

what does your brand sound like?

Companies invest millions in their visual identity programmes and hire consultants to get full control of how their brands are communicated to their customers, motivated to build the right brand image and gain competitive advantages.

At the same time, these companies play random background music in their stores. They use old CDs or private playlists that are often completely unrelated to the company's identity.

Why is the background music so often overlooked as part of the brand strategy, when the in-store environment is where customers are at the center of the brand experience?

brand fit background music* is a game changer for retailers

In the spring of 2015, students Jasmine Moradi and Gabriella Johansson conducted a study at the Stockholm School of Economics in collaboration with music tech company Soundtrack Your Brand and fashion company GANT Sweden AB. The study contributes to increased awareness about how a wrong choice of in-store music may damage the brand image and reduce sales. Furthermore, the study states that brand fit background music should be considered as an integral part of the brand experience.



Brand fit background music refers to songs and collections of songs that are congruent with a brand identity. Music consultants use processes to define a sound that matches the brand's values in order to curate playlists with brand fit.

background music is already proven to be good for business

Music in the store environment is not a new phenomenon. Background music is one of the most powerful tools companies can use to improve customer experience and positively affect the customer at the point of purchase. Research has shown that music has a strong connection to the human memory, and with a clear music strategy companies can get their customers to stay longer, buy more and create desired associations to the brand. (Milliman, 1982; Sweeney & Wyber, 2012; Yalch & Spangenberg, 2002).

Music strengthens brand experience

In a Swedish study, music was ranked as one of the most difficult things to live without in our daily lives. Only the internet and the mobile phone were seen as more important (Heartbeats International, "Uncovering a musical myth", 2011). Music strongly affects human emotional states (Lusensky, 2010) and, just like movies come to life with music, a company can enhance its brand image by using the right background music. The focus of retailers has shifted from offering only the physical products to providing a more holistic customer experience.

By establishing a clear music strategy, businesses can deliver a coherent and consistent message to their customers in several channels: shops, websites and commercials. Brands that strategically use music that fits their brand identity are 96% more likely to be remembered compared with those that use non-fitting music or no music at all. (Heartbeats International, "Uncovering a musical myth", 2011).



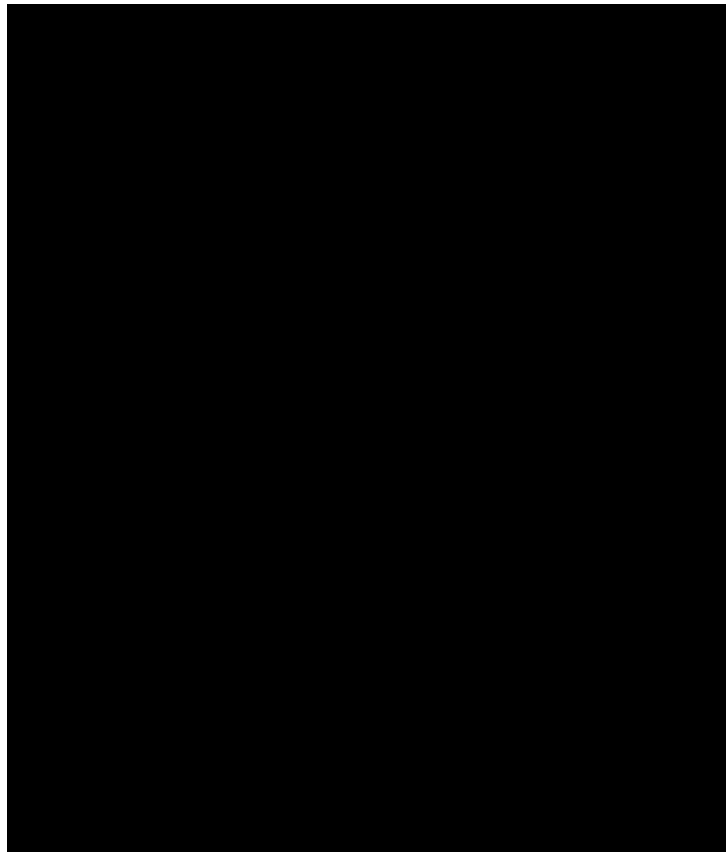
The right tone

What happens when the background music played in the stores fits the brand image? How does it affect customer experience and behaviour, and what effect does it have on sales?

