



Fall 2014

The Perfect Pitch: Car Commercials in the Environment

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The Perfect Pitch: Car Commercials in the Environment

Abstract

Car commercials, like many advertisements, tempt its viewers with comfort, capability, or safety features, as well as being well-engineered, affordable, attractive, large or compact sized, or fuel efficient. This study examines the pitches in YouTube car commercial video clips from the 1960s until 2014. We coded a total of 263 total car commercials based on pitch, setting, narrator, decade, and country of origin. The analysis revealed that most car commercials were presented in rural settings and capability was pitched most frequently overall. Fuel efficiency was ranked third overall; however, within urban settings, fuel efficiency had the highest frequency. During the 1990s, there was no presence of commercials alluding to fuel efficiency and instead safety was pitched more frequently compared to other decades. We discuss the other pitches that were found to be significantly different between the settings, narrators, decades, and countries of origin. Over time, pitches in car commercials have changed, perhaps because advertising is influenced by consumer demands, interests, and concerns.

Keywords

cars, commercials, pitch, environment

Disciplines

Environmental Education | Environmental Indicators and Impact Assessment | Environmental Sciences | Oil, Gas, and Energy

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Environmental Studies Thesis

The Perfect Pitch: Car Commercials and the Environment

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ES400 Senior Seminar: The Impact of the Automobile on Culture and Environment
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December 20, 2014

Abstract

Car commercials, like many advertisements, tempt its viewers with comfort, capability, or safety features, as well as being well-engineered, affordable, attractive, large or compact sized, or fuel efficient. This study examines the pitches in YouTube car commercial video clips from the 1960s until 2014. We coded a total of 263 total car commercials based on pitch, setting, narrator, decade, and country of origin. The analysis revealed that most car commercials were presented in rural settings and capability was pitched most frequently overall. Fuel efficiency was ranked third overall; however, within urban settings, fuel efficiency had the highest frequency. During the 1990s, there was no presence of commercials alluding to fuel efficiency and instead safety was pitched more frequently compared to other decades. We discuss the other pitches that were found to be significantly different between the settings, narrators, decades, and countries of origin. Over time, pitches in car commercials have changed, perhaps because advertising is influenced by consumer demands, interests, and concerns.

Introduction

The automobile sector is a large, successful industry, partly due to its effective advertising strategy to market its products (Greuner et al. 2000). All advertisements, significantly automobile ones, contain and send a message; a message in which sometimes is clear and accurate, while other times the viewer must identify the message themselves often being misled (Burns et al. 2005). For instance, commercials for automobiles often promote propaganda that exaggerates and associates unrelated aspects and characteristics to the vehicles, in which is much different than the pitch (Burns et al. 2005). Other times, automakers choose to avoid mentioning features completely, instead focusing on features

that are more important to make the automobile attractive potentially causing the viewer to purchase the vehicle (Burns et al. 2005). Ultimately, advertising reflects what the advertiser believes the consumer wants and what it is capable of providing (Ferguson et al. 2003).

Most of the time, we as human beings, are attracted to and accept the fallacies and false and misleading notions of the car companies' commercials (Burns et al. 2005). Through the use of a multitude of tactics of craftiness and skillful work, car companies use their commercials to appeal to our emotions, taking advantage of instinctive habits such as desiring a perfect image and playing off of customers' desires (Burns et al. 2005). In America, specifically Corporate America, image is everything, determining success or failure of corporations; hence, favorable images to the public, consumer, employees, and the investor through advertising are key (Burns 1999). In the present with a profit-driven corporate culture, automotive corporations have been responsible for large-scale image shaping (Burns 1999). This construction of the automaker's image is specifically significant due to its effect on the decision making of consumers regarding automobiles, since incorrect images are likely to lead to incorrect decisions by consumers (Burns 1999).

Like many advertisements, car commercials tempt us with features, such as high gas mileage, saving money, comfort features, road handling, or with using cars to make a person seem wealthy, economic, beautiful, etc. which are appealing to humans. Safety is often emphasized by highlighting features that the vehicle includes, while other automakers may instead focus on performance by highlighting the vehicle's acceleration and speed (Burns et al. 2005). This strategy is most apparent in the automobile industry where manufacturers compete extensively in the marketplace, and therefore need to distinguish their vehicles from others (Burns et al. 2005).

There have been few studies performed on advertising, specifically pertaining to vehicles, and thus many questions remain unanswered. While previous research studied the trends of advertising on the Internet in America throughout time (Chung 2006), our study further focused on the evolution of advertising specifically looking into car commercials. Today, for instance, the automobile advertising horizon is very different. When asked about the three most important factors that led consumers to purchase a particular vehicle, appearance, vehicle cost, manufacturer reputation, and performance/handling were placed ahead of safety in one study (Ferguson et al. 2003). There has been an upward trend of using luxury and pleasure appeals in advertisements and a downward trend of employing practicality and functionality appeals in the United States (Chung 2006). Events amongst other factors could have caused these changes in appeals and wants of U.S. consumers (Greuner et al. 2000). In this study, we aim to highlight a variety of these instances in relatively recent American car culture that may have affected the ways in which automobile manufacturers pitched their commercials.

One way that advertisers sell their messages and products is by attaching meaning to the qualities and features of the non-human natural world and our relationships to them (Meister and Japp 2002). Meister and Japp conclude that: "Nature-as-backdrop ads, therefore, provide an important record of the position of the natural world in our cultural environment" (2002). Commercials thus often allude to a specific car being one with Earth, in complete harmony with its surrounding setting. Ultimately, "nature acts as a rhetorically useful backdrop or stage" in automobile ads and continue to be a feature even today (Meister and Japp 2002). These basically rural settings are not the only places that cars are featured in advertisements; suburban and urban settings also are evident in ads. Often, cars are

placed within these settings, but the pitch that is presented by the narrator is much different than what is displayed, providing misleading notions to the viewers and consumers.

