

The Value of Music

The Effect of Music on Atmosphere and Purchase Intentions in a Bar



**A Study by Dr A.C. North, David J. Hargreaves, and Jennifer McKendrick
Summary by Claire Wells, PRS**

Introduction

This research investigates the two possible functions of music in commercial environments, which are:

- Effect of music on the perceived characteristics of the place in which it is played
- Customers' purchase intentions

It is suggested that the establishment should consider closely the music that it uses as it can result in determining the perceived image, clientele, and the amount of money that they spend. Studies have shown that opinions towards an establishment can be directly related back to the atmosphere.

For example:

Cherunlik (1991) found that subjects shared common conceptions regarding restaurant fronts, allowing them to distinguish between four common types of restaurant. The subjects were able to describe the quality of food, the ambience and even the characteristics of fellow diners from the front of the restaurants.

Leather and Lawrence (1995) investigated the effects of specific social and environmental features on the perception of pubs. Untidiness had a generally negative effect on judgements of the landlord.

North and Hargreaves (1996) found that diners liking for food in a student cafeteria increased with their liking for the music played. This seemed to be confirmed in a second study (North and Hargreaves, 1998a) where the atmosphere could be classified in terms of five characteristics:

- Upbeat
- Upmarket
- Assertive/aggressive
- Dignified/elegant
- Peaceful

It also showed that different types of music could alter the extent to which the atmosphere of the cafeteria was perceived as possessing these five characteristics.

Findings such as these indicate that customers' perceptions of the physical environment are a crucial aspect of in-store marketing.

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The Study

The first aim of this study was to explore a person's response to certain music and whether it could influence the perceived image of different commercial listening environments which enjoyed a different clientele.

Customers were presented with a list of 11 characteristics, and were asked to rate the bar on each using a scale from 0 ('The bar definitely does not possess this characteristic') to 10 ('The bar definitely does possess this characteristic'). This was followed by a list of popular items on sale in the bar. Customers were asked to state to the nearest penny the maximum sum they would pay for each item. Customers then completed a second page of the questionnaire asking them to rate the characteristics of the music/no music played that day in the same way as before.

Once the music had been playing for ten minutes the researcher approached diners with the questionnaire. At the end of the day he also received sales figures for beers, wines, spirits, soft drinks and food, to compare the relationship between what was bought and the atmosphere in the bar.

The Results

The results provide clear evidence that different musical styles and also the volume of the music influenced customers' perception of the bar. The research provided some evidence that the nature of the customers' perceptions of the bar was related positively to their perception of the music. For example, the more that customers perceived the music as being 'invigorating', the more the bar was also perceived this way.

The three factors found within this study are similar to those obtained in two other recent studies. The first of these (North and Hargreaves, 1988a) showed that responses to a cafeteria could be reduced to five basic dimensions:

- Upbeat
- Upmarket
- Assertive/aggressive
- Dignified/elegant
- Peaceful

These are very similar to the three factors obtained in this study, and scores on them were influenced by the music played in a cafeteria. A second study (North and Hargreaves, 1998) showed that responses to a banking hall could be reduced to four dimensions:

- Dynamic/upbeat
- Dignified
- Assertive/aggressive
- Inspirational

Again these dimensions are very similar to the three factors obtained in the study in a bar, and scores on them were influenced by the music played.

All three studies showed that music could influence scores on the chosen factors; the three principle dimensions that people respond to within commercial

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environments can all be influenced by the music played there. It is easy to determine which types of music could be used to promote/reduce customers' responses to a given environment along these dimensions. For example: If the bar was to be perceived as upbeat they may wish to play up to the minute chart music. If the bar was to be perceived as dignified/elegant they may chose to play more classically inspired music. It is also worth noting that although the three studies gave rise to effectively the same factors, the studies differed in terms of:

- The music they used
- The place in which they were carried out
- The clientele studied

This means that the factors are likely to be robust, as they have cross-situational validity. in turn making it harder to suggest that the results could be put down to chance.

Both musical volume and musical style influenced customers' estimates of the price they would be prepared to pay, and the specific effects of these two factors varied at different times of the day.

The results show that the volume and type of music used had an overall influence on customers' ratings of the bar. The bar was perceived as being the least peaceful when foreground music was played, but background music led to it being perceived as slightly more peaceful than when no music was played. This suggests that music does have an influence on the way a bar is perceived, and also reiterates the fact that you should chose the music wisely as different music leads to different atmosphere and image.

Conclusion and Implications

These findings have several obvious practical implications. First, they suggest that music can be used to differentiate two otherwise similar establishments by producing variations in their atmosphere. This may allow the establishment to attract different types of customer. Several studies have indicated that the effect towards an establishment and its image are related to the following:

- How often individuals frequent the bar
- The money individuals spend
- Choice of store
- Brand loyalty
- Sensitivity to promotions
- Sensitivity to price
- Response to new brands

As the present results demonstrate, music can affect the image of a commercial environment, it seems reasonable to suspect that it may consequently influence these other dependent variables. The effects of music on customers' estimates on the maximum amount that they would be prepared to pay suggest that music could be a factor in determining pricing policy. More generally, effects such as these indicate that music should be:

- Managed to create the best possible atmosphere for the chosen clientele
- Considered for its potential in creating an image and increase sales in the bar