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Audiomarketing – music as a tool for indirect persuasion

ABSTRACT: In modern society, music penetrates most of our everyday activities, and so one is not surprised that it has become commonplace, and even expected by consumers, in places of sale. Contemporary shops are no longer merely points of sale. They have become a sort of medium between clients, on one hand, and vendors and producers, on the other. Audiomarketing is a term used to define a modern marketing tool that uses music to create the unique atmosphere of a particular place and to influence consumer in places of sale. To explain the audiomarketing phenomenon, a review of selected studies concerning the problem of emotional responses to music has been presented. These findings are supported by a review of some investigations indicating that music can have a strong impact on consumer behaviour (e.g. music and the speed of customer activity, music and time perception, the effects of music on sales, etc.). The presented examples of experimental research provide excellent proof that it is worth introducing suitably chosen music into a space where people buy and consume. This is due above all to the fact that present-day society, overwhelmed by vociferous messages, prefers emotional arguments, and music can act as an excellent tool for communicating with consumers on an emotional level.

KEYWORDS: *audiomarketing*, music and emotions, consumer behaviour

Audiomarketing – an attempted definition of the phenomenon

‘Retail today is all about [...] touching, seeing, hearing and smelling’.¹ Besides window-dressing and the use of colours, lighting and scents, music is also used to create the unique atmosphere of a particular place, which is usually designed in such a way as to act on all the senses of potential buyers.

Audiomarketing is a term used to define a modern marketing tool that uses music to influence consumers in places of sale. It is a term commonly employed in Poland, but yet there is not really any definition of the notion in

¹ Paul Fulberg, ‘Using Sonic Branding in the Retail Environment – an Easy and Effective Way to Create Consumer Brand Loyalty while Enhancing the in-Store Experience’, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 3/2 (2003), 193.



the Polish academic literature. In the English-language subject literature, within the context of the use of music for marketing purposes, one finds such terms as 'branded music' and 'sonic branding', but it would seem an oversimplification to equate audiomarketing with these notions.

The term audiomarketing combines the words 'audio' and 'marketing'. The component 'audio' derives from the Latin 'audire', meaning to hear, to listen,² and in the case of audiomarketing it concerns mainly listening to music. In the quite voluminous subject literature, one encounters many definitions of marketing, which differ in terms of what a particular author considers to be the most essential features of the phenomenon. A classic approach is presented by the American scholar Philip Kotler, who emphasises that marketing is a social process, whereby particular individuals and groups obtain what they need. This process is based on the creation, offering and exchanging of products, as broadly understood.³ This is not an isolated opinion, since most authors⁴ describe marketing as a set of actions serving to satisfy the needs of target customers.

According to the classic approach, an essential tool in meeting this goal is a 'marketing-mix' – a combination of marketing instruments comprising the following elements (defined as 4P): product, price, place and promotion. In order to act effectively on the market, all these components must be integrated with one another, yet each of the instruments constitutes a separate sphere of influence. 'Product' is linked to such notions as market, range and packaging. 'Place' is connected with logistics, distribution channels and place of sale. 'Promotion', the system of marketing communication, comprises primarily advertising, personal promotion, sales promotion, public relations and personal sales.⁵

Audiomarketing may thus be defined as actions aimed at better satisfying the needs of clients by means of aural stimulation, and so first and foremost through music. From such a notion, it ensues that audiomarketing concerns the use of music in all possible promotional tools. In actual fact, however, this term is most commonly used to define marketing instruments that employ music in places of sale.

The first Polish supplier of audiomarketing services, the firm Internet Media Services S.A., founded in 2000, uses the term to define 'deliberate and orientated action aimed at exerting influence over the consumer's behaviour by

² Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik Wyrazów Obcych i Zwrotów Obcojęzycznych* [Dictionary of foreign words and expressions] (Warszawa, 1985), 43.

³ Philip Kotler, *Marketing. Analiza, planowanie, wdrażanie i kontrola* [Marketing Management. Analysis, Planning, Implementation, and Control], trans. (Warszawa, 1999), 6.

⁴ See Kazimiera Kotra and Anna Pysz-Radziszewska, *Marketing w teorii i praktyce* [Marketing in theory and in practice] (Poznań, 2004), 13–14.