In this study, we used a sample of commercials from YouTube to answer the following questions: Do pitches in automobile commercials reflect the country of origin, setting, and narrator? Have pitches changed over time?

Methods

To answer the research questions, we sampled and coded car commercials from YouTube, a popular video-sharing website, from the 1960s until 2014. According to Alexa.com, YouTube is the fourth most visited site by people in the United States (youtube.com.: How popular is youtube.com 2014). Founded in February 2005, YouTube now has more than 1 billion unique users that visit each month, and more than six billion hours of video are viewed per month (YouTube 2014). Considering YouTube's rapid growth and popularity as a relatively newer multimedia channel, this study is interesting and important to investigate questions and trends relating to car advertisement commercials.

Yoo and Kim's 2012 YouTube content analysis and Chung's 2006 analysis were used as tools to aid in the development of our study. The YouTube website was searched with the car make (Ford, Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, Mercedes, Volkswagen, BMW, Honda, Renault, Peugeot, Chrysler, and Volvo) followed by the keywords "car commercials" and then proceeding the years. Analyses occurred from October 25 to November 18, 2014. The selected years were every other within the specific decade (for example, for the 1960s decade-1960, 1962, 1964, 1966, and 1968). One video per year for each car make was analyzed. We incorporated the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s decades and also the 2010s with the years, 2010, 2012, and 2014. Twenty-eight videos per car make were

analyzed for a total of 263 videos on YouTube. For each car make and specific year, we selected the first relevant video in the list; the videos were solely from and created in the United States and clips with languages other than English were excluded. Access to television advertising in the early years is more scarce and could not be located (n=73). Videos that could not be located were noted in the data and excluded in the analyses. The basic information about the video including the title of the video and the webpage link were recorded in the Excel spreadsheet instrument.

The unit of analysis for each video's content was the entire commercial, including the video's visual, audio, and text presentation. Each video was examined by two students whom were trained with coding; the two examiners practiced with the first ten videos and any disagreements with the tested videos were resolved after further discussions to eliminate further error in the study. Since the study mainly focuses on the pitch and the setting of the car in automobile commercials, we analyzed and recorded features in all of the commercials. Aspects of the cars themselves, such as car make and model, type of car (coupe, sedan, truck, SUV, minivan, station wagon, convertible, hatchback, sports car, electric, and hybrid cars), and country of origin were recorded in the Excel spreadsheet instrument. Additionally, the setting was analyzed for each commercial and was categorized by a three-tier system as either rural, suburban, or urban along with a more specific setting (the list is included in the Appendix) and a secondary setting with its more specific setting. Furthermore, the main pitch and specific pitch of the commercial was chosen from the categories: affordability, attractive styling, capability (performance/power/speed/acceleration/technology), comfort (luxury/prestige), compact size, fuel efficiency, large size, safety, well-engineered (quality/reliability/durability), and safety. A secondary pitch and its more specific pitch and

other key aspects of the pitch were recorded as well. Additionally, the narrator's gender and/or aspects (male, female, kids, singer) and age were recorded (young, old). More than one feature within each category was permitted.

MS Excel was used to create figures. Pie charts displaying the percentage of videos displaying pitches, settings, and narrators were produced. Stacked bar graphs were created comparing the pitches with the settings, decades, gender of narrators, and countries of origins. In all cases, the main and secondary pitches were summed together for analysis purposes. Percentages were used in the analyses. SPSS was used to analyze the data using the Pearson Chi-Square test; the alpha is 0.05. If the "Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)" for the Chi-Square statistic is less than 0.05, there is a relationship between the variables based on the level of confidence; the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate was accepted (there is a significant difference). If $p > 0.05$ then the null hypothesis was accepted (there is no significant difference).

Results

Commercial characteristics

Out of all the commercials, capability was pitched the most at 29%. Comfort was pitched in 18% followed by fuel efficiency in 14% and attractive styling in 11% (Figure 1). A large majority of the narrators in the commercials were males (77%), while only 5% were females (Figure 2). A rural main setting was present in 40% of the total commercials, 26% had an urban setting, and 21%, a suburban setting (Figure 3).

Comparison to pitch

In the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, capability was pitched highest and greater than 25% of commercials in the respective decades. Comfort, however, was pitched

highest (25%) in commercials during the 1960s and capability was pitched second most. Comfort was pitched second most in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2010s. In the 2000s, attractive styling was pitched second most. In the 1960s, safety was not evident in any of the commercials. In the 1970s, compact size as well as fuel efficiency were pitched more often compared to the other decades, while safety was minimally pitched. In the 1990s, fuel efficiency was not pitched, while safety was pitched more often than in the other decades. As well, in the 2010s, fuel efficiency was pitched more often compared to the other decades (Figure 4). $P=0.0001$ between decade and pitch (Table 2).

Although cars originating from Sweden pitched capability the highest at 30%, safety was pitched more frequently than in the other countries. German originated cars featured the highest pitch relating to capability (42%), but promoted safety prominently compared to the other countries. Cars that originated in France pitched capability highest at 46% and safety was not pitched. Japanese originated cars in commercials pitched capability the highest at 31% and fuel efficiency was pitched more frequently than in the other countries. United States automakers' commercials featured comfort most at 37% (Figure 5). $P=0.000$ between country of origin and pitch (Table 3).

Capability was highest pitched in commercials with rural settings (38%) and suburban settings (21%). Commercials with an urban setting had the highest pitch with fuel efficiency at 31%. Commercials with an inside setting had the highest pitch with comfort at 35% (Figure 6). $P=0.004$ between setting and pitch (Table 4).

Female and male narrators' pitches displayed relatively the same trend. Females pitched comfort and capability the highest (both at 24%) in the commercials, while males

pitched capability (28%) highest followed by comfort (22%) (Figure 7). $P=0.045$ between gender of narrator and pitch (Table 5).

