

In-store music and consumer–brand relationships: Relational transformation following experiences of (mis)fit

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Abstract

We examine the role of in-store music–brand “fit” in reinforcing brand position using in-depth interviews. Fit is particularly important for stores wishing to attract new consumers without prior brand experience or knowledge because these consumers view music as an important signaling cue to the brand’s position, image and quality. We also identified the effect of misfit. Misfit had two contrasting brand effects: misfit resulted in counterfactual thinking about the brand, leading to a decline in the consumer–brand relationship, and misfit could be used strategically as part of a repositioning strategy. These positive effects of fit were moderated by music volume.

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1. Introduction

Retailers use atmospherics in order to reinforce and enhance brand image (Baker et al., 2002; Babin and Attaway, 2000; Berry et al., 2002), and build emotional connections with consumers (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997). Music is one important atmospheric variable (and the most commonly examined; Garlin and Owen, *in press*) in creating an in-store experience and connecting directly with customers’ emotions (Morrison and Beverland, 2003). Research has examined the impact of in-store music on consumers’ affective states, attitudes to the store, products and staff, and behavior (Garlin and Owen, *in press*). Yet, little is known on how in-store music effects (and consumers expectations of it are shaped by) perceptions of the brand. Schmitt and Simonson (1997) support the view that sound and

music should be incorporated into a firm’s brand identity. Given that any encounter with the brand shapes brand knowledge (Keller, 2003), this lack of research is surprising given the focus by advocates of experiential retailing on the creation of experiences that “instill vigor in, and tangibility to, brands... they provide a place for retailers to leverage and broaden the impact of other media related events to the brand” (Kozinets et al., 2002, p. 18, italics in original).

Although research has highlighted the positive effects of in-store music (Garlin and Owen, *in press*), these effects do not occur in isolation from other in-store variables, and the brand’s position (Baker et al., 1994; Mattilia and Wirtz, 2001; Sharma and Stafford, 2000; Wakefield and Baker, 1998). Music needs to be used strategically in an effort to ensure ‘fit’ between the store’s brand image and positioning (Dubé and Morin, 2001; Sharma and Stafford, 2000) because research has indicated that certain musical types are more appropriate for certain stores and mismatches can have negative results (Machleit and Eroglu, 2000; Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000).

For example, failure to attend to the relationships between atmospherics, staffing, and processes could create an irritating customer experience, and undermine the positive effects of individual variables (D’Astous, 2000; Garlin and Owen, *in*

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press). Baker et al. (2002) found that stores that trigger high shopping experience costs or a taxing emotional environment may encourage the customer to avoid the store. Given that research on the effects of in-store music identifies the link between consumers emotional state, their cognitive appraisal of the store (and its merchandise and staff), their behavior, and their overall satisfaction judgment of the store (Spangenberg et al., 2005), fit between the store's atmospherics and the brand is crucial.

Fit also has beneficial results. For example, classical music used in conjunction with soft lighting and multiple salespeople helps create a prestigious image in a retail setting, leading to higher service and quality ratings (Baker et al., 1994). Also, ensuring fit between the music and other in-store atmospherics (and products) is crucial for consumers with limited brand knowledge because they are more likely to use store cues to form expectations of the product (Baker, 1998). Atmospheric factors such as music also communicate important messages that allow consumers to make inferences about product quality (Baker et al., 1994; Zeithaml, 1988). This is especially so for consumers with limited product knowledge or brand experience. These consumers tend to base purchase decisions on inferences they make from various information cues communicated by the atmospheric features in store (Baker et al., 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 2001; Zeithaml, 1988). Finally, in-store music that reinforces the desired brand personality helps build a consistent brand image (Morrison and Beverland, 2003).

