

A REVIEW OF MUSIC STIMULI AND GENRE PREFERENCES IN CONSUMER CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT. Background: Music stimuli are widely used in retail, hospitality and service industries to shape customer experience. They create atmosphere, evoke emotions and support loyalty. Variations in genre, tempo, volume and tone influence movement patterns, time perception, comfort and willingness to stay, while also guiding product choices and encouraging unplanned purchases. **Aims:** This paper synthesises theoretical and empirical studies on the role of music stimuli in economic environments, with a specific focus on conscious consumer genre preferences. **Methods:** A structured literature review was conducted, drawing on research from marketing, psychology, and sensory science to identify and compare key concepts, frameworks, and findings. In addition, a bibliometric analysis of international publications was performed using Web of Science data, with keyword co-occurrence visualised through VOSviewer. **Results:** Genre choice interacts with demographic characteristics, cultural context, and service type. Conscious preferences can mediate the impact of music, influencing both satisfaction and purchasing outcomes. **Conclusions:** Music stimuli function as strategic tools in consumer contexts, with genre alignment crucial for perceived congruence and engagement. **Implications:** Effective practice should address not only the presence of background music but also the alignment between genre and audience preferences to maximize economic impact.

Keywords: Music stimuli, Genre preferences, Consumer behavior, Customer experience, Economic environments, Service marketing

JEL Classification: M31, M39

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Introduction

The intersection of musical stimuli and sensory marketing has increasingly been recognized as a significant driver of consumer behavior. In both advertising and retail environments, music operates as an important atmospheric cue that can evoke emotional responses, shape perceptual judgments, and guide purchasing decisions. Its influence extends well beyond that of a mere background element, as it actively modulates cognitive processes, steers emotional evaluations, and reinforces the overall perception of a brand. When integrated with precision and awareness of the target audience, musical components can enrich the multisensory dimension of marketing communication, cultivating deeper engagement and stronger connections between consumers and brands.

Empirical research demonstrates that the musical appeal embedded in advertising content can significantly influence consumer mindsets, underscoring the necessity for businesses to refine multisensory marketing strategies in order to maximize effectiveness (Patil et al., 2024). Aligning musical features with product attributes has been shown to enhance positive emotional reactions and elevate product evaluations, confirming the strategic role of music in shaping perceptions (Shibata, 2020). The notion of “musical fit” further reveals that the harmony between advertising music, brand identity, and message content can substantially strengthen recall and emotional resonance, thereby reinforcing the relationship between brand and consumer (North et al., 2004). Such congruence ensures that music functions not merely as an accompaniment to marketing messages but as a persuasive force that amplifies their impact, ultimately influencing purchase intentions and fostering lasting loyalty.

Theoretical background

Musical stimuli constitute a key element of sensory marketing, integrating acoustic cues with visual, olfactory, and other sensory inputs to enhance consumer engagement and support commercial outcomes. Their effectiveness lies in the capacity to influence information processing, emotional responses, and customer decision-making across diverse marketing contexts, including advertising, online environments, and brick-and-mortar retail settings (Marín, Zambrano, 2018; Jiménez-Marín et al., 2022). Music serves not merely as an aesthetic or supplementary feature but actively modulates cognitive processes and shapes brand perception, becoming an integral component of the customer experience (Zhu, Meyers-Levy, 2005; Levrini et al., 2019).

Research indicates that the significance of musical content varies according to the intensity of information processing, with referential meaning influencing perception under low cognitive load, while embodied meaning predominates under high cognitive load (Zhu, Meyers-Levy, 2005). Emotional music enhances brand recall and elicits positive physiological responses, particularly among female consumers (Levrini et al., 2019). Culturally congruent music can increase the likelihood of product selection and direct visual attention (Peng-Li et al., 2020), whereas stereotypical music associated with product origin influences decision-making among consumers with less well-defined preferences (Damen et al., 2021).

Empirical evidence from laboratory and field studies confirms that music extends the time spent in retail environments, increases satisfaction, and drives sales (Marín, Zambrano, 2018; Jiménez-Marín et al., 2022). This theoretical review aims to systematically synthesise knowledge on the role of musical stimuli in consumer behaviour and to analyse their effects in the context of cultural, cognitive, and situational factors.