Discussion

Overall trends in pitches and narrators

Since corporate images have profound and influential effects to the consumers, automakers often provide vague terms to promote their products and direct the public's focus away from the negative to the positive aspects (Burns 1999). Commercial advertising requires identifying the needs, wants, and values of consumers to convince them that the product has what they desire and thus pitches in advertisements are the best way that this is achieved. We found that capability was pitched most in all of the commercials. In vehicle advertising pitches, themes relating to performance attributes, which were grouped under capability in this study, have been common (Donovan et al. 2011). For instance, in Ferguson et al.'s 2003 study, the theme of performance was identified in 50% of all 1998 TV aired advertisements and as the dominant theme in 17% of these ads (Donovan et al. 2011).

Conversely, safety was pitched in only 4% of the total commercials in our study. Burns asserts that even though numerous studies rank safety as high amongst consumer concerns, safety may not rank as even higher in importance since consumers may take safety for granted (1999). For instance a participant in a NHTSA group, stated: "Safety is not going to be my prime concern because I know that by federal law there are certain features which must be on all vehicles. I trust those features" (Humphrey 1996). Instead of safety being a concern by consumers, many often place their trust in the federal regulations and corporations (Burns 1999). This is likely the case for commercials in our study as well, in

which audiences have become more aware of the vehicle safety features and already have a certain trust especially in the more recent years.

Our study displayed a considerable amount of male narrators; in fact, 77% of the narrators in the commercials were males, while only 5% were females. In Allan and Coltrane's study, an even greater percentage, 93% of the commercials, had male narrators while 7% were female in the 1950s and early 1960s commercials, while in the 1980s, 91% were male and 6% were female narrators (1996).

Have pitches changed over time?

Car commercials displayed a significant difference between decades (1960s to 2010s) and pitches. Thus, there must be factors and/or events that have caused pitches to vary between decades.

Our study concludes that comfort was pitched highest followed closely by capability, while safety was not pitched in any of the 1960s commercials. Cars in this decade were powerful (capability) and represented freedom, independence, love, popularity, and the ultimate status symbol for people, teens especially (Imam 2014). Songs, furthermore, romanticized the American car and movies often emphasized the power and speed of cars (both features of capability in our study) during this time. By 1964, almost 20% of American families had second cars, which were becoming necessities especially to those in the suburbs (Ingrassia 2011). Many families lived in the suburbs and cars were a way to escape this life that was referred by many as dreary (Imam 2014). Hence, comfort for these long rides was important. Safety may have not been pitched due to the Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, which was passed by Congress and required car companies to publicly disclose any recalls of vehicles (Ingrassia 2011). Cars made before the late 60s did not come with safety belts as

well.

During the 1970s, we found that compact size as well as fuel efficiency were pitched more often compared to the other decades. This decade is recognized as the advent of ecological concerns, a consequence of all sorts of environmental catastrophes, the environmental movement and environmentalism in the U.S. and along with it, arose the creation of many preservation societies and environmental protection regulations that required compliance by automakers (Brown 2001). For instance, automakers needed to follow the 1970 Clean Air Act, which ordered Detroit to decrease emissions by 90% over the next six years, leading to developments of unleaded gasoline and the catalytic converter (A History of Reducing Tailpipe Emissions 2011). In addition, automakers were required to reach a “fleet-wide average” of 27.5 miles a gallon by 1985 due to the 1975 Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) law (Ingrassia 2011). These reasons caused Americans to demand smaller, more efficient, and high-mileage vehicles (Ingrassia 2011). Fuel efficiency was pitched often during the 1980s in our study as well, possibly due to the effects of these regulations and implementations.

Furthermore, in the 1970s, additional events occurred which could have contributed to the compact size and fuel efficiency pitches present in the commercials. During this decade, automakers were forced to adapt to the gas crisis of 1973, in which the oil-rich countries of the Middle East declared an embargo against Israel and its allies, including the United States, causing a shock to American motorists (Ingrassia 2011). As a result, American motorists were forced to wait in long lines and could only purchase a certain amount of gasoline with high costs (Ingrassia 2011). As well, in 1974, Congress implemented a nationwide 55-mph speed limit to conserve gasoline, causing Americans to further demand

smaller, more fuel efficient, and reliable foreign imports (Ingrassia 2011).

Additionally, we found that safety was minimally pitched during the 1970s. Consumer advocacy groups and Ralph Nader's consumer movement in the 1970s continued the campaign for safer automobiles in America, which resulted in the introduction of shoulder-harness seat belts and lap belts, padded dashboards, and improved braking systems, but did not become implemented until later (Ingrassia 2011). Likewise, vehicle crash test scores didn't begin until 1979 and the greatest improvements did not come about until the early 1980 model years (Humphrey 1996).

We found that fuel efficiency was pitched fourth highest in the 1980s commercials. The 1979 oil embargo on Iranian oil placed by the U.S. in response to Iran's hostage-taking of American embassy personnel in Iran created long lines and high prices at the gas pump (Greuner et al. 2000). As a result of this oil crisis among many other events, U.S. consumers began to value fuel efficiency as well as cost (affordability) over size and style (Greuner et al. 2000). This was displayed in our study. Due to this, Americans began to discover that Hondas, Nissans, and Toyotas, all Japanese imports, were fuel efficient and also mechanically sound (Ingrassia 2011).

During the 1990s decade, our study found that capability was pitched the highest, followed by comfort, and affordability. The 1990s was a time of many events. The Big Three recovered as the Japanese went downhill, caused by the devaluation of the yen, thus driving the price of Japanese cars upward, while American cars became affordable (Ingrassia 2011). Honda and Toyota closed factories and laid off workers, whereas Detroit produced some of the best cars in its history; American automobiles of the 90s ruled the decade (Ingrassia 2011). Ferguson et al.'s study found during 1998 and throughout the previous decade and a

half, performance (capability) and sales incentives (affordability) were the predominant themes in car and passenger van advertising on television (2003), similar to our study.

