

# Tuning into Consumers: Unraveling the Multifaceted Impact of Music in Marketing

Edward Tae Ho Kim<sup>1</sup> and Sai-hyun Genie Kim<sup>#</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Chadwick International School, Republic of Korea

<sup>#</sup>Advisor

## ABSTRACT

As we enter the era of AI and online shopping, “sensory marketing,” marketing that utilizes the five senses to shape consumers’ consumption experience, has garnered significant attention. A pivotal field of research within this domain is the field of auditory marketing, marketing that leverages sonic stimuli to influence consumer behavior. This paper provides a comprehensive overview of theories and empirical studies that underpin the key pillars of auditory marketing. Specifically, this paper focuses on the use of music in retail stores, sonic branding, and advertisements. As the use of music in marketing is still a relatively understudied field, this paper also suggests future directions in research in the field of music advertising, atmospherics, and sonic logos that would be necessary in further advancing academic discussions on auditory marketing.

## Introduction

Due to the proliferation of technical devices and the development of technology, sensory marketing has become an important tool used by marketers. Sensory marketing, defined as “marketing that engages consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgment, and behavior,” enhances customer experiences and renders advertisements more memorable (Krishnan, 2012, p. 1). In fact, Miller et al. (2008) contend that auditory stimuli are potent marketing tools, as sonic cues are difficult to ignore.

One of the most prominent applications of music in marketing is the use of jingles in advertisements. Marketers leverage jingles by placing them in advertisements to augment product awareness and foster positive word of mouth. Examples of widely recognized jingles include “I’m Chiquita banana and I’ve come today,” by the United Fruit Company and “Pepsi cola hits the spot,” by Pepsi (Krishnan et al., 2012). Researchers have explored the role of music in marketing by examining its use in retail settings, focusing on how background music influences consumers’ impressions of service quality and product value (Crisinel et al., 2019). The use of music in branding is also a burgeoning field of research, as more companies are developing distinctive tunes to convey their brand identity. These “sonic logos” increase brand awareness and shape the image of the brand.

Understanding the psychological implications of music is critical in leveraging music in the field of marketing. Therefore, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of the use of music in marketing and identifies topics of research that require further attention.

## Music in Retail Settings

Philip Kotler’s pioneering work in the early 1970s laid the groundwork for understanding the significance of atmospherics in consumer decision-making. Kotler emphasized that beyond the intrinsic attributes of a product or service, consumers respond to the overall ambiance or atmosphere of a place. Specifically, he coined the term “atmospherics” to denote “the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers” (Kotler,

1973, p. 48). Various elements of the environment stimulate specific emotional responses from consumers, affecting their consumption behaviors (Kotler, 1973). The concept of atmospherics emphasized the holistic nature of the consumer experience and became the foundations of modern marketing research.

Music has become one of the most popular elements in retail environments due to its adaptability, consistent appeal to customers, and cost-effectiveness. Consequently, a bulk of scholarly research has been dedicated to the cognitive effect of background music in consumption contexts. For example, consumers in a wine store tended to purchase more expensive and high-end products when classical music was played in the background (Areni & Kim, 1993). This behavior has been attributed to the implicit association of classical music with luxury and sophistication. Similarly, Kellaris and Kent (1992) have shown that background music alters consumers' perceptions of time: when people listen to music that they favor, the perception of time is shorter compared to when they listen to atonal music (Kellaris & Kent 1992). These studies shed light onto the ways in which auditory stimulus can alter consumer's perceptions of the shopping experience and therefore, bolster sales.

A more recent study conducted by Pantoja and Borges (2021) indicates that when participants were asked to watch a short video with fast or short background music and an illustration of the menu, participants who listened to fast music had more positive taste expectations and higher purchase intentions compared to those who listened to slow music. Pantoja and Borges posit that this is because fast-paced music increases arousal levels (Pantoja & Borges, 2021). Studies have also shown that music influences the cognitive capacity of consumers, eventually influencing their purchasing decisions. Petruzellis et al. (2018) suggest that music familiar to consumers diminishes cognitive activity and eventually distracts consumers from promotional messages. However, familiar music also facilitated the creation of more positive emotions that fosters loyalty (Petruzellis et al. 2018). Such findings that provide insight into the mechanisms that underlie the influence of music on consumer behavior are essential in forming effective marketing strategies utilizing background music.

