

## **Consumer response to background music in advertising and service/retail contexts**

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### **Project Description:**

As one of the most important creative elements, music is incorporated in more than 94% of advertisements (Allan, 2008). Music accounts for a significant commercial advantage in the context of advertising by producing favorable associations with the product/brand (Gorn, 1982), contributing to the message (Hung, 2000), and by attracting consumers' attention and enhancing message recall (Yalch, 1991). Countless billions of dollars are spent annually on music by advertising agencies and client companies (Oakes, 2007). Music is ubiquitous in television, radio and cinema advertising, as well as in many service and retail contexts, thus underlining the need for increased academic research.

Indeed, existing laboratory experiments in the past four decades investigated the effects of various characteristics of music such as key, tempo, texture, volume, taste, familiarity, arousal, and complexity (e.g., Kellaris and Kent 1992, 1993; Kellaris and Rice 1993; Oakes 2003; Alpert et al., 2005; North et al., 2016; Abolhasani and Oakes, 2017; Craton et al., 2017) on consumers in various marketing contexts. However, flawed conceptual underpinnings, flawed experimental procedures, incomplete information, an exclusive focus on artificial lab experiments, and most importantly, the fact that there is a lack of research in new contexts (new media) may be considered as the overriding issues with the existing music and advertising research. Furthermore, the concept of musical congruity remains complicated as evident in the frequently contradictory findings of previous research. There is clearly a lack of coherent articulation of the theoretical underpinnings of musical congruity in the context of advertising which have resulted in contradictory findings in this particular area of research. Furthermore, there is a general gap in terms of the lack of qualitative research in music and advertising. In the existing music and advertising literature, the effects of background music are mainly measured using quantitative methods (Abolhasani et al., 2017). Therefore, there is a need to investigate the effects of background music in advertising through exploring consumers' lived experiences of musical consumption.

Furthermore, music is capable of transforming perceptions of any space, regardless of whether it is passively heard as a pre-recorded servicescape element or actively listened to as a live concert performance (Oakes and Warnaby, 2011). The store atmospheric elements include colour, scent, and ambient factors such as music and lighting. Retail and service organisations initiate involuntary exposure to background music to manipulate consumer perceptions and shopping behaviours. Practitioners have started recognising the importance and the choice of music played in their retail stores. Large retailers such as Hammerson, carried out an experiment in their shopping centres to see whether the music played in the background had any impact on the

behaviour of the shoppers (BBC, 2015). Similarly, music may be capable of influencing customers in online shopping environments, restaurants, while they are waiting in a service queue, or when listening to telephone on-hold tune (e.g., perceived waiting time).

Future research may build upon the findings of the netnography research by Abolhasani et al (2017) and investigate consumers' experience of the interplay between music, visuals and words in specific advertisements to analyse rhetorical and imagistic qualities that contribute to advertising resonance and interpret music as part of an overall rhetorical intention, thus leading to enriching the analysis of themes that emerge. It is also interesting to explore how the match between background music in retail and service environments and other sensory stimuli such as light, colour, and temperature transforms customers' perceptions of service environment attractiveness, their evaluation of service quality, as well as the amount they spend.

Therefore, we welcome applications for PhD research in the area of music and advertising as well as service/retail contexts. We are interested in hearing from potential PhD students who have an interest in consumer behavior. The research may follow a mixed methods approach, involving the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. This will address the methodological gap, i.e. the almost exclusively positivist approach adopted by the existing research.

#### **About the supervisors:**

This PhD research would build on the current relevant study being carried out at the Open University by Morteza Abolhasani and Gordon Liu. [Morteza](#) is a Lecturer in Marketing at the Open University Business School. His main research interests focus on exploring consumer responses to background music in advertising as well as service environments. [Gordon](#) is a Professor of Marketing Strategy at the Open University Business School. Gordon's research focuses on the intersection of marketing, strategy and entrepreneurship with particular interest in topics surrounding innovation/new product development, strategic orientation/capabilities, and network/strategic alliance.

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