When the environmental movement and environmentalism became a mainstream goal in the United States in the 1970s, advertisers discovered and took great advantage of the market by capitalizing off of green consumers (Meister and Japp 2002). These marketers created new products, but also repositioned existing ones to appear more environmentally friendly, even in their advertisements often with wild animals, mountain vistas, or clear, flowing waters (Meister and Japp 2002). As a result, a large number of ads began to focus on green product features, making claims that they are both environmentally good and safe (Meister and Japp 2002). In fact, between 1989 and 1990 these type of green ads increased 367 percent (Meister and Japp 2002).

However, by the late 1990s, advertisers announced the end of environmental period due to lack of concern for being 'green' (Meister and Japp 2002). Debate over anti-green products including gas-guzzling SUVs decreased and gained popularity (Meister and Japp 2002). As well, a booming economy, a growing middle class, and low gas prices in the late 1990s created many consumers that weren't concerned and interested in fuel-efficient vehicles (Matulka 2014). This was displayed by Davis and Truett's study, in which SUVs became the fastest growing segment of the auto industry with sales reaching almost 19% of the total light vehicle market in 1999 (n.d.). Our study displayed a similar trend with fuel efficiency not being pitched in the 1990s. Similarly, a survey conducted by AutoPacific in 1998 showed only 30% of all new car buyers considered fuel economy to be "extremely important"; while, 18% of sport utility vehicle buyers considered fuel economy as "extremely important," and only 10% rated the fuel economy of their new SUV as "excellent"

(Davis and Truett n.d.).

We found that safety was pitched more often in the 1990s than in the other decades. The 1996 Transportation Research Board market surveys found that there was a safety-conscious market for new car purchasers during this time (Humphrey 1996), largely aging baby boomers who wanted to protect their children. Data collected by GM in 1994 indicated that consumers ranked safety 6th out of 38 reasons for choosing and purchasing a new car and J.D. Power and Associates (1993) likewise stated that prospective car purchasers in 1993 rated safety third in importance when selecting a new car. Additionally, safety was rated fourth in purchase importance by Ford Motor Company by the NHTSA in 1994 (Burns 1999). Our study displayed safety in the 1990s as the fourth highest pitch.

Reasons for the high number of pitches relating to safety in commercials during the 1990s are numerous. The Director of Public Relations for General Motors of Canada, Stew Low, reasoned that in the 1990s: “Consumers became more aware of safety as an issue, whether it was personal safety or safety on the road or the whole change in the tide of opinion on drinking and driving” (Burns et al. 2005). Low similarly stated: “All these things started to bring automotive safety to the forefront of consumers’ minds. They started asking for new technologies and were willing to pay the price in the cost of the vehicle for those features” (Burns et al. 2005). Additionally, Lahey (1997) stated: “Larger number of young families and older car buyers with safety concerns, improved safety technology, and the growing need to find ways to differentiate models from their competitors” as reasons for safety as automakers’ primary marketing tool (Burns et al. 2005). In one study, safety was mentioned rarely in past years, except in 1993, a time when manufacturers were competing to install airbags in their vehicles (Ferguson et al. 2003). In the later parts of the 1990s,

Lahey (1997) stated: "While BMW is advertising its improvements in dealing with side-impact collisions, Saab is promoting a system that will protect against whiplash in rear collisions. Chrysler is talking more about its antilock brake systems, and Ford is positioning its Windstar as the only minivan to earn five stars -- the highest possible U.S. government front-end crash test rating for both driver and front passenger" (Burns et al. 2005).

In our study, we found that pitches relating to capability was highly evident in the 2010s commercials, but it is important to note the number of commercials that pitched fuel efficiency compared to the other decades. Gas prices have come down recently, but car companies are still emphasizing fuel efficiency as a way to save both money and the planet (Deutsch 2006). The revival of the electric vehicle occurred around the start of the 21st century with the turning point in part due to the introduction of the Toyota Prius, the world's first mass-produced hybrid electric vehicle, released in 1997 (Matulka 2014). Later, in 2000, the Prius was released worldwide, becoming an instant success with celebrities, raising interest in the car along with concern about carbon pollution (Matulka 2014). In late 2010, the Nissan LEAF, a totally electric vehicle, was released in the U.S. market (Matulka 2014). Through the Recovery Act, the Energy Department invested in building a nation-wide charging infrastructure across the country and new battery technology helping to improve a plug-in electric vehicle's range (Matulka 2014).

Do pitches in automobile commercials reflect the country of origin?

This study displayed a significant difference between the pitch and country of origin of the automobiles in the commercials as well. Cars originating in Sweden, pitched safety more often compared to the other countries. Safety is a large part of Sweden's culture and heritage and is placed above all else by automakers (Mooij 2013). Volvo (Sweden) has

always had a focus on safety and was one of a few automakers, which stressed safety in their advertising prior to the 1990s (Burns et al. 2005). By doing so, safety has been another dimension to differentiate themselves from other automakers as well as a way to provide revenue and a safety-conscious corporate image to advertisement viewers (Burns 1999). German originated cars promoted safety prominently as well amongst the countries. Mercedes (Germany) has been focusing on and promoting safety for some time, unlike the United States' automakers (Burns 1999). In Burns et al.'s study, several Japanese automakers, including Honda and Toyota earned above average crash test scores, yet failed to stress their accomplishments in their advertising (2005). Our study likewise displays safety being the least pitched in French commercials followed closely by Japanese originated car commercials.

Japanese manufactured vehicles pitched fuel efficiency more often than the other countries in this study. Japanese imports have always had great engineering innovations. For instance, in the 1970s, Japanese car features, such as front-mounted engines and front-wheel drive lead to greater fuel efficiency and safer vehicles (Ingrassia 2011), a feature that was also pitched in our study for Japan. Additionally, Deutsch asserts that Subaru's (Japan) ads stress fuel efficiency, not environmental correctness; since all-wheel drive has become common in SUVs, they fear drivers will associate all-wheel drive with gas guzzlers (2006). The Japanese manufacturers, Toyota, produced the world's first mass-produced hybrid, while Nissan released all-electric vehicles.