Parameters of Musical Stimuli in the Context of the Servicescape

Musical stimuli represent one of the most significant components of ambient conditions within the servicescape concept, which describes how physical, visual, acoustic, and other sensory elements of the environment influence customer behavior and experience. Key musical parameters include genre, tempo, volume, and tonality, each exerting a specific impact on the perception of the environment, customer movement speed, subjective time perception, and economic behavior. Tempo is the most frequently examined parameter in this area. Nine of the analyzed studies confirmed that a slower tempo extends dwell time and increases spending. In restaurants, for example, Caldwell and Hibbert (1999) found that slow music extended the average dining time by 22 percent and increased customer spending by 10 percent. Sullivan (2002) demonstrated that at a slow tempo, guests spent on average 15 minutes longer at their tables. In retail spaces, Eroglu et al. (2005) observed that a slow tempo slows down customer movement, encourages longer product browsing, and leads to a higher number of impulse purchases. Conversely, a fast tempo increases arousal, which can stimulate impulsive decision-making

and exploration of new products (Ding and Lin, 2012; Sun et al., 2023). This effect is mitigated when the music is familiar, as familiarity brings comfort and reduces stimulation (Sun et al., 2023). Tempo also influences time perception. In a simulated casino, Noseworthy and Finlay (2009) found that a combination of slow tempo and high volume improved the accuracy of game duration estimates and increased players' confidence in estimating time. In a banking environment, Chébat et al. (2001) demonstrated that tempo moderated the effect of visual cues on perceived waiting time, with slow music enhancing relaxation and reducing the negative feelings associated with waiting.

Volume has been studied less frequently, but results suggest that higher volume may, in certain settings, extend dwell time and increase spending (Sullivan, 2002). In restaurants, higher sound intensity, along with the presence of music, increased both the length of stay and the amount spent. In a simulated casino, the combination of high volume and slow tempo improved the accuracy of time estimation (Noseworthy and Finlay, 2009). However, the effect of volume is context-dependent. Excessive loudness can be perceived as disturbing, shorten the length of stay, and reduce satisfaction, particularly among more sensitive customer segments.

Musical genre and the degree of familiarity with the pieces represent important moderators of the effects of tempo and volume. Herrington (1996) found that in supermarkets, music matching customer preferences resulted in longer dwell times and higher purchases regardless of tempo. Caldwell and Hibbert (2002) showed that music preference predicted dwell time and spending better than tempo alone. Kapoor and Rashmi (2023) reported that familiar music extended the subjectively perceived time, whereas unfamiliar music extended the actual time spent in the store. An interesting finding is the genre alignment with the venue's theme. Choo et al. (2020) stated that a mix of music genres tailored to the style of a restaurant increased sales by between 6.3 and 11.4 percent. This effect is related to the concept of musical fit (North et al., 2004), which emphasizes the congruence between music, brand identity, and communication content.

Although tonality was not directly examined in the included studies, theoretical works suggest that the harmonic congruence of music with the environment and brand can influence mood and product evaluation. For example, culturally congruent music can direct visual attention and increase the likelihood of product choice (Peng-Li et al., 2020). Combinations of musical parameters may create synergistic effects. For instance, the pairing of slow tempo and high volume (Noseworthy and Finlay, 2009) or slow tempo and high visual stimulation (Chébat et al., 2001) amplified positive time perception and customer engagement. The mechanisms of these effects include physiological arousal, which influences behavioral pace, evocation of associations and memories, mood management, where music regulates the customer's emotional state, and cognitive processing, as familiar music can reduce cognitive load, whereas unfamiliar music can increase it.

Music and Consumer Behaviour

Music in consumer environments operates as a powerful tool for shaping behavior, as it integrates emotional, cognitive and behavioral processes into a unified sensory experience. In retail, hospitality and online contexts, it influences mood, time perception, motivation to remain in the environment and customers' spending patterns (Zeeshan and Obaid, 2013; Garlin and Owen, 2006). Its effects vary according to context. In luxury retail spaces, music can underscore the premium nature of the offering (Sweeney and Wyber, 2002), while in dynamic retail formats it can stimulate faster decision-making and encourage impulse purchases (Schnurr et al., 2017).