⁵ Kotler, *Marketing. Analiza, planowanie, wdrażanie i kontrola*, 89–90.

means of music and audio advertisements'.⁶ This definition emphasises the influencing of the client through the aural sphere, but it omits to mention that audiomarketing concerns places of sale alone. Another company, Spin Media, which also provides services in audiomarketing, defines the phenomenon as 'managing the aural space in sales points or customer service points'.⁷ A similar understanding of audiomarketing has been put forward by Bogusław Kwarciak and Ewa Andora, who consider that the essence of this phenomenon is 'influencing the client through suitably chosen music and advertisements adapted to the place of sale'.⁸ Both these definitions stress the fact that this element of marketing strategy concerns places in which the client most often meets the producer. Thus audiomarketing is associated with shops (including shopping arcades, hyper- and supermarkets, and also niche shops) and places of service (including restaurants, hotels, beauty parlours and airports), and not television or radio advertisements. It also constitutes a combination of two instruments of marketing-mix: promotion, since music, as one of the elements creating the image of a brand or product, is used in marketing communication, and place, on account of the fact that audiomarketing is inseparably linked to the playing of suitably chosen music in places where purchases are made.

Modern places of sale – a brief profile

Contemporary shops are no longer merely points of sale. They have become a sort of medium between clients, on one hand, and vendors and producers, on the other – a medium that plays a key role in creating what is known as 'brand experience'.⁹ Frequently, an increasingly important role is played by the forging of an 'aura' around a product or service. This is intended to create such conditions that the potential buyer will notice that a given product is aimed just at him. In effect, the consumer finds himself not in an ordinary place of sale, but in a new world, created specially for him, in which he feels good, since all the elements are tailored to his personal profile. In communication with clients, the atmosphere in a shop has become a kind of 'silent language'.¹⁰ In 1974, Philip Kotler¹¹ stated that the place of purchase was one of the most important components of a product. Interestingly, in some instances the shop, or more specifically its atmosphere, exerts a greater

⁶ <http://imspolska.com/pl/index.html>, accessed 5 September 2009.

⁷ <http://www.spinmedia.pl/>, accessed 27 August 2009.

⁸ Quoted at <http://www.nf.pl/News/942/Tylko-wlasciwa-muzyka-we-wlasciwym-miejscu-moze-zwiekszyc-sprzedaz/>, accessed 27 August 2009.

⁹ Fulberg, 'Using Sonic Branding', 194.

¹⁰ Philip Kotler, 'Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool', *Journal of Retailing* 49/4 (1973–1974), 48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

influence over the purchasing decisions of a consumer than the commodity itself. In extreme takes on this aspect, it is considered that the atmosphere is the primary product bought by the client.

It is also worth noting that research has shown it is in the place of sale (and so usually in a shop) that seventy per cent of purchasing decisions are made.¹² What is more, as TNS OBOP research has shown, almost seventy per cent of Poles buy on impulse.¹³ So from the point of view of the managers of brands and places of sale, it is worth investing in tools that both create an exceptional atmosphere in a particular place and also have a direct influence on a consumer's behaviour. One such instrument is undoubtedly music, which has become an inseparable part of the modern place of sale.

The effect of music on emotional reactions – selected examples

One property of music that is readily used for marketing purposes is the fact that it is one of those stimuli that usually arouse positive emotions in people. Some quite interesting observations ensue from the very definition of emotions. An emotion is characterised as a complex, individual mental process in which a role is played by both environmental stimuli and physiological variables. Interestingly, emotions can stimulate an organism into action,¹⁴ and they can also trigger 'physiological changes activating the organism and placing it in a state of readiness [...] alter perceptions [...] restrict the effectiveness of thought processes, blunting criticism in a particular way, making it easier to remember those situations in which they appear.'¹⁵ One should bear in mind, however, that these are quite short-lived, ephemeral states, and so when listening to music we are dealing more often with moods that are less intense than emotions, but more durable and unchanging. The complex range of issues connected with the sources of emotions aroused by music has been addressed by such scholars as Leonard Meyer and John Sloboda.¹⁶

¹² Robert Liljenwall, *The Power of Point of Purchase Advertising: Marketing at Retail* (Washington, 2004), 26.