The psychological impact of background music also elicited behavioral responses that were more directly related to a store's sales. Smith and Curnow (1996) demonstrated that music with high volume shortened consumers' perceived shopping time. Furthermore, Biswas et al. (2019) found that low-volume music had a relaxing effect on listeners, increasing the sale of healthy food items. Conversely, high-volume music increased purchases of unhealthy food items, as high-volume music elevated excitement levels (Biswas et al., 2019). These behavioral outcomes emphasize the importance of carefully designing the sonic retail atmosphere to match the objective of retailers.

Another empirical investigation conducted by North and Hargreaves (1998) in a cafeteria further indicates that different styles of music can impact consumers differently. This study shows that consumers who listened to classical and pop music demonstrated a higher willingness to pay compared to groups who were exposed to other genres of music or no music at all (North & Hargreaves, 1998). Moreover, scholars have investigated the interaction between various atmospheric cues and music. Based on the Schema Incongruity Model, Eroglu et al. (2005) studied the effect of music speed and retail density, which refers to the degree to which a consumer feels that a retail environment is crowded. The study indicates that pairing slow music with low retail density and fast music with high retail density renders the perceived shopping experience more effective and enjoyable (Eroglu et al., 2005). The aforementioned studies illustrate the collective influence of sensory inputs on consumption behavior and lay the foundation for optimizing the sonic landscape of retail environments.

## Sonic Logos

Sonic logos, also referred to by various terms such as "audio branding" and "acoustic branding", have been extensively defined and analyzed within the academic literature (Gustafsson, 2019). For instance, Manchon (2019) defines sonic logos as "the strategic use of sound to communicate the identity and values of a brand" (p.

586). Similarly, Scott (2022) describes sonic logos as “short musical note sequences that are part of a brand’s identity system.” Kellaris (2012) further posits that sonic logos are the equivalent of visual logos. Some of the most well-known examples of sonic logos include the tone, “I’m lovin it” by McDonald’s and the unique chimes and ringtones played when consumers turn on their Windows or Nokia computers.

Researchers have demonstrated that sonic logos aid consumers in recognizing brands, as musical elements such as tempo, rhythm, timbre, and pitch of sonic logos significantly impact both short-term and long-term memory (Bonde & Hansen, 2013). Sonic logos can also be used to arouse certain emotions that align with the overall brand image. Specifically, Krishnan (2012) mentions that brands with a long history can utilize old music as sonic logos to trigger nostalgia and positive emotions. In essence, when utilized strategically, sonic logos fortify brand identity and enhance the emotional connection between the brand and the consumer.

Scholars have conducted studies to investigate the various factors of sonic logos to determine their efficacy. Empirical findings indicate that the number of tones that characterize sonic logos affect product perceptions and eventually, people’s willingness to pay. Specifically, Krishnan et al. (2012), revealed a non-linear relationship between the number of tones in sonic logos and their effectiveness: few tones (e.g. three tones) or many tones (e.g. nine tones) rendered the product less valuable compared to sonic logos with a moderate number of tones (e.g. six tones).

The instrumental composition of sonic logos also determines brand perceptions. Studies have shown that sonic logos characterized by feminine instruments with a positive valence evokes a brand image of sincerity, while those created using masculine instruments evoke perceptions of ruggedness (Techawachirakul et al., 2023). Similarly, Melzner and Raghbir (2023), have found that the roughness and smoothness of sonic logos, one of the most foundational elements of the timbral quality of music, alter consumers’ perceptions of the brand for even well-known brands. For instance, participants who listened to the sonic logo of coca-cola that was played on a smooth violin perceived the brand coca-cola as more competent, sincere, and sophisticated compared to those who listened to a sonic logo played on a rough electric guitar (Melzner & Raghbir, 2022). However, the sonic logo of coca-cola played using a rough electric guitar was considered to be more exciting than that of a violin (Melzner & Raghbir, 2022). Another study conducted by Kim (2020) indicates that the instrumental composition of the sonic logo affects the perceived warmth and competence of the brand: a sonic logo played on a trumpet elicits a greater degree of perceived warmth compared to those played on a piano or a violin while a sonic logo played on a piano elicited the greatest degree of perceived competence. These findings indicate that sonic logos are not just supplementary elements in branding; rather, they are powerful marketing tools that mold brand perceptions and consumer behavior.