the study found that brand fit music increased sales dramatically

Average sales increased by 31.7% when brand fit background music was played compared with when incongruent background music was played in the store.

other music



brand fit music

+37.1%



several other benefits were also apparent

Increased customer satisfaction

Together with the other factors of the store experience, brand fit background music contributed to increased customer satisfaction.

Stronger brand image

When background music with brand fit was being played, customers' associations with the brand were strengthened and their attitude towards the perceived store atmosphere was improved.

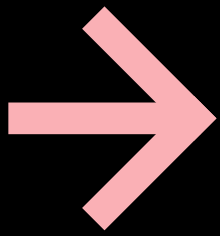
Customers stayed longer

The time customers spent in the store increased by 1.58% when brand fit background music was played, compared with when incongruent background music was played. The biggest difference was seen between background music with brand fit and no music at all, where the time spent in the store increased by 42.24% when background music with brand fit was played.

satisfaction
image
time

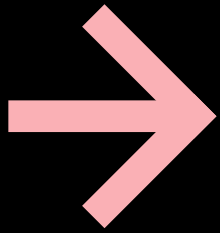
We've put together some quick advice so you can use the insights from the study to avoid the pitfalls and start playing better music in your store

a guide to better music



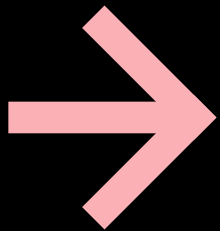
Take control of your speakers

Become aware of what is actually being played in your stores. Scrap CDs and private playlists. Implement a centralised music management system, where you can continuously monitor the background music's effect on your brand image and sales.



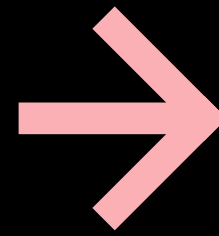
Match expectations

When customers walk into your store, they already have an expectation of the brand experience. Make sure that the music in your stores is consistent with the customers' associations of the brand. Companies that constantly deliver on expectations build strong brands.



Make it all work in harmony

All factors in the store environment – assortment, decor, staff, lighting, scents and sounds – must be in harmony to optimally enhance the customer experience, customer satisfaction and the brand image. To be successful with your music strategy, the background music needs to be adjusted to, and combined with, an otherwise well-considered store environment. The wrong choice of music can damage your brand image and reduce sales.



Don't stand still

Your "soundtrack" must be developed together with the other elements of your brand. Update your playlists regularly to keep your brand sound up to date and your staff happy. Gather feedback from both customers and staff to gain knowledge about what effect your background music has at different points in time and on different customer groups.