United States automakers' commercials featured comfort most often within and amongst the other countries in our study. Belk and Pollay's 1985 study found an upward trend of using luxury and pleasure appeals, ultimately comfort pitches, and a downward

trend of employing practicality and functionality appeals in the U.S. (Chung 2006). In the U.S., the automobile serves as a necessity, inexpensive goods that are common and affordable for the masses (Chung 2006). There were 133,438,000 registered private cars in the U.S. in 2009 and the median household income of the U.S. was \$49,777 (Statistical Abstract of the United States 2012). The lowest price of a new car is only about \$10,000, making cars affordable and rather inexpensive for Americans (Chung 2006). Thus, necessities' primary function is to help consumers achieve a state of comfort and tend to result in advertisements which address these values (Chung 2006).

Do pitches in automobile commercials reflect the setting?

We found a significant difference between the settings and pitches in the commercials. With regards to pitches, commercials with a rural setting had the highest pitch with capability. American popular culture includes road movies that highlight the popularity of automobiles, often with high-speed car chases over highways and backroads. This was portrayed as a source of freedom and excitement. There is a nostalgia for the experience of motoring on slower, narrower, and scenic highways of the past, a rural setting. In the 19th century and into the 20th century, the rise of urbanism in much of the western world led to an itinerant urban society compared to a once settled agrarian one (Brown 2001). This led to a loss of community, sense of place, and rural rootedness (Brown 2001). People hence turned to the open, rural, roads for adventure, fun, discovery, and independence. It can be seen that humans nowadays have an infatuation with "natural" settings, which is why they may spend a lot of money each year going to National Parks and Nature Reserves. This may also contribute to why we see so many commercials in the rural setting. Seeing a natural setting, such as an open dirt road or open land, romanticizes the car, thus having a positive

effect on the consumers watching it.

We found that commercials with an urban setting had the highest pitch with fuel efficiency. Urban driving involves stop-and-go traffic and was once considered the biggest challenge to maximizing fuel-efficiency in vehicles. Modern fuel-efficient technologies have been developed to minimize the impact stopping and going had on fuel consumption. Tong et al. reported that transient driving modes, such as acceleration and deceleration were more polluting to the atmosphere than steady-speed driving modes, such as cruising and idling (2011).

Do pitches in automobile commercials reflect the narrator?

In our study, there was a significant difference between gender of narrator and the pitches. Males and females, however, displayed similar trends in the pitches presented in the commercials. Allan and Coltrane's study found that males in commercials are the rule and far outnumber women, but are shown in different settings, performing different activities, and displaying different character traits (1996). Males pitched capability slightly higher than females in this study. Cars, often used in car racing, have served as objects for men to position themselves in terms of masculinity for a long time, providing an arena to display their masculine power; males invest in fast cars as a way to display masculinity as parodied and satirized in popular media (Best 2006). As a result, males seek cars with high horsepower, speed, and acceleration capabilities. On the other hand, females pitched comfort and capability both at the same percentages in our study. Women are more likely to use cars for work, childcare, and shopping and thus as Penny Wark, the motoring editor of *Women's Journal*, states: Women "seek...comfort, economy -- and a place to put their handbag" (Lees-Maffei 2002). Our study affirms this finding.

Improvements and future studies

With any research, there is always potential for improvement. When looking at the dataset, it is important to note that we could not find every single car commercial in each of the years that we wished to analyze. We can see more commercials missing especially in the earlier decades, since YouTube probably has not acquired some of those commercials. As well, in our study, we wished to analyze solely commercials that were created in the U.S., meaning that manufacturers from other countries had many of their commercials in different languages. In that sense, with the absence of some commercials, a potential improvement could be conducting more trials, possibly not in the specific year, to develop a larger overall dataset. As well, instead of finding those in a specific year, we could have chosen more within the decades.

In the area of our actual data collection, there could also be improvement. In most of the commercials, there was not one specific setting portrayed. Many had two or maybe three settings throughout the commercial. In this way, it was difficult to determine the main setting in each of the commercials, since there were so many depicted, thus, our use of 'primary' and 'secondary' settings in the dataset. Along those same lines, it was also difficult to determine urban vs. suburban and suburban vs. rural in a few of the commercials, since there may were fast turnovers at some points in the commercial making it challenging to differentiate between settings. Similarly, in a few of the commercials, there were more than two pitches besides the main and secondary pitches that we used in our analyses. To account for this, we recorded all pitches presented in the commercials, but some accounted for more than two, sometimes up to four total pitches. Lastly, since both testers were not simultaneously analyzing the commercials together, there could be potential differences in

how each tester analyzed the commercials; however, this is considered a minor error in the study, since the first ten commercials were conducted together to get a sense of what to look for and discussions occurred with any controversial instances. Additionally, future studies may want to look at other car manufacturers both within the United States and other countries. This study aimed to include a diverse grouping of manufacturers, but there is room for improvement. In the study, we included two manufacturers from the U.S., four from Japan, three from Germany, two from France, and one from Sweden.

Conclusion

It does seem that the pitches in commercials reflect the country of origin. Our study showed that the pitches specifically in Japanese, U.S., and Sweden originated car commercials are likely linked to the culture of the country as well as to the automakers' aims. However, interesting results were evident between the pitches and settings. In urban settings fuel efficiency was pitched highest, while in rural settings, capability was, in which we found surprising since environmental aspects were not featured. In the commercials, we saw that males and females relatively have the same trend in pitches. Additionally, it was shown that pitches have indeed changed over time. Over the decades, our study displayed that varying pitches were prominently displayed in commercials, including fuel efficiency in the 1970s and 2010s, and safety in the 1990s.