For our purposes, 'fit' concerns congruency between music and other atmospheric in-store variables (D'Astous, 2000; Baker et al., 2002; Bitner, 1992; Garlin and Owen, in press; Spangenberg et al., 2005; Mattilia and Wirtz, 2001; Turley and Milliman, 2000), and perceptions of the brand (Kozinets et al., 2002). Also, music may effect the meaning consumers derive about the brand (Spangenberg et al., 2005). Fit is therefore likely to reinforce established brand meanings thus enhancing the brand's equity (Keller, 2003). Likewise, misfit may result in counterfactual thinking about the brand, resulting in consumers reassessing their view of the brand and searching out further information sources to form a new judgment about the brand's position (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003).

Based on the above review this paper has several aims. Firstly, the article examines whether consumers experience in-store music–brand image fit, and what effect this has on the consumer–brand relationship (defined as the strength of consumers emotional connections to the brand; Fournier, 1998; Keller, 2003). We propose that in-store music fit may confirm prior expectations about the brand (cf. Oliver, 1996). This process could have a number of possible outcomes. In-store music–brand fit may enhance shoppers' in-store experience, possibly resulting in delight. Delight is a profoundly positive emotional experience (Oliver et al., 1997). Delight is the highest form of satisfaction (Arnold et al., 2005; McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003; Oliver et al., 1997). A delightful experience may transform the consumer–store brand relationship resulting in closer emotional ties to the brand, resulting in greater loyalty and profits (Arnold et al., 2005; Fournier, 1998; Machleit et al., 2005; Oliver et al., 1997).

Secondly, should misfit occur, how does it impact consumers' evaluations of the store, product, and brand? Evidence suggests that poorly crafted in-store experiences may cause confusion or annoyance, potentially leading the consumer to leave the store (Cox et al., 2005; D'Astous, 2000; Maxwell and Kover, 2003). In cases of misfit, confusion may give rise to counterfactual thinking. Counterfactual thinking occurs when "people compare thoughts about what could have occurred with what they perceive actually occurred" (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003, p. 254). In the case of retail brands, consumers may experience confusion because the in-store music does not fit with prior expectations of the brand's position, image and target market. We believe that such a process may diminish the consumer–brand relationship.

2. Method

The need to account for the role of music within a wider brand context supports the adoption of a qualitative research design (Kozinets et al., 2002) because brand effects are highly context-bound (Keller, 2003). Data for this research were collected through a number of methods including background interviews with sellers of in-store music packages, observational research in themed retail stores in Australia and the US, and in-depth interviews with 20 consumers, using projective techniques to examine issues of fit and misfit. The paper will focus primarily on the results gained from the 20 in-depth consumer interviews.

Sampling was theoretically driven because the aim was to gain a diverse sample of consumers who could recount multiple in-store experiences. An overview of the sample is provided in Table 1. We have included musical preferences in Table 1 to control for this effect in perceptions of fit and positive experience. For example, several consumers reported positive mood effects based on their 'love' for a particular song [due to space considerations this analysis has been left out because it merely reinforces extant research on the positive effects of music on consumers mood (the findings indicated no brand effect flowing from personally likeable music) – see Garlin and Owen, in press], and more critically, examples of music 'working/not working' in the right/wrong environment, even when consumers openly stated their objection/preference for these musical styles.

Questions included grand tour questions that focused on descriptions of positive and negative in-store experiences involving music. These were followed by specific probes and projective questions asking consumers to identify which lifestyle or target consumer the store's music was trying to appeal to. At all times, the interviewees were asked to provide real examples, naming the store brands they had visited. Based on these descriptions we explored consumer's reactions to positive and poor music experiences, and responses to fit and misfit.

