The Effects of Background Music on Consumer Behavior

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Introduction

Businesses use many marketing tactics to increase their sales, and one of them is creating an atmosphere that will influence the buying probability of their customers. This cognizant use of consumers' surrounding environment is known as atmospherics. Marketing professor Phillip Kotler (1973) defines atmospherics as "the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers" (p. 50). The concept of atmospherics applies to both the store interiors and exteriors, with the environment of a store being one of the most salient features of a shopping experience. Kotler argues that the use of atmospherics is a significant marketing tool in settings where a product is bought, where there are a number of competitors, where price differences are small, and where products are targeted for a specific group. The atmosphere serves as the medium of attention, communication, and emotion to influence consumers' purchase behavior. This means that management uses an atmosphere to draw attention to products and to convey a message about them. A quality shopping space can impact consumers' affective states by appealing to the senses of sight, sound, scent, and touch. Kotler also argues that atmosphere and the likelihood of a purchase have a causal relationship because of the sensory qualities' ability to affect buyers' purchase probability (p. 53).

This paper will specifically look at the effects of the sensory quality of sound on shopping behavior. Background music in stores is ubiquitous and consumers have little control over it. This use of music started as early as 1934 with the creation of Muzak, one of the more well-known services that produce music playlists for stores nationwide (Lindberg, 2009). Stores use it as a marketing tool to influence the unconscious behaviors of shoppers, such as affecting their perceptions of how long they were shopping and encouraging them to linger in a store

longer or to change their pace (Graves, 2010, p. 54). The exposure to the right type of music can evoke in consumers a mood that can enhance purchase probability (Sullivan & Adcock, 2002, p. 156).

In a few cases, some shoppers are aware of background music and argue that it can become ineffective if it does not suit the atmosphere. A writer at the magazine publication *Travel + Leisure* had a strong distaste for background music that he deemed did not fit the environment. The music playing during his dining experience in a luxury resort's restaurant "made time grind to an agonizing halt," making him want to leave (Lindberg, 2009). However, when he had breakfast at the same place, his mood was better because the background music was more suitable to the atmosphere—it made everything seem "brighter, crisper, cooler," and this was more to his liking (Lindberg, 2009). He also knew that the music service company DMX produced both playlists that were used during his dining experiences, but he preferred the channel that was playing during the breakfast meal.

Another example of music effects while shopping is a consumer reporter's article about music in retail stores. This blogger, who is over the age of 60, had an issue with stores playing loud music (Mayer, 2012). She eventually went to stores that played music to her preferred volume level. The consumer reporter later learned that retailers are increasingly using music to differentiate target consumers from customers of another demographic, as well as "to make shopping more sensory, or 'experiential'" (Mayer 2012). In this particular circumstance, the music was a turn off for her because she was not the target customer for the store, ultimately causing her to find a more suitable environment. These two viewpoints show that background music can affect some consumers' behaviors in retail settings.

Since background music is an important characteristic of successful atmospherics, this paper will focus on the influence of background music on consumers in spending environments. Music in stores has an intended purpose of making customers spend in a specific direction and of controlling the length of their stay. This marketing tool is used to affect the subconscious minds of shoppers; with the knowledge of this topic, businesses can benefit from creating an effective atmosphere. The purpose of this meta-analysis is to demonstrate to businesses the power that background music can have on consumers. By investigating these effects from business and marketing studies, the findings should support the arguments that: 1) certain tempos and styles of background music will increase consumer spending (influencing business sales) and 2) these different types of background music will increase or decrease the amount of time consumers spend in the purchasing environment.

Methodology

This paper presents a meta-analysis of eight studies relating to the buying influence of background music. This means that the results of these studies were analyzed and compared to one another to develop a conclusion. The databases Business Source Complete and Academic Search Complete were utilized to find academic studies. Keywords such as “effects of background music”, “consumer behaviors”, “consumer habits”, “retail sales”, and “music and shopping” were employed in combination with each other to generate possible sources. The eight studies that were chosen were based on whether or not the findings included the amount of money consumers’ spent and the time and/or perceived time they stayed in each music condition. If the studies contained findings for other variables, they were excluded from the analysis and discussion. The overview and results of the studies were presented in two parts with their corresponding discussions that synthesized the findings immediately following. Then a general

discussion about environmental psychology theory, which can explain the possible causes of background music, concludes the study.

Results

In 1982, R.E. Milliman investigated the effects of background music on supermarket shoppers' behaviors. The treatments to the respective environments of no music, slow-tempo music, and fast-tempo music were used to test if there were differences made upon shoppers' pace in store, the daily sales by customers, and the customers' awareness that there was background music. However, the result from the last dependent variable will be left out due to its irrelevance for this paper. In the slow-tempo music condition, the pace of in-store traffic was significantly slower than in the fast-tempo music condition (p. 89). In-store traffic in the slow-tempo music condition was also slower than the no music condition, but not by a significant value. For the results on the daily sales by customers, the slow tempo music condition was found to have a significantly higher sales volume than that of the fast-tempo music treatment, which had lower daily sales figures.