Even with some limitations, this study offers valuable information. The changes in pitches over time as presented in our study are perhaps because advertising is influenced by consumer demands, interests, and concerns. Presently, corporate culture is profit-driven and automotive corporations have used large-scale image-shaping to appeal to the consumer and affect their decision making. An incorrect image presented to the public is likely to cause

incorrect consumer decisions and thus is of great importance to automakers in determining the approaches taken to construct their image. Because of this, the pitches that these automakers share in some instances differ from the setting portrayed in their commercial advertisements.

Thus, media has a strong effect on shaping individuals' understanding and attitudes toward cars and this study along with future studies can be used for evaluation purposes. Overall, this study provides an exploratory ground for studies involving advertisement commercials on YouTube, specifically automobiles and their pitches, and calls for future research to build upon these exploratory findings.

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Figures and Tables

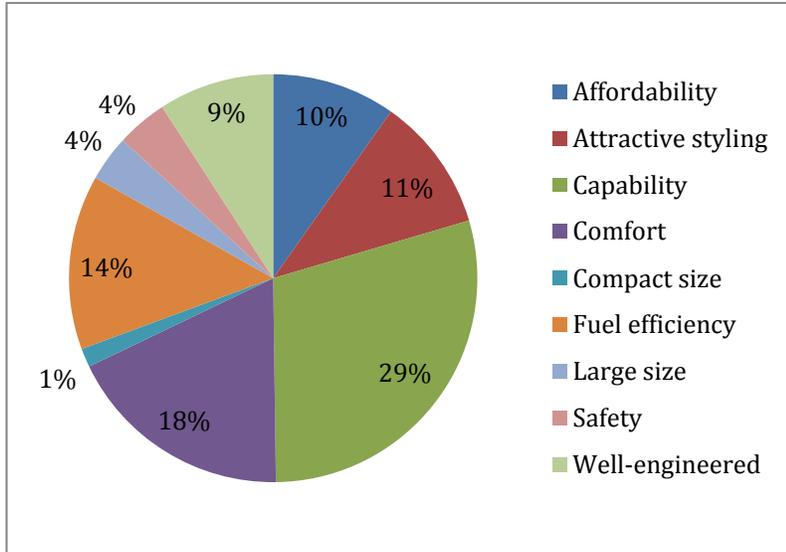


Figure 1. Percentage of the specified pitch in the car commercials. n=263 videos.

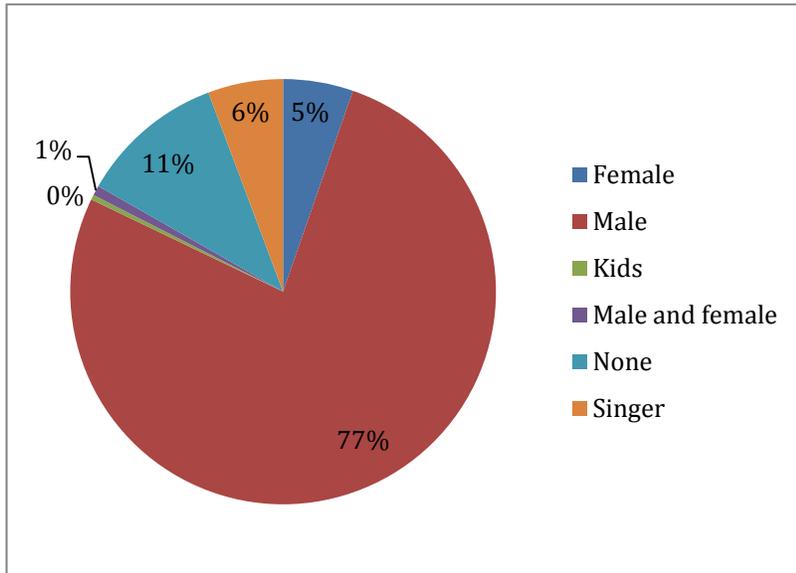


Figure 2. Percentage of narrators speaking pitches in the car commercials. n=263 videos.

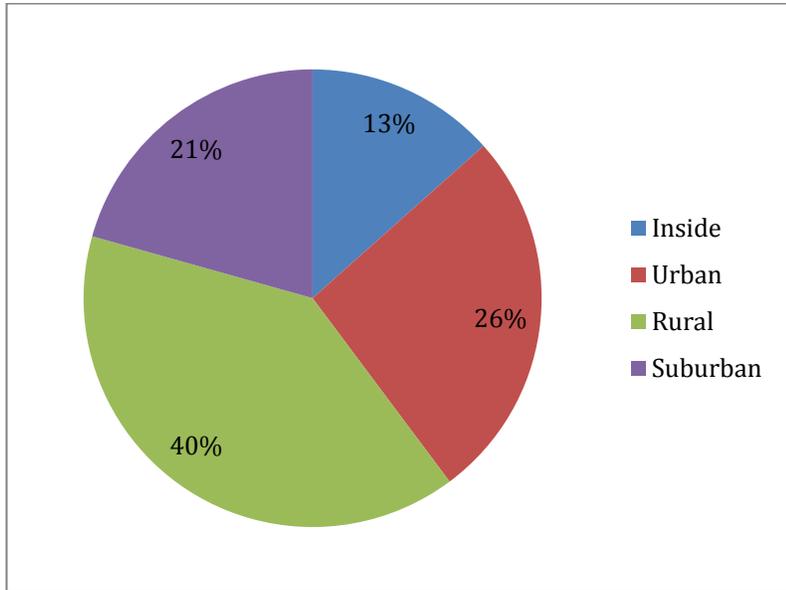


Figure 3. Percentage of the specified setting in the car commercials. n=263 videos.

