



Thank you for the music – or not? The effects of in-store music in service settings



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ABSTRACT

Managers believe that in-store music has positive effects on customers' responses; consequently, it is widely used in different service settings such as supermarkets and coffee shops. However, prior research shows inconclusive results about the effects of in-store music – namely positive, non-significant and even negative effects. To shed more light on the actual effects of in-store music, the authors provide a systematic literature review of journal articles to explore such effects in six frequently studied service settings: supermarkets, retail, restaurants, bars, cafeterias and banks. The present literature review has three objectives. First, the authors develop a conceptual framework to provide structure and guidance to the research stream about in-store music in service settings. Second, the authors take a closer look at the existence of in-store music (i.e., whether the presence of in-store music helps, has no effect, or 'hurts') as well as on the design of in-store music for each service setting separately (i.e., how in-store music has to be designed to have beneficial effects). Third, after elaborating the status quo (what do we know?), this review identifies areas for future research (what do we need to know?).

1. Introduction

Following the widespread belief that in-store music affects customers' responses positively, managers invest considerable resources to incorporate in-store music into their overall store design (Bell et al., 2011; Knoferle et al., 2012; Morrison and Beverland, 2003). Consequently, in-store music is ubiquitous; customers are exposed to it daily while purchasing groceries, dining in a restaurant or buying clothes. Yet, for managers it is not clear whether it is always beneficial to play in-store music, in other words, whether customers react positively or negatively to it.

On the one hand, it is very tempting for managers to use music in service settings: various studies about in-store music support the notion that there is a positive relationship between in-store music and customer responses. Soh et al. (2015), for example, report that in-store music enhances customer's emotions in retailing. In-store music can also positively affect customer's overall evaluations; for instance, customers evaluated a bar as more inspirational and sophisticated when in-store music was played (North et al., 2000). Furthermore, previous studies show that playing in-store music significantly increases customer's time spent in a restaurant (approx. 15 minutes

longer) (Sullivan, 2002).

On the other hand, there is also a downside of playing in-store music: a variety of studies report negative effects on customers' responses. Smith and Curnow (1966) report that in-store music can shorten customer's time spent in a supermarket by about 3 minutes. Furthermore, Milliman (1982) shows that in-store music can have detrimental effects – namely sales volume was about \$5 lower per customer in a supermarket when in-store music was played. Moreover, North and Hargreaves (1996) indicate that customers are more likely to return to a cafeteria in the future under the absence of in-store music. These negative effects may occur when customers consider the in-store music as disturbing, e.g., when in-store music is too loud or does not 'fit' to the service setting.

To reiterate, previous research on in-store music in service settings has produced mixed results. These findings include significant (positive as well as negative) and non-significant effects, and also effects in opposite directions, even for the same relationships (e.g., Milliman, 1982, 1986; North et al., 2000, 2015; Wilson, 2003). It is therefore not clear whether in-store music 'helps' or 'hurts', and it is also not clear what factors 'drive' such effects. How should in-store music be designed in service settings to have beneficial effects? We contribute

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to answering such research questions by taking a closer look at the relevant literature in the field.

First, we examine the effects of the *existence* (presence vis-à-vis absence) of in-store music more closely. Previous studies of in-store music in service settings have, however, been limited to investigate the existence of music (e.g., Jacob et al., 2009; North et al., 2015), and focused mainly on the musical design. In particular, these studies have investigated whether and in which way different musical characteristics (e.g., fast vis-à-vis slow music) affect customers' responses – but it remains unclear whether the absence of in-store music would be more beneficial than having any music at all, regardless of its characteristics. Thus, to answer our first research question, we focus only on those studies which investigated whether the presence of in-store music is better than its absence.

Second, we take a closer look at the effects of the *design* of in-store music. One reason for the mixed effects reported by prior research could be due to the musical design itself (e.g., fast music may affect customers differently than slow music). However, it is not clear which musical design triggers positive effects and which musical design has a negative impact on customers' responses. Thus, in this review we analyze which musical design is beneficial or detrimental – and under which circumstances. We discuss the impact of the in-store music's design for the six frequently studied service settings separately: supermarkets, retail (e.g., clothing store, jewelery store), restaurants, bars, cafeterias and banks. We chose this approach because managers need to know how the design of in-store music impacts customers' responses in their own service setting. Moreover, it is important to look at the effects of in-store music for each service setting independently, because as Machleit and Eroglu (2000) demonstrated, up to 50% of all customer responses vary significantly in their intensity by service setting. Thus, the service setting could moderate the relation between in-store music and customers' responses (Roschk et al., 2016), i.e., it could be that the same design of in-store music has different effects depending on the service setting, for example, an increased volume of the music played may affect supermarket customers differently than customers in a bar.