The first author conducted the analysis. Analysis involved the use of open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This analysis involved tacking back and forth between the emergent categories, transcripts, and relevant literature (Spiggle, 1994). Along the way, a number of accepted quality checks were conducted. These included the use of multiple sources of evidence, pattern matching through cross-case

Table 1
Details of sample

Name	Gender	Occupation	Age	Income ($\times 10^3$)	Musical preferences
Hayley	F	Self-employed	28	25–45	MOR
Steven	M	Teacher	46	65–80	Eclectic; dislikes country and jazz
John	M	Part time	18	<25	Eclectic
Jeanette	F	None	48	25–45	Eclectic
Rosie	F	Teacher	45	45–65	Eclectic; dislikes jazz
Melissa	F	Sales	28	45–65	MOR
Nick	M	Self-employed	25	25–45	Eclectic
Sam	M	Military	30	45–65	Eclectic
Caroline	F	Accounts	24	25–45	MOR; dance
Jane	F	Researcher	27	25–45	MOR; dislikes metal and alternative
Graham	M	Retail	36	100+	Soft rock, classical, new age
Joanne	F	Part time	32	25–45	Eclectic
Cori	M	Student	24	25–45	Eclectic; dislikes country
Lyn	F	Publisher	43	25–45	Rock, MOR
Jason	M	It	31	45–65	Rock
Adam	M	Construction	34	25–45	Eclectic
Priya	F	Accounts	25	25–45	R n B, Hip Hop
Eva	F	Administrator	27	45–65	MOR; dislikes jazz and alternative
Aidas	M	Self-employed	26	45–65	Electronic
Bianca	F	Student	20	<25	MOR

MOR=middle of the road pop (top 40's).

analysis, the seeking of rival explanations, the use of multiple researchers, presenting findings to colleagues and practitioners, reflections on findings and conclusions, the use of an interview guide, and spending significant time in the field.

3. Findings

3.1. The experience of in-store music–brand fit

We identified several instances of in-store music–brand fit. Firstly, in-store music often reinforced prior perceptions of the brand, thus reinforcing the consumer–brand relationship. Second, where consumers had no prior experience or expectations of the brand, music was an important signaling cue about the brand's position and target market. The right music could entice a consumer to enter the store, possibly beginning a brand relationship. In either case, the brand effect could be one of reinforcement resulting in a pleasant, expected experience, or music could be part of a transformational experience, resulting in delight and increased loyalty. These findings will be explored below.

In the context of retail brands, in-store music was identified as an important brand attribute, often reflecting the core image of the brand. For example:

I like in-store music because it can get you in the mood to shop but the right music has to be played to reflect the

brand. Like I said before about being unique and different, you have to be able to distinguish not just the product, but your whole brand. And in-store music is a part of the brand. It just is because it's what you're showing, how you're showing yourself off to everyone else. (Bianca)

Bianca's passage identifies that music should say something essential and unique about your brand that goes beyond expectations for the product class. For Bianca, in-store music is essential for brand differentiation (critical to brand equity; Keller, 2003). Fit reinforces Bianca's expectations of the brand's position. Such reinforcement provides a pleasant experience and reinforces the brand's image, resulting in a strengthened consumer–brand relationship. For example:

(I. How did the music blend in with the store?) "Good. Because it's an upbeat sporty type of store, but it wasn't too fast like the other music I was telling you about. It blended in because Nike – it's more about going harder than relaxing." (I. Going harder?) "You know, physical, running, gym, sweating." (I. Did the music portray that?) "Yes, more about being active rather than the opposite.... I love the way the shop is set out. Everything always looks fantastic. I'm always quite happy to browse and try things on and have a look and see what they've got that's new. I can spend hours in there, I love it.... I guess their staff are always quite sporty looking, it's the whole theme of the store." (I. Did the music make any particular impact?) "I think it fits in with the whole sporty theme. As I said before it's more about being physical, it's more of a physical rather than a passive music." (I. What would be the type of passive music?) "Like if you went into a store and they were playing jazz. That wouldn't fit with Nike for me because Nike is not about relaxing, it's more about what their logo is – Just Do It" (Hayley).