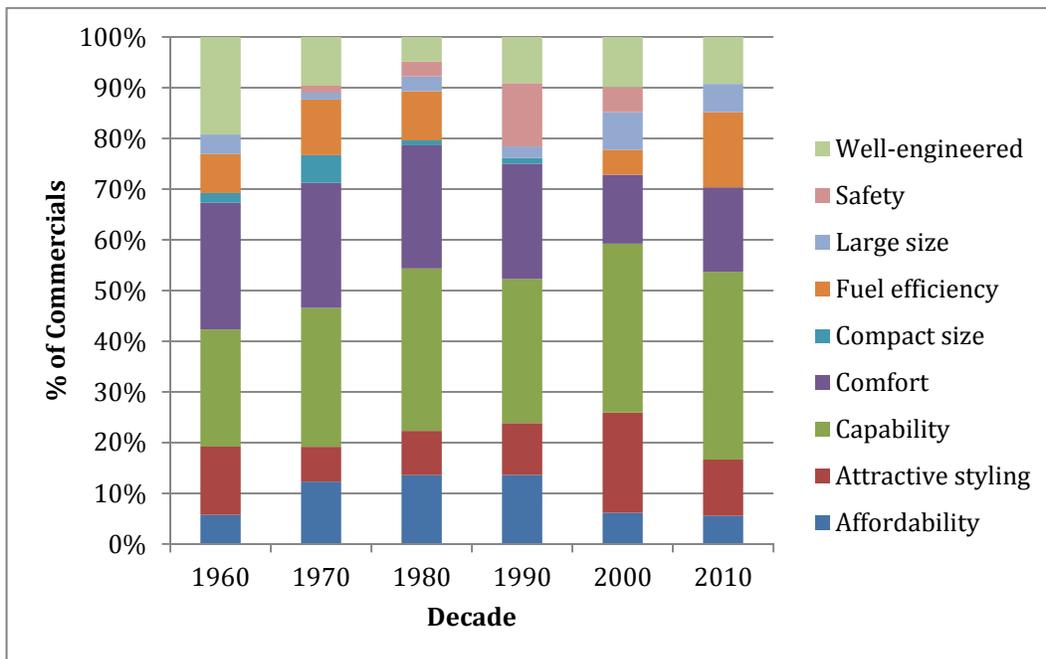


Figure 4. Percentage of commercials with the specified pitch for each decade. n=263 videos.

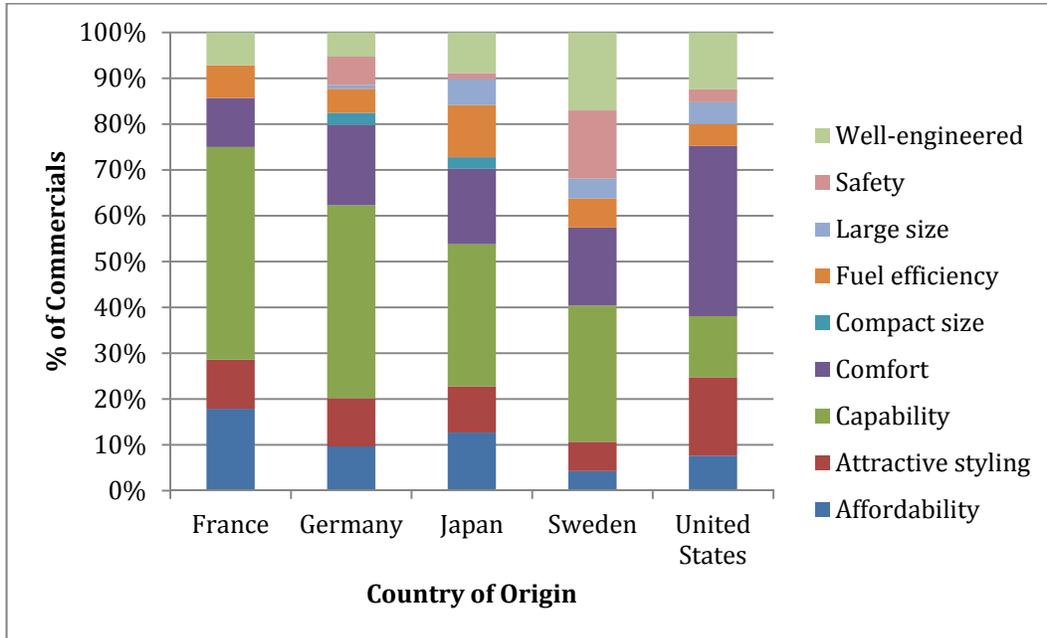


Figure 5. Percentage of commercials with the specified pitch for each country of origin of the vehicles. n=263 videos.

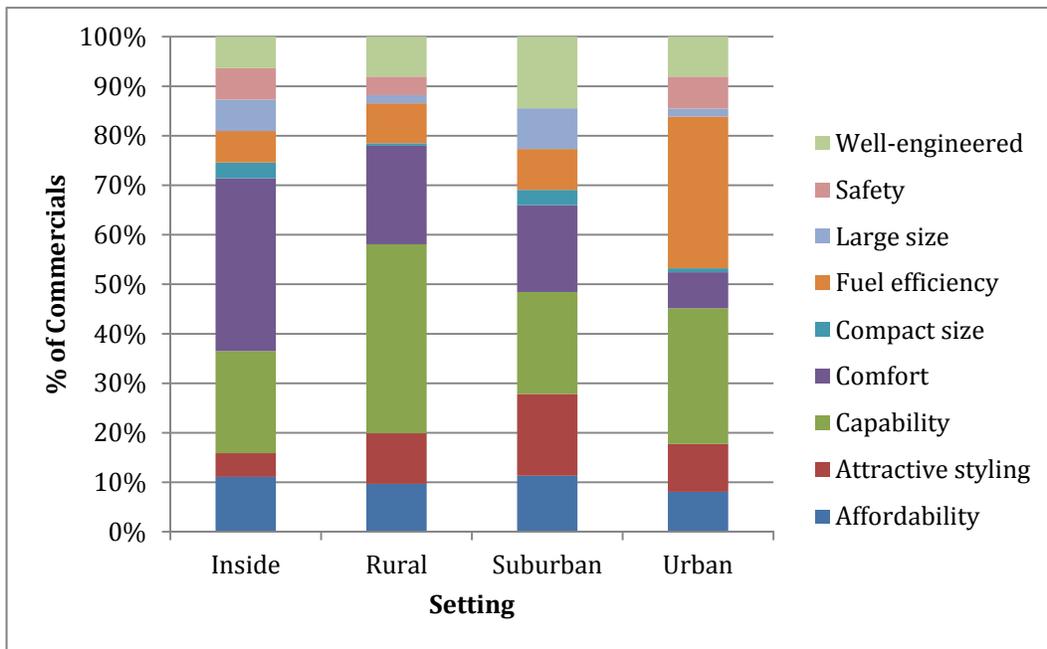


Figure 6. Percentage of commercials with the specified pitch for each setting. n=263 videos.