From an emotional perspective, responses to music are triggered by mechanisms such as brainstem reflexes, evaluative conditioning, emotional contagion, visual imagery, episodic memory and musical expectancy (Juslin and Västfjäll, 2008). Experimental evidence confirms that manipulation of these mechanisms leads to predictable affective responses (Juslin et al., 2014), enabling marketing professionals to deliberately create the desired atmosphere. Moreover, consumers frequently use music for affect regulation through strategies such as cognitive work, entertainment and distraction (Baltazar, Saarikallio, 2019), which further enhances its significance in building a positive customer experience.

Recent research confirms that music exerts a measurable economic impact. In restaurants, slow-tempo music extends average dining time and increases per-customer spending by 6–11 percent (Choo et al., 2020; Krause et al., 2021). In retail operations, familiar or preferred music increases dwell time and purchase amounts (Kapoor and Rashmi, 2023), while high volume in certain contexts can lengthen stays and boost spontaneous purchases (Sullivan, 2002). Biswas et al. (2019) found that lower-intensity music in grocery stores increased the sales of healthy products, suggesting that volume and genre can nudge specific purchasing behaviors. Genre congruence with store image also plays a decisive role.

Music also shapes perceptions of service quality (Noone et al., 2009) and can reduce perceived waiting times (Chebat et al., 2001). In hospitality, thematically congruent music boosts satisfaction,

length of stay and spending (Krause et al., 2021). Multisensory research indicates that combining music with congruent scents increases positive emotions and purchase intentions (Schnurr et al., 2017), while crossmodal studies show that music can influence taste perception and perceived product quality (Knöferle, et al., 2016).

In tourism and leisure environments, live or thematically aligned music creates memorable experiences and higher revisit intentions (Larsen et al., 2009). In branding, music functions not only as an atmospheric element but also as a strategic tool for customer relationship management. Personalized playlists tailored to customer segments and venue type can foster loyalty and long-term value (Dydnanský, Madleňák, 2012). However, misalignment between music and brand image or excessive uniformity can reduce engagement (Litomerický, 2022).

The growing adoption of neuromarketing methods such as EEG, eye-tracking and sentiment analysis enables the detection of subtle affective reactions to music that surveys often overlook. These techniques, combined with real-time testing and optimization, confirm that music is not merely an acoustic backdrop but a dynamic driver of consumer behavior, perception and brand relationships. For maximum impact, music use in retail and service environments should be part of an integrated customer experience design, based on empirical evidence and continuously refined (Schnurr et al., 2017).

Conscious and Unconscious Genre Preferences of Consumers

Research on consumer music preferences shows that these preferences result from a complex interaction between conscious and unconscious factors. Conscious preferences are shaped by sociodemographic characteristics, personality traits, musical experience, and cultural capital. Demographic variables such as age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status have a demonstrable influence on genre choice. For example, higher education and cultural capital are associated with more diverse music preferences, while younger and less-educated respondents tend to prefer energetic and popular genres (Pereira, 2015; João et al., 2021). Gender differences are evident in the mapping of music genres (Gürgen, 2016) and the cultural context can alter the meaning and significance of genres (Tekman, 2009).

Personality traits from the Big Five model, particularly extraversion and openness to experience, are significant predictors of music preferences. Extraversion is associated with interest in contemporary and energetic music, whereas openness is linked to sophisticated and complex genres such as jazz and classical (Greenberg et al., 2022; Nave et al., 2018). Fricke et al. (2017) further found that high emotional intelligence predicts a preference for emotionally rich and complex music, suggesting that affective competencies influence listening choices. Musical experience and expertise increase the consistency of preferences and reduce the influence of external stimuli (Liang and Willemsen, 2019).

Unconscious influences include automatic responses measured through EEG, priming, or crossmodal effects, which can alter consumer behavior regardless of stated preferences. EEG experiments show that brain activity can predict product choice in the context of musical stimuli, sometimes before the listener consciously recognizes the preference (Ward et al., 2020). Crossmodal studies demonstrate that music can guide visual attention and shape product evaluations. For instance, Wang (2019) used eye-tracking and EEG to show that congruent background music increases attention to high-margin products and improves their perceived quality.