¹³ TNS OBOP market research, 'Produkty impulsowe – nieplanowane zakupy' [Impulse products – unplanned purchases], September 2004, quoted at <http://www.tns-global.pl/centrum/2005/2005-01#926>, accessed 19 September 2009.

¹⁴ Philip Zimbardo, *Psychologia i życie* [Psychology and Life], trans. Janusz Stawiński (Warszawa, 1997), 665.

¹⁵ Mirosław Laszczak, *Psychologia przekazu reklamowego* [The psychology of the message of advertising] (Kraków, 1998), 126–127.

¹⁶ Leonard Meyer, *Emocje i znaczenie w muzyce* [Emotion and Meaning in Music], trans. Antoni Buchner and Karol Berger (Kraków 1974); Also John Sloboda, *Poznanie, emocje i wykonanie: trzy wykłady z psychologii muzyki* [Cognition, emotions and per-

The fact that sounds affect a variety of human reactions is incontrovertible, and it has been confirmed by a great deal of research, some of which seems particularly crucial from the point of view of audiomarketing. In 1994, for example, Claudio Robazza, Claudio Macaluso and Valentina D'Urso tried to find an answer to the question as to whether age, sex and musical training have any effect on the interpretation of the emotions of a given passage of music.¹⁷ It turned out that none of the factors enumerated above acts directly on our understanding of the emotional message of music. This may confirm the hypothesis that the emotional force of music is perceived irrespective of the listener's age and sex.

The question of the innate understanding of the emotional message of music was addressed by Antoinette Bouhuys, Gerda Bloem and Ton Groothuis.¹⁸ In research from 1995, they used two fragments of classical music, one of which was perceived as sad, the other as cheerful. While the music was being listened to, the participants in the experiment were shown happy, sad or neutral faces. Interestingly, it turned out that when listening to sad music, the participants described a neutral or sad face. The results of this experiment demonstrated that the music one hears may influence one's perception of other elements of reality, which confirms the essence of the effects of audiomarketing, and so the use of sounds to manipulate the perception of the space that surrounds us.

In 1995, Steven M. Smith carried out research that would appear to be particularly interesting in respect to audiomarketing. It concerned the question of context-related memory. There have been many attempts to study this phenomenon, in various situations in which music was usually employed as a memory stimulus. In his experiment, Smith addressed the question of the influence of background instrumental music on how we remember certain content. It turned out that a situation where the same music was played during both revision and an examination made it possible to remember the greatest amount of content. By contrast, when exam candidates heard different music in the two experimental situations, it was markedly more difficult for them to recall that content.¹⁹ In the context of audiomarketing, it may seem justifiable to conclude that music originally heard in a point of sale ought to remind the consumer of that place when he hears it again.

formance: three lectures in music psychology], trans. Andrzej Miśkiewicz (Warszawa, 1999).

¹⁷ Claudio Robazza, Claudio Macaluso and Valentiono D`Urso, 'Emotional Reactions to Music by Gender, Age and Expertise', *Perception and Motor Skills* 79 (1994), 939–944.

¹⁸ Antoinette L. Bouhuys, Gerda M. Bloem and Ton G. G. Groothuis, 'Induction of Depressed and Elated Mood by Music Influences the Perception of Facial Expressions in Healthy Subject', *Journal of Affective Disorders* 33 (1995), 215–226.

¹⁹ See Fulberg, 'Using Sonic Branding', 196.

This research shows that music can act as an excellent tool for communicating with consumers on an emotional level, since it fulfils a crucial role as a factor affecting the context of that communication. On the other hand, music only becomes an effective tool for communication when its use is carefully planned.

The influence of emotions aroused by music on consumers' behaviour in a shop

In modern society, music penetrates most of our everyday activities, and so one is not surprised that it has become commonplace, and even expected by consumers, in places of sale. Marketeers very quickly understood that music was a perfect tool for influencing a client's behaviour; hence research was undertaken into the effect of music in places of sale or consumption.

In 1966, Patricia Smith and Ross Curnow²⁰ conducted research into behavioural reactions triggered by music in a shop. In two places of sale, loud and soft music was played. The experiment showed that the level of loudness correlated to the time spent on shopping, with sales per minute considerably greater when loud music was played in the shop. This was due to the fact that when the intensity of the sound was greater, clients spent less time in the shop and so made their purchases more quickly. It also turned out that there was no link between music and the average amount sold per person or the clients' satisfaction.