## Music in Advertisements

The ramifications of background music in advertisements have also been a topic widely investigated by scholars. One of the most dominant paradigms used to delve into the mechanism behind the influence of background music is the classical conditioning paradigm, a theoretical framework that delineates the process in which an association between unrelated stimuli is formed usually through repetition. Through classical conditioning, the music becomes unconsciously associated with the advertised product (Gorn, 1982). Nonetheless, this does not automatically yield a favorable evaluation of the advertised product, as whether this leads to increased product liking hinges upon the listener’s predilection towards the presented music (Gorn, 1982).

Scholars have also investigated the effects of using music in advertisements through the framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). According to ELM, there are two ways of processing information: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route is triggered when people are motivated to examine a product thoroughly (Zander, 2006). On the other hand, the peripheral route is activated in low-involvement situations and is used when people unconsciously process information without much cognitive effort (Zander,

2006). Studies have suggested that music in advertisements exerts significant influence when people are processing information through the peripheral route. According to Park and Young (1986), music had the highest influence when a participant's level of involvement with the subject was low. When the level of involvement was high, on the other hand, music served as a distraction and hindered participants from engaging with the marketing message. Scholars have also pointed out that the effect of music on people's attitudes towards a specific subject is moderated by various cognitive processes such one's level of engagement or the number of concurrent thoughts that are being processed (Petruzzellis, 2018).

Furthermore, musical styles played in the background of advertisements can convey different meanings (Baker, 1993; Krober-Riel, 1993). For instance, people perceived cars that were presented in advertisements accompanied with rock songs as having more power, speed, and competitiveness while cars in advertisements with classical music were associated with luxury, elegance, and interior rim (Baker, 1993). Not only can music in advertisements arouse various emotional responses related to the product, but it can also influence the perceptions of the product and the brand in a more indirect manner by influencing the perception of the endorser in the advertisement (Zander, 2006). Furthermore, a study conducted by Biereley et al., (1985) illustrates that products that were associated with pleasant music had higher preference ratings compared to those devoid of musical accompaniment.

Scholars have also analyzed the effectiveness of advertising music through the congruence between the product and the background music. MacInnis and Park (1991), prominent researchers in music marketing, describe music as a "message-relevant executional cue" that reinforces the central theme of an advertisement. Emotions and perceptions elicited by music also affects people's purchasing behaviors. When music evokes emotions that are consistent with the symbolic meaning of the product, the likelihood of the individual purchasing the product increases. For instance, music positively impacted people's willingness to pay when advertisements of products purchased for happy occasions (friend's birthday) featured happy music and when advertisements of products purchased for sad occasions (visit to a sick friend) featured sad music (Alpert et al., 2005). This study underscores the importance of aligning the musical nuance of the background music with the emotional valence of consumers' purchase occasions.

## Conclusion and Future Research

In the current status quo, people's sensory inputs (sound, smell, touch etc.) are strategically employed to shape consumers' perceptions of products and brands. This paper sheds light on the application of one of the most useful yet understudied sensory input in marketing: music.

Although this is a burgeoning field of research that is starting to gain more attention in academia, there are many topics of research related to music marketing that require further investigation. For instance, within the realm of atmospherics, scholars could investigate not only the effect of background music on purchase intentions, but also other marketing-related consumer behaviors such as people's willingness to spread positive word of mouth. In fact, as the online shopping experience and immersive shopping experiences using 4D devices has become more prevalent in the current status quo, the effect of background music in the online space is also a field that merits scholarly attention.

Furthermore, consumers' retail experiences are inherently characterized by multiple sensory inputs. Consequently, the interaction between auditory stimuli and other sensory stimuli in the retail settings such as in-store fragrances or the overall color scheme of the store could be investigated. In the domain of advertising, the optimal placement of music in advertisements or the psychological implications of various musical elements such as timbre, tempo, or lyrics should also be studied to fully leverage consumers' multisensory experiences in advertisements.

Finally, research on the instrumental composition of sonic logos should encompass artificial sounds to determine if synthesized tunes created through the Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) also affect

brand or product perceptions. Specifically, the effectiveness of such artificial tunes and their influence on brands that promote organic goods would be an interesting research topic. Such studies would shed light onto the significance of aligning the overall brand image with sensory inputs used to promote the brand. Furthermore, an examination of the interplay between auditory logos and visual logos is also an important topic of research, as visual logos often accompany their sonic counterparts. As mentioned in this paper, music plays a significant role in marketing, and its role will only expand as we enter a new era of AI and online purchasing. Therefore, the role of music in retail settings, advertisements, and branding emerges as a promising field that warrants further scholarly investigation.

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