Hayley's experience at Nike reinforced the brand's core personality of activeness and the brand's espoused identity of "Just Do It". Hayley's passage also reinforces the importance of congruency or fit between the atmospheric variables in the store and her view of the brand (which moderated the experience of in-store music). Music that fits the brand also reinforces previous expectations, thus maintaining and strengthening the bond Hayley has with the brand because fit reinforces the familiar (cf. Keller, 2003). Hayley's emotional response to music–brand fit resulted in a positive cognitive appraisal of the brand, and had positive behavioral outcomes. Hayley's response also confirms the importance of context in understanding music's effect (cf. Garlin and Owen, in press). However, this context goes beyond classifications of store types and suggests that consumers draw on multiple in-store atmospheric cues, and their knowledge of the brand to assess fit. This suggests that music–brand fit can be assessed holistically (Baker et al., 2002; Chebat and Dubé, 2000; Turley and Milliman, 2000), with reference either to experiential realms (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), or themes (Kozinets et al., 2002) in future field research (cf. Garlin and Owen, in press).

However, not all consumers had prior expectations of particular brands. As a result, brand reinforcement via in-store music–brand fit occurred indirectly. For example:

The kind of music that they play would make me think of a similar thing of the clothing, if you know what I mean. So if they were playing classical music, I would probably have more of a feel for their kind of clothing that they have if I didn't necessarily know their kind of clothing. If they were playing really loud disco, rap or whatever, I would probably think that's a little bit younger for me and I may not go in there, I would even think it is poor quality. (Eva)

Eva uses music as an important cue about the product range and quality rather than the brand per se. For Eva, music sends an important signal about the brand's target market, image, and importantly, quality. Without prior brand knowledge, Eva uses music as a key cue to decide if the brand is desirable. As a result, for new-to-the-brand consumers, music can reduce uncertainty about the brand and reduce potential risk. Without prior expectations, the brand effect of in-store music is indirect because customers draw on multiple cues to make inferences about fit, confirming previous suggestions on the importance of fit for consumers with limited or incomplete knowledge of the brand, or of the product (Baker, 1998; Baker et al., 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 2001). For example:

I went into Country Road and I found that music to be just right because they had some sort of relaxation type of music on. Like cafe music, and it's kind of relaxing and makes you feel good. And my perception of that was it kind of matched because when I walked in there I saw the home ware and the home ware is quite nice, and anyway, that music kind of matched the home ware because your home is meant to be a relaxed environment. (Jane)

Rather than relating the in-store music choice to previously formed expectations of the brand's position, Jane draws on in-store cues and forms associations between them (home ware) and idealized images (the home should be relaxed) and forms an expectation of appropriate music. For Jane, consistency between all three resulted in fit and positive views towards the Country Road brand. In this case, fit is experienced *in situ*. For Jane, fit between a product range and the in-store music enhances her perceptions of the product, which then transfers to the brand. Because she relates the music primarily to the product class (which is just one part of the store environment), and she is an inexperienced Country Road customer, the emotional effect is less than for a transformation experience (see Melissa's passage below).

3.1.1. In-store music–brand fit and delight

Music can also transform the in-store experience, creating powerful consumer–brand bonds. In this case, music combines with other cues to form a powerful emotional experience for the consumer. For example:

A shop in the Jam Factory... a furniture store, they play such gorgeous music and I actually bought three CD's from them

because I love the music. It's South American music and it's got that whole ethnic feel. I love it. The music fits in perfectly and it almost made the environment more jovial because they do water features and they've got a lot of bright colors and all that essence. Fluffy pillows everywhere, and plants and you felt like you were transformed into this other place. It's just amazing. It really created such a nice feel to the place and you almost want to get up and dance. I've never liked that kind of music at all, I was just walking around all different shops, and I was just taken back. I'd say as you walked into the store you could hear it and it emphasized the feel of the shop. It's just like the type of stuff that they sell there – it's not from here. It's like it could be in South America, because of the music. It almost emphasizes that feel... just a very warm place. Just very friendly, the staff were very friendly as well which helps the image. You just feel welcomed there, you feel at ease. (Melissa)