The relationship between the tempo of music and the behaviour of consumers in a supermarket was investigated by Ronald Milliman.²¹ An experiment was carried out in three different contexts: without music, with music at a slow tempo and with music at a quick tempo. The results showed that with slow music the movement in the shop was slower, and sales rose thirty-eight per cent compared to the daily average, whereas quick music considerably increased the speed at which shoppers moved about and so also the turnover of clients. In 1986, Milliman conducted similar research in a Texas restaurant.²² The results proved quite similar: the pace of eating slowed and increased under the influence of slow and quick music respectively, although the number of meals consumed remained the same. Interestingly, in the case of slow pieces of music, the consumption of alcoholic drinks rose.

²⁰ Patricia Smith and Ross Curnow, 'Arousal Hypothesis and the Effects of Music on Purchasing Behavior', *Journal of Applied Psychology* 50 (1966), 255–6.

²¹ Ronald E. Milliman, 'Using Background Music to Affect the Behavior of Supermarket Shoppers', *Journal of Marketing* 46 (1982), 86–91.

²² Milliman, 'The Influence of Background Music on the Behavior of Restaurants Patrons', *Journal of Consumer Research* 13 (1986), 268–269.

Richard Yalch and Eric Spangenberg carried out several experiments based on Milliman's research, addressing the question of the influence of different kinds of music on the behaviour of consumers in a shop. For example, in tests from 1988 they compared the effect of soft instrumental music and the latest hits on two groups of clients: up to twenty-five years of age and older.²³ It turned out that the younger consumers had the impression that they spent more time in the shop when they heard instrumental music in the background, whilst the older shoppers had a similar impression when listening to popular hits. On the basis of these results, the scholars advanced the conclusion that when shoppers encounter factors to which they are unaccustomed, they experience a subjective sense of time slowing down.

The effects of audiomarketing – a survey of selected research

These examples show beyond doubt that music played in a shop influences consumers' behaviour, and the results obtained during the experiments have helped experts to select music appropriate to a particular place. Another interesting aspect of the research is the attempt to define the measurable benefits for firms employing audiomarketing in a place where their products are sold.

It turns out that music in shops and service points is one of the factors influencing clients' perception of a brand. This has been confirmed by research such as that carried out by three scholars from the University of Leicester, Adrian North, David Hargreaves and Jennifer McKendrick, who in 1997 ran tests in a chain of sports shops.²⁴ The aim of the experiment was to see how consumers perceived a given shop when music of different styles was played in the background. The results of this research showed that although clients responded negatively when asked whether music was an important element in a shop, their perception of that place differed according to the kind of music being played. Clients described the shop as 'relaxed and modern' when fast-moving energetic music was played in the background. Meanwhile, when shoppers heard slow rock music coming out of the store speakers, they deemed the shop 'uninteresting and drab'. The research shows unequivocally

²³ Richard Yalch and Eric Spangenberg, 'An Environmental Psychological Study of Foreground and Background Music as Retail Atmospheric Factors', in *AMA Educators' Conference Proceedings*, ed. A. Walle (Chicago, 1988), 106–110.

²⁴ Adrian North, David J. Hargreaves and Jennifer McKendrick, 'The Perceived Importance of in-Store Music and Its Effects on Store Atmosphere', 1997; quoted from 'Benefits of Using Music in Your Business' [e-publication], <http://www.prsformusic.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/Benefits%20of%20using%20music%20in%20your%20business.pdf>, accessed 27 July 2009.

that even when clients are not aware of the fact, music influences how they perceive and assess a particular shop.

The examples of research described above confirm that music in a shop influences consumers' behaviour. However, one may also cite experiments that show a direct effect of music on clients. In 1999, North, Hargreaves and McKendrick conducted their now famous research into the buying of wine by supermarket shoppers.²⁵ In this experiment, for two weeks, typically French and typically German music was played in the wine department in alternation. It turned out that the sales of French wine were greater than the sales of German wines when French music was played and vice versa – when shoppers heard German music, they bought more German wines. On leaving the shop, the shoppers were unaware that the music had influenced their buying decisions. The results of this experiment confirmed that music can play a crucial role even in respect to specific product selections, in a way of which the buyers are unaware. The authors of the research had certain doubts as to whether such actions were ethical, but that does not alter the fact that by means of specific music some clients could be manipulated into buying a product 'tipped' by those conducting the experiment.