Milliman (1986) also studied a restaurant to determine if different music tempos have an effect on the amount customers spent, their length of stay, the length of time it took for the restaurant to serve its customers, and the number of people who left before being seated. The findings again showed that in the slower music treatment, customers took a significantly longer time to finish their meals than in the faster music treatment (p. 288). For the amount spent on food, this study found no significant difference between the slow-tempo and fast-tempo conditions, but for the amount spent on drinks, the charges were higher in the slow-tempo condition.

Caldwell and Hibbert (1999) carried out another study that researched the effect of music tempo in a restaurant. Their findings were aligned with the results from Milliman's study (1986) in that music with a slower tempo resulted in consumers dining longer, strengthening the conclusion made from both studies. The study also found higher spending on food (which diverged from what was founded in Milliman's study) and drinks in the slow-tempo condition compared to the fast-tempo treatment. Caldwell and Hibbert also investigated customers' perceptions on how long they thought they spent in the restaurant in addition to their actual dining time. People who dined with slow-tempo music underestimated their time, and people in the fast-tempo condition overestimated their time spent in the restaurant.

Discussion

The results from the above studies illustrate that background music has a significant influence on consumer behavior. More importantly, the type of music was a crucial factor in determining the amount of money consumers spend. The first three studies manipulated the music tempo to observe how this variable will affect consumer spending. In addition, the first study also observed the pace of in-store traffic, and the third study measured consumers' perceived length of stay. The conclusion made here is that the consumers in the slow-tempo conditions consistently spent more on their purchases and took a longer time in the supermarket or restaurant than did their counterparts in the fast-tempo conditions.

From this data, businesses can use music with a slower tempo to encourage their customers to stay in the stores longer and spend more as a result. The slower tempo influences shoppers to also move slower and slow down their pace. Of course, the setting is an important consideration when deciding on the type of music to play. Sit-down restaurants want their patrons to stay longer, but in fast-food restaurants, fast tempo music is played "to 'turn over' as

many customers as possible" (Wood & Allen, 2012, p. 10). Customers in sit-down restaurants are encouraged to order more food, drinks, or dessert when slower music is playing. Yet in fast-food places, the goal is to serve as many people as possible, so music with a faster tempo is utilized. Faster music is predicted to be more arousing on consumers, so their physical behavior is quickened to match the music tempo (North & Hargreaves, 2008, p. 270). Since the background music has to fit the environment, the style of music is an important factor for affecting consumers' behavior, which leads to the data from the rest of the studies.

Results

A study that investigated different genres of music took place in a university cafeteria. The researchers surveyed subjects with a questionnaire on their purchase intentions in the different conditions of classical, pop, easy-listening, and no music (North & Hargreaves, 1998). The subjects were asked how much they were willing to spend for each item on a menu. The findings showed that subjects were willing to pay more in the classical-music condition than in the no-music or easy-listening conditions, but this amount was not more than the total price in the pop-music condition. The conclusion from this was that classical and pop music were associated with items of higher prices that subjects were willing to pay.

The fifth study continued with genre-driven background music and focused on classical music's influence with a field experiment in a restaurant setting. The restaurant mainly appealed to people of the upper-middle class as the prices were higher than the average in the market. The researchers hypothesized that "classical music would lead to customers spending more money than with pop music" (North, Shilcock, & Hargreaves, 2005, p. 713). The hypothesis was supported with the classical-music condition having the greatest spending out of the classical,

pop, and no music treatments (p. 716). The spending in the pop-music and no-music conditions was relatively the same with no significant difference between food and beverage charges.

Another study that continued to use classical music as a treatment was Areni and Kim's (1993) field experiment in a wine store. The researchers manipulated the background music in this particular wine store between classical and Top-40 music. They were interested in how these two types of music affect the purchase behavior, the consumption behavior, and the amount of time customers spend in the store. Results found that there was no significant influence on consumption behavior or on the time spent in the store, but classical music led customers to purchase more expensive products (p. 338).

The seventh study about background music effects investigated the influence of background music on consumers in a retail electronics store (Andersson, Kristensson, Wastlund, & Gustafsson, 2012). Pop music and no music were used as treatments in this experiment, and as shoppers left the store, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire that measured the time they spent in the store, their spending total, and other variables. The results showed that consumers spent a significantly longer time in the store and spent significantly more on purchases during the pop-music condition compared to the no-music condition (p. 555).