Melissa's in-store experience went beyond the pleasant experiences identified in the earlier passages. Melissa's experience is more akin to extraordinary or flow experiences (Czikszentmihalyi, 1990) where consumers are literally transported to a magical realm and lose themselves in the experience. For Melissa, in-store music (in conjunction with other in-store cues) reinforced the brand's position and image at an emotional level, thus building stronger resonance with the brand (cf. Keller, 2003). In contrast, the bonds identified in the earlier passages had a less powerful emotional effect; rather they reinforced perceptions of quality, market position, and target audience. Melissa was delighted by the store and overall experience because the experience resulted in unexpected pleasure (Oliver et al., 1997). Music in this context helped tie together the other in-store cues into a complete experience and not only introduced the brand to Melissa for the first time, but also helped form a powerful emotional bond that resulted in increased loyalty (as evidenced by her subsequent purchases mentioned in the passage and her ongoing patronage).

In summary, fit between in-store music and the brand operated at many levels. For consumers with clearly formed expectations of the brand, fit results in brand reinforcement and a positive in-store experience, albeit one that is more satisfactory rather than delightful. For consumers without prior experience of the brand, music is an important signal of product quality and appropriateness (i.e., target market). As a result, this form of fit helps introduce the brand to the consumer. In other cases, music can play a key role in creating a powerful all encompassing experience resulting in delight. In each case, in-store music plays a key role in reinforcing, forming and transforming a consumer–brand relationship.

3.2. The experience of in-store music–brand misfit

The study includes evidence of in-store music–brand misfit. Misfit had two outcomes in terms of consumer–brand relationships: dilution and repositioning. As such, misfit can result in either negative or positive brand-related outcomes.

For consumers with prior expectations of the brand, misfit resulted in counterfactual thinking. For example:

I suppose I do expect chart music to be in there and the reason why is because when I think of Esprit I think of a relaxed feeling. A lot of their clothing is comfortable and relaxing. So I do expect hip music but I was kind of expecting something a bit more relaxed than what they were playing. The music didn't match that. Even though I liked the song, it doesn't really match the person that you would expect to come out of Esprit because it is a little bit more aggressive. Esprit is a really clean-cut place. If you bought a whole Esprit outfit, you would look clean cut, you would look good as opposed to what I call a trash shop – where they sell bright neon shops at \$10. If you wore that, then you would look cheap and nasty, trashy, but coming out of there you would look clean cut so that's why I would expect the music being more clean cut. (Joanne)

Joanne's passage identifies an instance of counterfactual thinking about the brand. Jane compares her mental image and expectation of the brand with her experience of the in-store music. For Joanne, the two do not fit, and she begins to reassess the situation in terms of "what might have been" (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003). In this instance, misfit results in a not so subtle shift in the brand's position as Joanne reassesses the brand as a lower quality brand.

Misfit could result in a decrease in the strength of the consumer–brand relationship, potentially devaluing the brand, as the following projection shows.

(*I. What if Britney Spears was playing?*) "I think that would probably turn me off a bit. I think that's the kind of thing you associate with a shop that's really trying to sell shoes to teeny bopping girls. They're not the type of shop that I would shop in." (*I. Even if it was that particular jeans store that you always go to and one day you walked back and Britney Spears was on?*) "I'd probably think it doesn't fit. Because that's a really cool shop and something that's got really good quality products in there." (Nick)

Nick's passage identifies the potential damage to the brand resulting from perceived misfit. Nick identifies that should a store he frequents play music that is not in keeping with the brand's personality and position, his emotional connection to this previously loved brand would diminish, and potentially result in him dropping the brand altogether. Should the (new) in-store experience conflict with his (existing) perception of the brand (i.e., misfit occurs), Nick would infer that the brand was targeted at another market and was less desirable, thus diminishing his quality perceptions of the brand.

