

Music and Consumer Experience

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Consumers are besieged by music. Corporations use music to shape consumer experience and purchasing behaviors, to build emotional connections with consumers, and to enhance the corporate brand image.

Auditory cues can and do modulate many different aspects of consumer perception and behavior in retail environments. For example, people move more slowly in retail environments featuring slow tempo or quiet music. This means that retailers often use slower, softer music when they want customers to linger. However, in fast-paced restaurants or bars, where there is quick table turnover, increasing the loudness, or beats per minute, of background music can result in a significant increase in rate of consumption of food and drink as well as in the overall amount that people consume.

Moreover, ambient music and purposefully programmed sound is such a taken-for-granted element of a built space that consumers notice only when they enter a music-free environment. Although it is a typically overlooked aesthetic structure, sound is an important design element of a built space devoted to consumerism. Music directs consumers to places of consumption. It also keeps out the unwanted noises of the commercial infrastructure such as heating and cooling systems, hard vertical and horizontal surfaces that produce echoes, random utterances and conversations, as well as the general social scene and traffic noise outside

of the commercial space. As such, companies use background music and prepared soundscapes to mask undesirable noise and sounds in their environment and to enhance the aesthetic appeal of their business.

Stores often use these preprogrammed playlists to be heard by consumers, not listened to. This means that many, if not most, consumers are not entirely aware of the programmed soundscape. Though background music may be music-like in its content, it is noise-like in its purpose in that it is creating an atmosphere. For example, playing the sounds of a babbling brook would promote a soothing atmosphere, just as uplifting popular music in the hallways of a shopping mall promotes a social atmosphere.

Founded in 1934, Muzak carved out a long-standing niche by providing and distributing background music to retail stores and other companies. The company was so successful that its name became synonymous with benign background music, a connotation that was not often flattering. Despite providing background music to about 300,000 US locations such as restaurants, malls, and hotels, with revenues of almost US\$200 million, the company filed for bankruptcy in 2009. After emerging from bankruptcy in 2010 and restructuring their corporate offerings, Mood Media purchased Muzak in 2011. Though Mood Media officially retired the name "Muzak" in 2013, the company will be remembered as a pioneer in the commercial use of music to produce a certain mood or response from consumers.

Music that consumers experience is, today, likely the result of planning, organization, and monitoring by a multi-sensory branding company such as Mood Media or PlayNetwork who sell plentiful preprogrammed

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playlists to all manner of clients. Whether you are in a library, a café, a shopping mall, or a restaurant, the scene is likely (unobtrusively) filled with music or some aural backdrop.

Of course, multi-sensory branding firms have not cornered the market on music commoditization, and many companies have moved their background music business in-house. Starbucks, for example, treats music as an active commodity, incorporating music into its global corporate culture. Though their strategy regarding in-store music sales and promotion has changed several times in the last decade, an in-house team selects all of the music played in their stores, helping to maintain a consistent brand image.

Music is a significant part of popular culture and people's everyday lives. Advertisers and agencies have understood this for a long time, leading them to incorporate jingles and popular music into advertising. Jingles are short tunes that explicitly promote a product or a brand. For example, State Farm has used Barry Manilow's "Like a Good Neighbor" jingle for 40 years. In contrast, popular music originally intended for a general listening audience is increasingly being used for specific commercial interests. For example, in the last decade the Apple corporation has used a variety of pop music in its ads for the iPod, iPhone, and its laptop computers. Both of these forms of music, jingles and pop, can become uniquely attached to a brand.

As a characteristic aesthetic element, particular music in advertising can become a distinctive asset for a company and an extension of a brand for consumers. This form of sonic distinction can extend to sound logos and sound trademarks. A sound logo is a short distinctive melody or other sequence of sound, mostly positioned at the beginning or ending of a commercial. It can be seen as the acoustic equivalent of a visual logo. For example, Walter Werzowa composed the five

musical tones heard in every commercial for Intel Corporation and for computers that use its chips. Those tones are intended to evoke innovation and trouble-shooting skills while also sounding corporate and inviting. The 1996 World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights expanded the legal definition of trademark to encompass sound. A sound trademark is when sound is used to perform the trademark function of uniquely identifying the commercial origin of products or services. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) chimes were the first sound trademark to be officially accepted by the US Patent and Trademark Office.

In summary, music provides a set of aesthetic and commercial cues, beyond visual and other sensory practices, for consumers and corporations. In this manner, music is intricately intertwined with commercial symbols, practices, and environments.

SEE ALSO: Advertising; Brands and Branding; Marketing/Marketing Science; Shopping; Shopping Malls

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