Music genre can also activate specific consumer mindsets. For example, hip-hop has been linked to fostering competitive attitudes, while country music evokes comfort and familiarity. Music affects consumer behavior through emotional, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms. It can alter attitudes, perceptions, time spent in-store, spending levels, mood, and affective engagement (Zeeshan, Obaid, 2013). Emotional responses are mediated by mechanisms such as brainstem reflexes, emotional contagion, and episodic memory (Juslin, Västfjäll, 2008), and can be deliberately influenced by marketing interventions (Juslin et al., 2014). In digital retail environments, music-induced mood has been shown to directly enhance brand attitudes and purchase intentions, underlining the role of music as a strategic tool in both physical and online consumer contexts.

Music Genre and Brand

Customer loyalty in the music industry has acquired new meanings and forms in the digital environment. It is no longer defined solely by repeat purchases or subscriptions. The relationship between the customer and a music brand, whether a streaming platform, an artist, a festival or a genre, is increasingly shaped by emotional connection, community participation and the technological mediation of the experience. Research in this area identifies several key factors influencing the emergence and maintenance of loyalty.

Loyalty to a brand in online music services is conditioned by a combination of rational and emotional factors. Chang (2008) highlights the importance of customer satisfaction, perceived service

quality, fair pricing, reliability and especially content personalization. Today, these variables are amplified by algorithmic recommendation systems, which shape user preferences and increase brand engagement. In the context of streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music, research by Tan et al. (2023) shows that user engagement and satisfaction are closely tied to long-term loyalty, with emphasis placed on personalized experiences, community features and platform stability.

Music also plays an important role outside the digital environment, for example, in retail brand building. Purdy et al. (2013) note that the selection of music genres in stores shapes the perception of brand identity and influences customer purchasing behavior. Different genres carry different symbolic meanings that a brand can use as part of its positioning strategy. Music genres, therefore, function not only as an aesthetic element but also as a semiotic tool with a direct impact on emotional connection with the customer.

In the case of music festivals, loyalty takes on a different character. Leenders (2010) demonstrated that decisions about attending a festival are determined not only by the program or line-up but also by the brand of the festival, the atmosphere, the aesthetics and the overall experience. These intangible values influence the perception of the festival brand as a cultural and emotional space, leading to stronger loyalty that persists despite changes in content.

Online fan communities are also of key importance. Obiegbu et al. (2019) analyzed how discussions, shared experiences and emotional interactions between fans lead to the creation of a collective commitment to the brand. These digital communities do not function merely as passive consumers of content but as active co-creators of brand meaning. Their research also shows that fans can be critical of a brand and question its decisions while still maintaining a loyal relationship. This represents a form of loyalty that is reflective and dynamic.

Marketing strategies are an inseparable part of this process. Minarni and Dewi (2023) demonstrated that digital marketing, word-of-mouth and purposeful brand awareness building play a decisive role, especially for new music artists who are building an audience through social media and online community platforms. The importance of these strategies is confirmed by Turri et al. (2013), who emphasize that user engagement on social media fosters the development of affective commitment, an emotional bond with the brand that leads to long-term loyalty and willingness to publicly advocate for the brand.

It follows that loyalty in the music sector is no longer simply the result of satisfaction with a product but a complex network of interactions, experiences and emotional ties. Brands that can create authentic and participatory environments are able to establish stable, long-term relationships with their audiences. In this process, music becomes not only a product but also a cultural medium for building identity, community and emotional resonance between the brand and its audience.

Music and Purchasing Emotions

Music plays an important role in influencing consumer emotions and purchasing behavior. Its effects are evident at the cognitive, affective and behavioral levels, and these influences are mediated through the structural elements of music, psychological associations and physiological reactions of the listener. Research has consistently confirmed that music in the retail environment can influence mood, brand attitudes and purchasing decisions. Alpert and Alpert (1990) demonstrated that background music can create a favorable emotional setting that leads to higher brand evaluations and stronger purchase intentions.

In-store music creates a sensory experience that can reinforce brand identity and influence customers' willingness to explore the offer and make a purchase decision. According to Strähle and Hohls (2018), music works synergistically with other components of the retail atmosphere, such as lighting, scent and design, creating what is referred to as a multisensory brand environment. The final effect depends not only on the choice of music but also on its congruence with brand identity and the expectations of the target group.

The emotional impact of music in retail can be explained through several mechanisms. As Shaefer (2017) notes, music affects emotions through rhythm, tempo, melody and harmony, as well as through cultural codes, personal memories and associations. In some cases, it even activates the autonomic nervous system, producing physiological reactions such as changes in heart rate or breathing that influence how customers experience the store environment.