By answering our research questions, we make three contributions to the literature on in-store music. First, we offer a conceptual framework (see Fig. 1) to give structure to the existing literature on in-store music in service settings, notwithstanding that several literature reviews (Allan, 2008; Herrington and Capella, 1994; Oakes, 2000; Oakes and North 2008; Turley and Milliman, 2000) and meta-analyses (Garlin and Owen, 2006; Roschk et al., 2016) already provide frameworks about the effects of in-store music. However, these studies focused either on the effects of the different atmospheric in-store stimuli (e.g., music, scent, and color), and in-store music was only partly included, or then they focused on selected musical dimensions

and selected customer responses. Moreover, these studies do not help managers of different service settings to understand the specific effects of the musical design in their setting. We summarize the key contributions from these prior studies in comparison with the key contributions of the current study (see Table 1). Second, we attempt to attain a *better understanding* of in-store music and its impact on customer's affective states and behavior by elaborating the status quo of research pertaining the effects of in-store music. Third, we identify *under-researched areas* and provide content-related as well as methodological implications for future research.

In the next section we present our conceptual framework for the effects of in-store music according to our literature review. Following this, we report on findings about the existence of in-store music and finally on the design of each musical characteristic for each service setting separately. We conclude our paper with a discussion of our results, their managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

2. Conceptual framework

The integration of previous findings into a conceptual framework necessitates focussing on the most frequently studied variables about in-store music in service settings (see Fig. 1). It should be noted that some studies compared the musical existence with the musical design, however, the majority of previous studies investigated solely the musical design (e.g., slow vis-à-vis fast music) without considering the effects of the absence of in-store music. The design of in-store music, in the context of this framework, encompasses a broad range of musical dimensions. We consider a physical dimension of music (e.g., tempo and volume), a preferential dimension (e.g., familiarity and liking) and the genre of the music itself (e.g., top 40 and classical). We found that a few studies also included moderating variables about customers or circumstances into their study design: age, gender and the time of the day when the music was played. Like aforementioned, the six most frequently studied service settings are included as potential moderators into our conceptual framework. Finally, customer responses can be subdivided in different affective states and behavioral outcomes. Interestingly, the majority of prior studies focused on the effects of in-store music on customer's affective states or on customer's behavior. We could find only few studies focusing on intermediate (interaction) effects between in-store music, affect and behavioral actions, i.e., studies that investigate whether in-store music has an influence on customer's emotions, and whether these emotions in turn, affect customer behavior (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). We know from the literature that emotion, or specifically 'affectational drivers', are significantly associated with brand recall (Baumann et al., 2015), and it can be assumed that the same applies to customer's behavior more

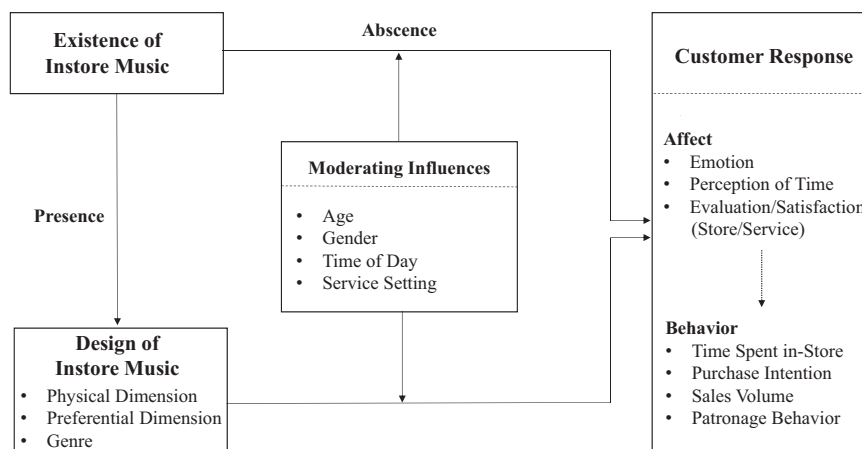


Fig. 1. Research on in-store music in service settings: a conceptual framework.

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