Adrian North and his colleagues were not the first to examine wine sales in their research. For example, in an experiment carried out in 1993, Charles Areni and David Kim tested the influence of different types of music on the behaviour of clients of a wine store.²⁶ Over the course of two months, two kinds of music were played: classical and 'top of the pops'. It turned out that shoppers spent more money when classical music was played in the shop. In addition, the results of the experiment suggested that clients listening to classical music bought not more wine, but more expensive wine. These conclusions are crucial from the point of view of audiomarketing, since they highlight the role of music in creating the atmosphere of a sales place. It seems that the melodies heard by clients are more convincing when they are suited to the character and context of a given place. The clients who heard classical music probably felt in a more intimate and elegant mood, since that is how classical music is perceived. So the surroundings of wine and classical music made consumers choose dearer wines.

The research described here shows that music in a place of sale can influence the perception of a brand, forge an atmosphere and make shoppers' time more pleasant. Moreover, an appropriate choice of background music for a

²⁵ Adrian C. North, David J. Hargreaves and Jennifer McKendrick, 'The Influence of in-Store Music on Wine Selections', *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84 (1999), 271–276.

²⁶ Charles Areni and David Kim, 'The Influence of Background Music on Shopping Behavior: Classical Versus Top-Forty Music in a Wine Store', *Advances In Consumer Research* 20 (1993), 336–340.

particular shop favours specific purchasing behaviour and extends or shortens the time spent shopping.

Conclusion

The presented examples of experimental research provide excellent proof that it is worth introducing suitably chosen music into a space where people buy and consume. This is due above all to the fact that present-day society, overwhelmed by vociferous messages, prefers emotional arguments, and music is one of those stimuli that evoke a good mood in people. It is just such stimuli that are designed to make a consumer feel a pleasurable state and wish to feel it again. In effect, music, which is always accompanied by some emotions, helps to create a friendly attitude, and even loyalty, towards a brand. By means of aural stimuli, it is possible to arouse a sense of confidence and security, 'to relax, induce into action and even influence a particular perception of a space and time'²⁷ – and that is exactly what is sought by those concerned with the marketing of a given product or service.

As a means of communicating with clients, music in places of sale is becoming increasingly widespread, and so one should not be surprised that consumers even expect to find music in shops and may feel ill at ease if it is absent. However, one should bear in mind that the choice of sounds for a particular place should not be random, but must be based on a well conceived and thoroughly elaborated plan.

In the opinion of audiomarketing specialists, 'the influence of music on increasing sales can be noted only when it is ideally suited to the target group'.²⁸ Another crucial step in preparing a strategy for an audiomarketing campaign is to investigate what music those persons prefer. Ultimately, marketers must ask themselves the question as to what role music is to fulfil in communication with the client.

The question of how to create programmes of music tailored to specific places of sale is a separate, but equally fascinating, issue. It is worth mentioning that music programmes suited to a particular place are produced by specialist firms employing experienced music consultants who keep abreast of the music market. In addition, these firms have at their disposal the requisite technical tools (including the programme RCS Selector), and they usually collaborate with market research companies which carry out the necessary specialist research into such things as consumers' musical preferences. 'The

²⁷ Marek Śliperski, 'Zmysł słuchu wspiera kreację wizerunku' [The sense of hearing helps create image] [e-publication] http://www.gu.com.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7306&Itemid=146, accessed 5 September 2010.

²⁸ <http://ims.com/pl/index.html>, accessed 15 September 2009.

conclusions of this research run counter to intuition, because shopping is a peculiar social and cognitive experience, including in terms of music'.²⁹ It would seem justifiable, therefore, to advance the conclusion that nothing is left to chance, and the existence of audiomarketing is determined by modern programmes designed and controlled by professionals.

Translated by John Comber

²⁹ <http://www.nf.pl/News/942/Tylko-wlasciwa-muzyka-we-wlasciwym-miejscu-moze-zwiekszyc-sprzedaz/>, accessed 27 August 2009.