In digital contexts, music is used in the form of online playlists, streamed audio branding elements and personalized sound design for e-commerce platforms. Research by Dikcius et al. (2024) has shown that different music genres can evoke different emotional responses among online shoppers depending on the type of product being offered. For example, relaxing music supports the purchase of cosmetics, while energetic music boosts sales of sports equipment.

Beyond the direct influence of music on consumer behavior, there is also the possibility of analyzing consumer emotions retrospectively. As Domenico (2009) highlights, sentiment analysis algorithms can identify emotional responses to music and brands from online reviews and opinions, providing valuable marketing insights for optimizing the retail atmosphere.

Music affects not only purchasing decisions but also time perception, shopping mood and spending levels. Jain and Bagdare (2011) point out that appropriately selected music can extend time spent in-store, increase service satisfaction and enhance willingness to spend. These effects are moderated by several factors, including customer demographics, store type, current mood, time of day and the presence of other sensory stimuli.

Music also shapes perceptual aspects such as perceived waiting time or consumption speed. North and Hargreaves (2005) found that music can alter the rate of beverage consumption in restaurants. Oakes and North (2008) emphasize the importance of musical congruity, meaning the match between music and environment, as a critical factor in achieving desired customer responses. Music that matches the context, such as relaxing music in cafés or ambient music in luxury boutiques, supports positive evaluations of the environment, while incongruent music can lead to brand rejection.

One important framework for understanding these dynamics is the Musicscape concept as defined by Oakes (2000) and further developed by Allan (2007). This framework positions music as part of the overall atmospheric design (servicescape) that shapes the customer experience. Music functions here as both a spatial and emotional layer, not just a backdrop but an integral element of brand and environment perception.

Zeeshan and Obaid (2013) additionally note that the effectiveness of music is differentiated according to the characteristics of the target audience. Age, cultural background and current emotional state can all moderate the effectiveness of musical stimuli. The type of service is also relevant, since the same music can produce different reactions in a restaurant compared to a bank or a gym.

A notable trend in recent years is the use of advertising music, such as jingles or branded compositions, instead of neutral ambient music in stores. Raja et al. (2019) found that advertising music can increase brand recall, product recognition and emotional connection. This suggests that a well-targeted brand can use the retail space as an audio medium for communicating identity, not only as a distribution channel.

Given the complexity of interactions between musical variables and consumer responses, systematic models and quantitative methods, including experimental designs, EEG and eye-tracking measurements, and sentiment analyses, are increasingly applied. Such research is essential for detecting subtle affective reactions that standard surveys often fail to capture. Findings from existing studies confirm that music is a strategic tool with multidimensional effects. It is not merely an acoustic backdrop but a dynamic means of shaping behavior, perception and the relationship with a brand. The use of music in retail and service environments should, therefore, be part of an integrated approach to customer experience design, grounded in research, tested rigorously and optimized in real time.

Methodology

This article is conceived as a theoretical study based on secondary sources. Its primary objective is to synthesize and analyze existing knowledge about the role of music in consumer behavior, particularly in the context of retail, hospitality, and online environments. The review includes scientific and professional publications, with a focus on recent empirical research that provides current insights and trends in the fields of music marketing and neuromarketing. The main sources were peer-reviewed scientific articles from the Web of Science database. In addition, selected chapters from professional monographs, conference papers, and industry reports were used, addressing the impact of music on consumer decision-making, music preferences, the effects of musical parameters (tempo, genre, volume, tonality), and the role of music in building brand identity and customer loyalty.

The literature search was conducted using keywords in both English and Slovak, including: music and consumer behavior, music in retail, background music and purchase intention, music and brand loyalty, musical fit and neuromarketing music. The results were then filtered according to thematic relevance and methodological quality. To process the information, content analysis and comparative synthesis of findings from various studies were applied. From each work, key results, methodological approaches, and main conclusions were extracted.

To enrich the review with a quantitative perspective, a bibliometric analysis was added as a complementary method. Data were retrieved from Web of Science using the keywords “music stimuli”, “background music”, “music preference”, “genre preference”, combined with “consumer behavior”, “servicescape”, “sensory marketing”, and “neuromarketing”.