In this last study, a laboratory experiment was conducted with college-aged subjects in a simulated retail store (Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000, p. 142). One of the hypotheses in this paper was that individuals who listen to familiar music (Top 40) while in the retail setting will be more stimulated and spend less time shopping than the people who listen to unfamiliar music (instrumental style of older music or easy-listening music). The measurements supported this hypothesis with a slightly significant result.

Discussion

For the last five studies, the style of music was manipulated to examine how this will affect consumers' purchasing behaviors and time spent shopping. Classical and pop music were shown to generate the greatest spending out of classical, pop, easy-listening, and no-music conditions for these studies. The fourth study's data demonstrated that classical and pop music willed consumers to spend significantly more, and the seventh study's data showed that consumers stayed in the buying environment with pop music significantly longer compared to environments with no music. In the eighth study, subjects spent less time shopping when familiar music (Top-40) was playing compared to when hearing unfamiliar, easy-listening music.

The use of a certain style or genre of music creates a perception of the environment. Classical music in a restaurant or store produces the judgment that the setting is upmarket, and to match this atmosphere, people will buy more expensive items to also be perceived as classy (Wood & Allen, 2012, p. 11). However, other explanations are possible for people to purchase more expensive items in the classical-music conditions. The background music could have created the message that only the higher-priced items should be considered. This supports Kotler's argument about how the use of atmosphere can serve as a medium that creates a message about the store. As for the findings from the eighth study, businesses can use unfamiliar music or older music on younger consumers to stimulate them to an extent so that they will stay in their stores longer, while not stimulating their attention away from shopping; however, the background music cannot diverge too far or it will not attract the demographic of customers they are targeting. This illustrates the situation of the sixty-year-old consumer reporter who was not attracted to stores with loud music because they were not aimed at her age demographic.

General Discussion

Many of these studies involved the environmental psychology theory, which is "the study of transactions between individuals and their physical settings" (Halpern & Voiskounsky, 1997, p. 373). The stimulus-organism-response model in this theory illustrates that "music is the stimulus that causes a shopper's evaluation and some type of behavioral response" (Lowrey, 2007, p. 35). Figure 1 presents the many possible stimulus inputs that can generate responses from the consumer (Min Li & Dong, 2012). For example, the audio-visual elements of the environmental inputs and the situation of the consumer inputs act as the stimuli for people's cognition, affecting attitudes in promoting a purchase. As seen in the studies that used classical music as a treatment, the consumers determined that the place was upscale and that they should behave according to this evaluation.

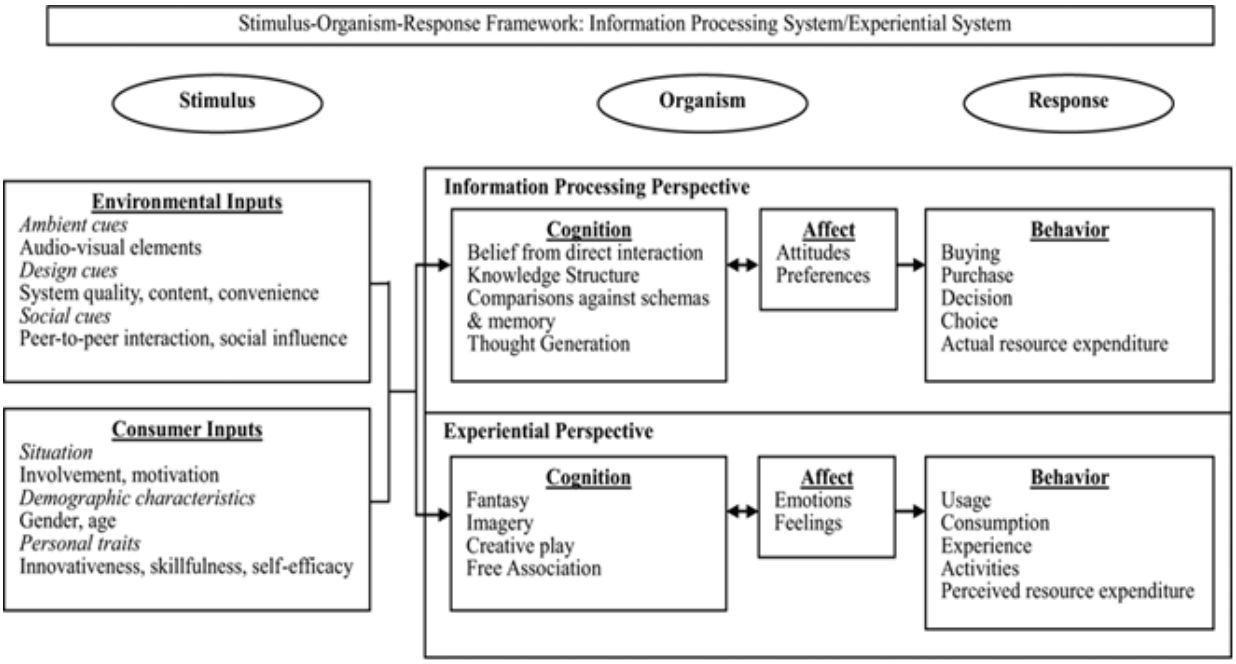

Figure 1. Stimulus-Organism-Response Model. Reprinted from "Factors influencing consumption experience of mobile commerce: A study from experiential view," by Z.Y. Min Li & X.C. Dong, 2012, *Internet Research, 22*(2), p. 125.