For Nick and Jane, misfit between the in-store music and brand challenged the perceived quality, desirability, and target market of the respective brands resulting in deligitimization (Kates, 2004). In these cases deligitimization undermined the brand's status because the music challenged consumers' perceptions of the brand's functional quality. In both cases, this deligitimization reduced the brand's status, but did not necessarily end the relationship. For other brands, misfit attacked the

core values of the brand, ultimately reducing the brand's authenticity. For example:

It was clear to me in what it was trying to be on that day or period of time, however it wasn't clear to me in terms of that's the image that we're trying to project. I suppose Christmas is like an engine of capitalism. At Christmas time everyone spends money, buys presents and it increases sales. However the Body Shop is a shop that is on the other side of politics, it's more concerned about humans and the environment... (Jane)

Jane's passage identifies how a decision to play music inconsistent with the Body Shop's position leads her to question the motives behind the brand. She identifies that the Body Shop's non-commercial motives clash with her view of Christmas as a largely commercial holiday. Sincere brands may be particularly prone to such challenges and deligitimization (Aaker et al., 2004) because sincerity requires a high degree of consistency between the brand's espoused values and its actions (Beverland, 2005). While Jane understands that everyone plays Christmas carols during this time of year, this only serves to remove the crucial source of differentiation between the Body Shop and other, more commercial brands. As a result, such a choice leads her to challenge her previous assumptions about the brand's inner character, and effectively question its legitimacy (Kates, 2004).

3.2.1. Brand repositioning through misfit

Counterfactual thinking caused by misfit also had positive outcomes. For brands seeking to reposition, challenging consumers' previous assumptions about the brand was critical. Music played a crucial role in shifting consumer perceptions about the brand. For example:

I tend to associate Witchery with slightly older people because it's a little bit more expensive. I would have thought that they'd had some more classical sort of music in the background, whereas this was sort young, cool music. Generally when I'm thinking of younger people's stores I'm thinking the clothes are a little bit more affordable, young people are students with not a whole heap of money. Like when I think of their ads I think of people wearing suits and that sort of thing. I thought oh, it's a different brand to what I thought it would be. I certainly turned my perception of the clothes into maybe younger, groovier clothes and also the girls that were working in the shop did that as well because they were wearing Witchery clothes and I'd gone oh, I thought Witchery stuff was all older and conservative and you're wearing cool jeans and a cool top. (Caroline)

Caroline's passage reveals that the Witchery clothing brand was positively repositioned in her mind. For Caroline, the brand is now perceived as somewhat more modern and younger. However, this choice of music has also had another, more subtle effect – it has led Caroline to associate the brand with lower prices. As a result, the brand is repositioned in her mind, but not in the way intended by the brand managers of Witchery.

In summary, misfit resulted in both positive and negative outcomes for the brand. Misfit between in-store music and the brand's position could trigger counterfactual thinking, resulting in consumers downgrading the brand, challenging its legitimacy, or changing perceptions of the brand (repositioning).

3.3. Music volume as moderating influence on role of fit

The positive (negative) effects of in-store music–brand fit (misfit) were moderated by music volume. Consistent with our earlier view that music plays an integrating role, low music volume decreased the overall affect of the experience. For example:

I think that they need to have something in background music, especially at their quiet times. Like I was saying about General Trader, if it's dead silent in the store and especially if there's only you and the service person there, it's almost like in society we're taught very much to break the silence, you feel you have to talk and sometimes it's a bit like 'hi how are you going?' And you go 'good,' and that's how far our relationship needs to go. But because it's quiet and because you're both just there, they feel like they have to go 'how is your day going?', and I feel like going 'it's fine, I don't want to talk to you, I want to look at what's in your shop.' (Caroline)

Caroline's passage reveals the negative effect of a lack of music. For Caroline, silence in the store results in an uncomfortable feeling, and imposes an unwanted obligation on her to interact with staff. For Caroline, this intrudes on her desire for a personal and efficient shopping trip, and results in a negative attitude towards the brand. In contrast, loud music could destroy a positive experience resulting in dissatisfaction and store exit (cf. Arnold et al., 2005). For example:

I like music on when you're shopping but not when it's overpowering, you just can't hear what they're saying, you're screaming over the top of people, it's just ridiculous. I just want to rush and get it over and done with as soon as possible. (I. Did you try things on?) "Not really because you don't pay much attention to the clothes, you're kind of just browsing really quickly so you can just get out of there so you don't pay much attention to what they've got. Half the time literally if I see it and if I really like it I won't bother trying it on, I'll just buy it so I can just get out of there. (Rosie)

The above passage illustrates how music volume that breaches Rosie's zone of tolerance results in a dissatisfactory experience, impedes her ability to efficiently shop, and decreases store stay time. As a result, a potential brand reinforcement occasion is lost. The ability to experience the functional benefits of the brand (in this case the clothes), and the service aspects of the brand are reduced. In both cases, any positive effects of fit are lost because of the music volume.

4. Conclusion

This paper contributes in a number of ways. First, we identify the effects of in-store music–brand fit on consumers' percep-

tions of the store, and perceptions of the brand. To our knowledge this is one of the first papers examining the brand effects of atmospheric variables. Our findings also confirm the views of brand researchers (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004) on the need for research into how a retail store affects consumers' perceptions of brand image and positioning. Our findings also support the view that the positive effects of in-store music do not occur in isolation from other in-store variables, and the brand's position (Dubé and Morin, 2001; Sharma and Stafford, 2000).

Achieving fit resulted in brand reinforcement (for consumers with prior expectations of the brand), delight, or attraction (for new-to-brand consumers). We also identified the importance of prior brand experience or knowledge on the role of fit. For consumers with prior experience of the brand, fit resulted in repositioning and (all things being equal) a satisfactory (though not delightful) experience. As a result, the consumer–brand relationship was strengthened. For consumers without prior brand experience, in-store music served as one important cue to the brand's position. In this case the effect of fit was indirect because the brand effects were reliant on perceptions of product quality being confirmed as well as other in-store cues. Nevertheless, fit was critical to introducing these consumers to the brand. In particular, fit helped build emotional connections between the consumer and the brand. Such connections are believed to be central to experiential marketing (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and branding practices (see emotional branding; Keller, 2003). Second, we also identified that music played a central role in integrating other atmospheric variables to create a consistent, and in some cases, transformational experience.

Third, we identify two contrasting effects of misfit. Misfit triggered counterfactual thinking about the brand, resulting in a loss of status, or positive repositioning. In the case of lost status, misfit could result in confusion leading to reduced stay time or exit, or for new-to-brand consumers, store avoidance. In these cases, misfit did not go to the heart of the brand and as a result misfit would be easier to remedy. We also identified more serious effects. In the case of sincere brands (such as the Body Shop) misfit could challenge the brand's legitimacy, resulting in a loss of status and declining equity. In this case, poor music choice could clash with the values underpinning the brand, thus undermining the brand's authenticity and perceived sincerity (Aaker et al., 2004; Beverland, 2005; Kates, 2004). We also identified positive instances of misfit. This suggests that misfit is beneficial for firms wishing to reposition their brands, although changes in music style may have unintended consequences (such as repositioning the brand down-market).

We also contribute to the emerging research on delightful and terrible in-store experiences (Arnold et al., 2005; Machleit et al., 2005). Confirming research on in-store hassles, we find that misfit and music volume effects are key drivers in "atmospheric responsiveness" (Machleit et al., 2005) that contribute to both negative in-store experience and patronage decisions. We go beyond this research in two ways. First, we identify how and why music volume affects in-store experiences. Music that is too quiet imposes an undesired "obligation" to interact with sales staff, while very loud music intrudes on the overall experience (cf. Arnold et al., 2005). Second, misfit triggers