The dataset was processed with VOSviewer (v1.6.xx) to generate keyword co-occurrence maps and visualize the main research clusters, which made it possible to identify dominant themes and gaps in the international literature.

Results

The synthesis of secondary sources confirms that music stimuli function as a strategic tool in service marketing, integrating emotional, cognitive, and behavioral processes into a unified sensory experience. Across retail, hospitality, and online contexts, their influence manifests in:

- extending dwell time,
- increasing expenditure,
- altering time perception and perceived waiting times,
- enhancing satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Tempo is the most frequently studied parameter:

- Slow tempo extends dwell time and increases sales in restaurants (Caldwell & Hibbert, 1999; Sullivan, 2002) and retail stores (Eroglu et al., 2005).
- Fast tempo increases arousal, accelerates decision-making, and encourages exploration of new products (Ding & Lin, 2012; Schnurr et al., 2017).
- Tempo also interacts with visual cues to shape perceived waiting times (Chébat et al., 2001).

Musical fit—the congruence between music, brand identity, and customer expectations—amplifies emotional responses, brand evaluations, and economic outcomes (North et al., 2004; Choo et al., 2020). Table 1 summarises the main effects of key musical parameters as identified in the reviewed studies, including their context and original sources.

Table 1. Effects of Musical Parameters on Consumer Behaviour

Parameter	Effect	Context	Source
Tempo	Slow tempo extends dwell time and increases spending	Restaurants, Retail	Caldwell & Hibbert (1999); Sullivan (2002); Eroglu et al. (2005)
Tempo	Fast tempo increases arousal and encourages impulse purchases	Retail, Dynamic formats	Ding & Lin (2012); Schnurr et al. (2017)
Genre	Genre congruence with preferences increases dwell time and purchases	Retail	Herrington (1996); Caldwell & Hibbert (2002)
Genre	Genre congruence with venue theme increases sales by 6.3–11.4 %	Restaurants	Choo et al. (2020)
Volume	Higher volume increases length of stay and expenditure (context-dependent)	Restaurants	Sullivan (2002)
Volume	Lower volume promotes purchase of healthy products	Grocery stores	Biswas, Lund & Szocs (2019)
Tonality	Harmonic congruence with environment/brand improves mood and product evaluation	Retail	Peng-Li et al. (2020)

Source: *own processing based on reviewed literature*

Recent research provides complementary insights beyond the parameters listed in Table 1. Sun et al. (2023) demonstrated that fast tempo music increases variety-seeking behaviour through heightened arousal, with familiarity serving as a moderating factor. Manzoor (2024) reported that ambient music influences both emotional and cognitive responses and stimulates impulse purchasing, with gender moderating the strength of this relationship. Zhang et al. (2023) found that music played specifically during the purchasing stage in live streaming commerce significantly increases purchase

intentions and arousal compared to continuous background music. Zhu et al. (2025), applying the Stimulus Organism Response model, revealed that authenticity and perceived quality in music festival settings enhance emotional reactions, perceived value, satisfaction, and visitor loyalty. The experimental study “Chew that beat!” (Migliavada et al., 2024) showed that slow tempo music prolongs eating duration and increases the number of chewing cycles. Valenzuela Gálvez et al. (2024) discovered that sound stimuli in digital marketing channels increase customer engagement, particularly for hedonic products, although engagement may act as a negative moderator under certain conditions.

As shown in Table 1, tempo and genre appear most frequently in the reviewed literature, while volume and tonality are examined less often. The evidence consistently points to the importance of aligning these parameters with the service context and customer preferences to achieve optimal effects. The impact of music is shaped by conscious preferences influenced by demographics (Pereira, 2015), personality traits (Greenberg et al., 2022; Nave et al., 2018), musical experience, and cultural capital, as well as unconscious influences detected via neuromarketing tools such as EEG, eye-tracking, and sentiment analysis (Ward et al., 2020; Wang, 2019). Service context plays a key role, as identical music may be perceived positively in a café but negatively in a bank. Cultural congruence is another determinant, with culturally matched music directing visual attention and increasing the likelihood of product choice (Peng-Li et al., 2020).