how the study was conducted

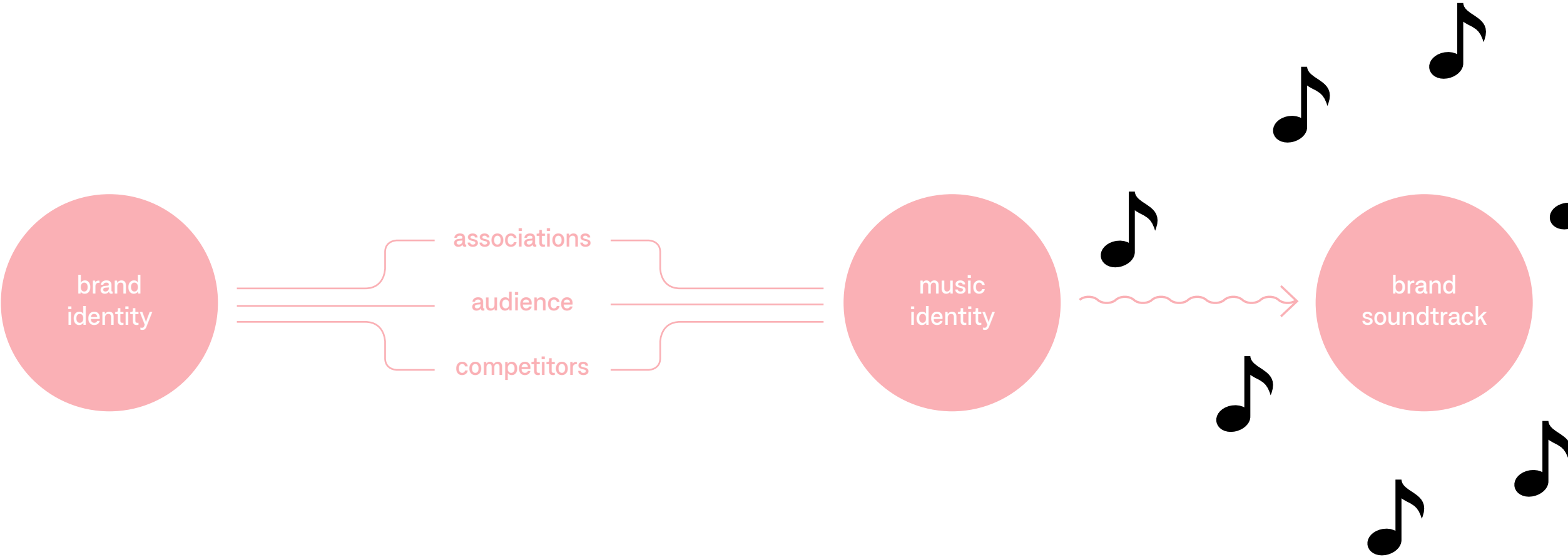
The study used the Latin Square design to eliminate random effects.

The study was designed as a classic field experiment, conducted in three steps; two pre-studies and one main study. To eliminate any random effects, such as pay days and holidays (Nordfält, 2011), the study used a Latin square design with one control group and two music manipulations. The manipulations were divided into two-hour intervals and rotated at each day of the experiment.

	day 1	day 2	day 3
morning	silence	brand fit	no fit
lunch	no fit	silence	brand fit
afternoon	brand fit	no fit	silence

Pre-study A examined the customers' perception of GANT's brand image. Soundtrack Your Brand then created a music profile that fit with the customers' associations. To ensure maximum brand congruency, pre-study B examined that the selected music matched GANT's brand image. In the spring of 2015, the main field experiment was conducted in a GANT store in Täby, Sweden. To achieve high validity, data was gathered from three main sources; sales data, 200 questionnaire responses and 601 time observations.

An overview of the process that was used to create a soundtrack that fits a brand's identity and its customers' associations.



about the authors of the study



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The study, on which this report is based, was conducted by Jasmine Moradi and Gabriella Johansson, who both hold a bachelor's degree in Retail Management from the Stockholm School of Economics. This report summarizes their bachelor thesis "What does your brand sound like?", with the aim to research how brand fit background music affects customers' emotions, brand image, and reaction, and whether this leads to an increase in sales of consumer durables.

Their interest in the use of background music in retail stores, and its effects on consumers' associations with a brand, was raised during the course In-store Marketing (Jens Nordfält). The course discussed Milliman's (1982) study on how supermarkets, with the help of background music, are able to influence customer behaviour. The authors became curious whether the same effect could be obtained within consumer durables with a brand congruence approach. The topic is particularly relevant to study since there has been an emergence of several companies that strategically work with in-store background music, and since in-depth academic research on the subject is lacking.

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If you're interested in reading the entire study, please contact Soundtrack Your Brand by sending us an email press@soundtrackyourbrand.com