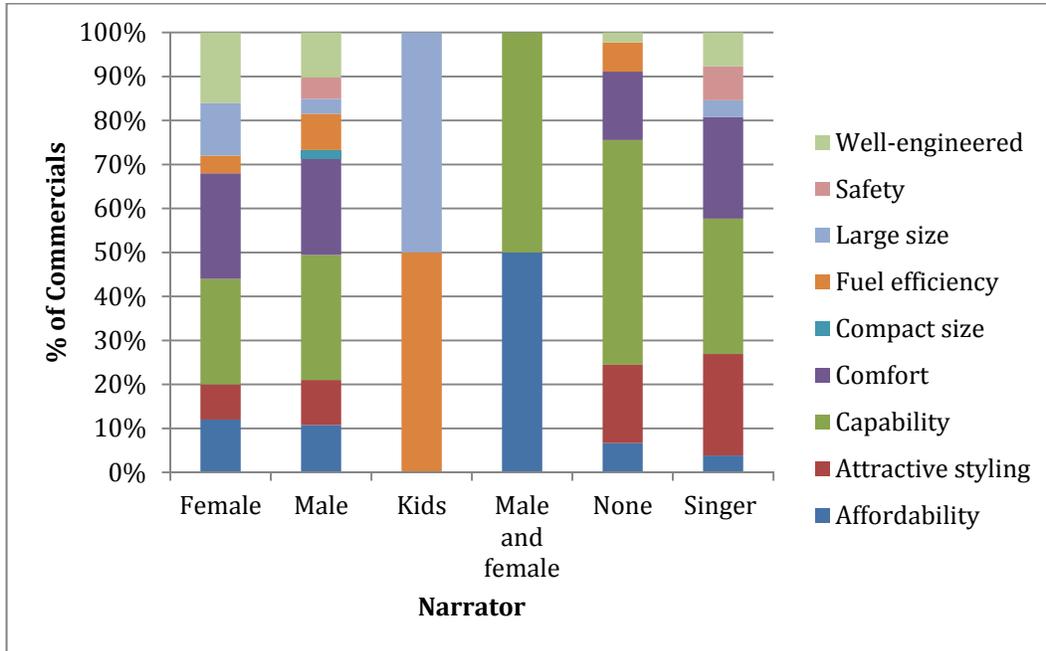


Figure 7. Percentage of commercials with the specified pitch for each narrator type. n=263 videos.

Table 1. Percentages of commercials with the specified pitch for each setting. n=263 videos.

Pitch	Inside	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Affordability	11%	10%	11%	8%
Attractive styling	5%	10%	16%	10%
Capability	21%	38%	21%	27%
Comfort	35%	20%	18%	7%
Compact size	3%	1%	3%	1%
Fuel efficiency	6%	8%	8%	31%
Large size	6%	2%	8%	2%
Safety	6%	4%	0%	6%
Well-engineered	6%	8%	14%	8%

Table 2. Chi-Square test for Decade vs. Pitch.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	75.716 ^a	40	.001
Likelihood Ratio	80.005	40	.000
N of Valid Cases	452		

a. 21 cells (38.9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .81.

Table 3. Chi-Square test for Country of Origin vs. Pitch.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	82.272 ^a	32	.000
Likelihood Ratio	83.807	32	.000
N of Valid Cases	451		

a. 20 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .43.

Table 4. Chi-Square test for Setting vs. Pitch.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.338 ^a	24	.004
Likelihood Ratio	48.744	24	.002
N of Valid Cases	452		

a. 11 cells (30.6%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .98.

Table 5. Chi-Square test for Narrator vs. Pitch.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	56.301 ^a	40	.045
Likelihood Ratio	52.764	40	.085
N of Valid Cases	451		

a. 38 cells (70.4%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is .03.

Appendix

YouTube Car Commercials Specifics:

Decade: 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s

Car make: Ford, Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, Mercedes, Volkswagen, BMW, Honda, Renault, Peugeot, Chrysler, Volvo

Type of car: Minivan, electric, hybrid, sportscar, SUV, station wagon, truck, sedan, and hatchback

Country of origin: Ford (US), Toyota (Japan), Nissan (Japan), Mazda (Japan), Mercedes (Germany), Volkswagen (Germany), BMW (Germany), Honda (Japan), Renault (France), Peugeot (France), Chrysler (US), Volvo (Sweden)

Setting: Inside, urban, rural, suburban

Specific setting: From list below

Pitch: Affordability, attractive styling, capability (performance/power/speed/acceleration/technology), comfort (luxury/prestige), compact size, fuel efficiency, large size, safety, and well-engineered (quality/reliability/durability)

Narrator: Gender-Female, male, kids, male actor, male and female, none, and singer

Age-young, old

Specific settings:

Suburban

Schools
Single homes (private residences)
Parks
Stores
Neighborhoods
Large yards
Garages

Urban

Offices
Sports parks
City hall
Stores
Schools
Homes
Apartments/Townhouses
Skyscrapers
Museums
Hotels
Businesses
Streets
Among bus, trains, taxis
Lots of people

Sidewalks
Rooftop

Rural

Country
Farms
Open land
Woods
Town hall
Highways
Camping
Open roads
Nature