Another model in the environmental psychology theory is the pleasure-arousal-dominance model. In this model, "the environment affects individuals' moods or emotions by altering their state of pleasure, arousal, and dominance" (Lowrey, 2007, p. 35). This model extends the stimulus-organism response model by specifically stating that consumers' moods or emotions are the causes for the approach-avoidance behavior that results in their spending. Depending on which state the affective valence (valence of positive or negative mood) is situated—pleasure, arousal, or dominance—consumers either approach or avoid. The four characteristics of approach-avoidance behavior include the wish to stay, explore, talk to others, or increase gratification from a certain behavior. These inclinations can either go in the direction of approaching (e.g., staying in store) or avoiding (not staying).

The consequence of the studies' findings is that businesses should use atmospherics in an appropriate manner to help in their financial returns. Stores not only have to know whom their target consumers are, but also what their consumers are searching for in their shopping experiences. Restaurants especially need to create appropriate atmospheres, as they can be a significantly determine the success of a restaurant (Kotler, 1973, p. 58). An example of the failed use of atmospherics was a bakery that was overdesigned for the clientele in the area in which it was situated. The store was nicely designed and suggested expensive pastries (Kotler, 1973, p. 63). However, this presentation also suggested high prices that were not appropriate for everyday purchasing. The owners of this bakery had not carefully thought out the needs of their clientele. Each market or type of store is different with a variety of customer characteristics, so businesses have to answer a number of questions when choosing background music that is suitable for their consumers and their financial goals.

Conclusion

The eight studies discussed in this paper prove that certain types of background music did influence consumer spending and the amount of time consumers spent in the purchasing environment. Settings that played slow-tempo music were found to influence consumers to spend more and stay longer than in the environments with fast-tempo music. The slow tempo of music affects the speed in which consumers eat or shop, encouraging them to spend more from the longer stay in the restaurant or store. Classical and pop music were the styles found to also encourage customers to spend more or purchase more expensive items and to stay in the buying setting longer than they did with no music at all. These findings can largely be explained by the stimulus-organism response model and the pleasure-arousal-dominance model of environmental psychology theory. With an understanding of appropriate atmospherics, businesses can use environmental factors to stimulate consumers to a higher purchase probability. The target consumers and setting have to be taken into consideration for background music to have the intended purpose. As discussed in the introduction with the two writers' personal experiences, if background music is not fitting for the environment or does not attract the target consumers, then it would be damaging instead of helping the business.

The synthesis of these studies' results was to form a conclusion about the influence of different types of background music on consumers. The analyses support that the tempo and genre of music are important contributors to how consumers will spend their money and time. These studies took place over a significant amount of time, and the evidences were consistent throughout the years, which helps support the practicality of background music. However, the methodology utilized to narrow down the studies limited the amount of papers that could have been analyzed, which inhibits the generalizations that can be made about background music's

effects from these findings. This was a significant limitation in the research because a number of studies were excluded due to their data being focused on other dependent variables that were not analyzed in this paper. Future meta-analyses should include more studies and look into other dependent variables that have a relationship with store background music, such as the attitudes consumers can hold about the music and the quality of the atmosphere. Another criticism of the studies included in this paper was that most of the settings took place in a restaurant. This research only contained two studies with a retail setting as the shopping environment. To increase the generalizability of future meta-analyses across all types of businesses, experiments conducted in a variety of settings should be included.

The studies assessed in this research strongly supported the argument that background music is a beneficial element to the use of atmospherics in businesses. The use of field experiments was instrumental for establishing causality, which helped strengthen the generalizability of the findings to settings like the ones from the studies. However, a limitation within the studies of this paper was that a majority of them did not gather data on the individual characteristics of consumers. When the styles of music are manipulated, the individual personalities of shoppers are important to consider. Consumers' personal music preferences can relate to their responses to stores' background music, affecting their behavior. Further research conducted on this topic should also survey consumers' personal music preferences to see if a similarity between personal music taste and background music will influence shoppers to spend more time in the store and make more purchases. Future research is necessary to observe how other variables are affected by background music.

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