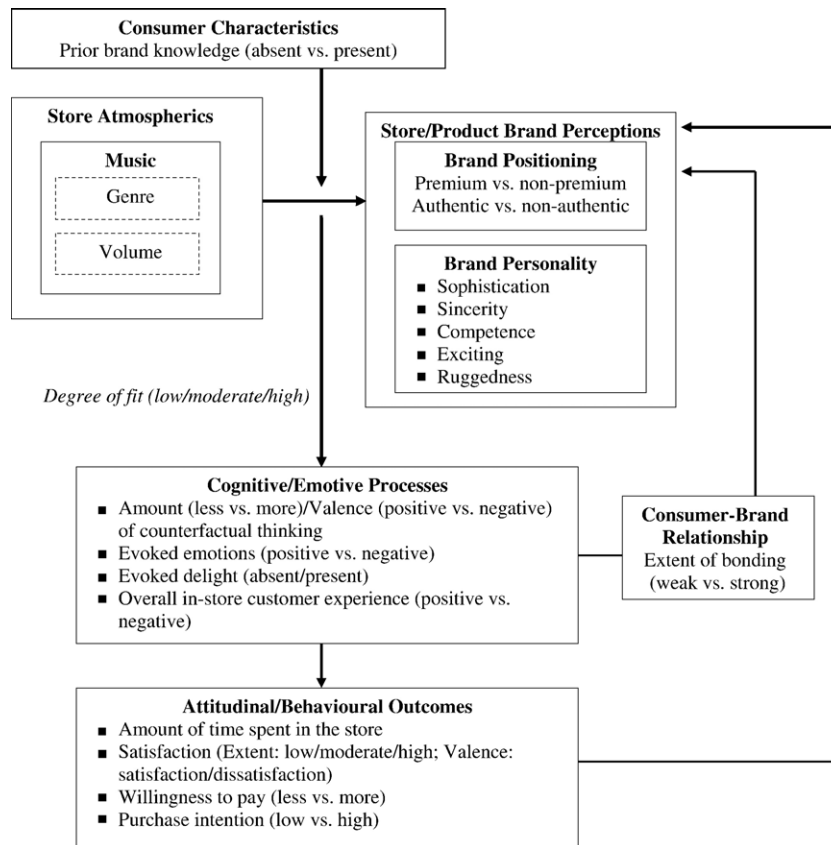


Fig. 1. The effect of in-store music on attitudinal/behavioural outcomes, store/product brand perceptions, and consumer–brand relationships.

counterfactual thinking about the brand and store, potentially leading to discomfort, exit, or non-entry. More importantly we also identify effects of such hassles on brand image as well as the store itself. Future research could examine whether these effects are different depending on shopper orientation (Machleit et al., 2005). Finally, the examination of the experience of (mis) fit contributes to our understanding of the emotional and behavioral elements of delightful and terrible shopping experiences (Arnold et al., 2005).

Based on the above findings, a conceptual model showing the direct and indirect effects of music–brand fit/misfit is advanced (see Fig. 1). Future research could examine the proposed relationships and moderators using experiments or quasi-experimental research designs. For example, research could examine the impact of different types of music on different categories of brands, moderated by prior brand knowledge. Also, given that consumers identified a ‘zone of tolerance’ for music volume, future research should examine whether the upper and lower limits of volume are generalizable across stores, customers and brands, or contingent. Observational research could also examine the behavioral effects of music that is too low or high.

Finally, our results have a number of implications for retailers. First, brand managers should undertake ongoing research with their target customers on music trends to ensure they remain relevant with their target audience. Second, research should be conducted with non-brand users on associations between different styles of music and perceptions of target audience, price, quality, and image. Third, atmospheric variables

such as music should be considered as part of an integrated marketing communications strategy to ensure a “one voice, one look” to brand-related communications. Fourth, sincere brands should give careful consideration to changing music to reflect holiday norms as such a choice may undermine the brand’s point of difference. Finally, these results reconfirm the importance of controlling the type and volume of in-store music. Retailers that leave it up to staff to choose in-store music could pay the price in terms of declining brand equity, and unintended repositioning.

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