According to Juslin and Västfjäll (2008), music shapes emotions through six mechanisms: brainstem reflexes, conditioning, contagion, imagery, memory, and expectancy. These processes link to physiological activation (Shaefer, 2017), mood regulation (Chebat et al., 2001), and cognitive modulation (Liang, Willemsen, 2019). Genres act as semiotic tools in brand positioning (Purdy et al., 2013). In digital platforms, personalisation and community features strengthen loyalty (Tan et al., 2023), while festivals and fan communities build attachment and co-create meaning (Leenders, 2010; Obiegbo et al., 2019). Music also interacts with lighting, scent, and design in multisensory branding (Strähle, Hohls, 2018) and shapes crossmodal perception, such as taste and quality (Knoflerle et al., 2016).

Figure 1 shows the bibliometric keyword co-occurrence map generated in VOSviewer. Three main clusters were identified: (1) sensory marketing and multisensory stimuli, (2) emotional responses and servicescape, and (3) retail applications and shopping behavior. Background music was the central node linking strongly with consumer behavior, sensory marketing, and servicescape.

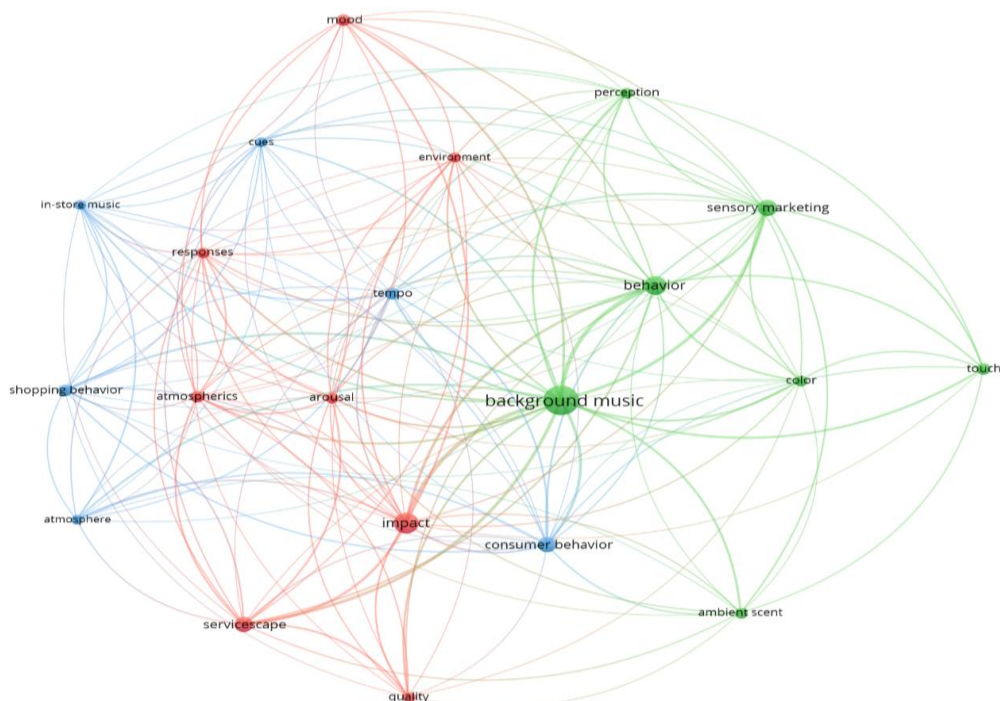


Figure 1. Keyword co-occurrence map based on bibliometric analysis
Source: Own processing using VOSviewer (v1.6) based on Web of Science data

The bibliometric mapping illustrates the structure of international research on music stimuli in consumer contexts and links it with our conceptual framework. The analysis shows that research has developed in three dominant streams: sensory marketing and multisensory stimuli, emotional

mechanisms and psychological processing, and retail practice connected with consumer behavior. Within this network, background music emerges as the central concept that bridges the clusters, most frequently associated with consumer behavior, sensory marketing and servicescape. This confirms that music operates both as an independent stimulus and as part of broader multisensory branding strategies. At the same time, the integration of bibliometric evidence with our empirical analysis demonstrates that genre preferences act as an important moderator of consumer responses. It also reveals research gaps, particularly in relation to volume, tonality, cultural context and digital service environments. These findings underline the international relevance of the topic while highlighting directions for further research and practical implications for service industries.

Figure 2 presents the conceptual model derived from this synthesis, providing a structured overview of the theoretical relationships identified in the literature.

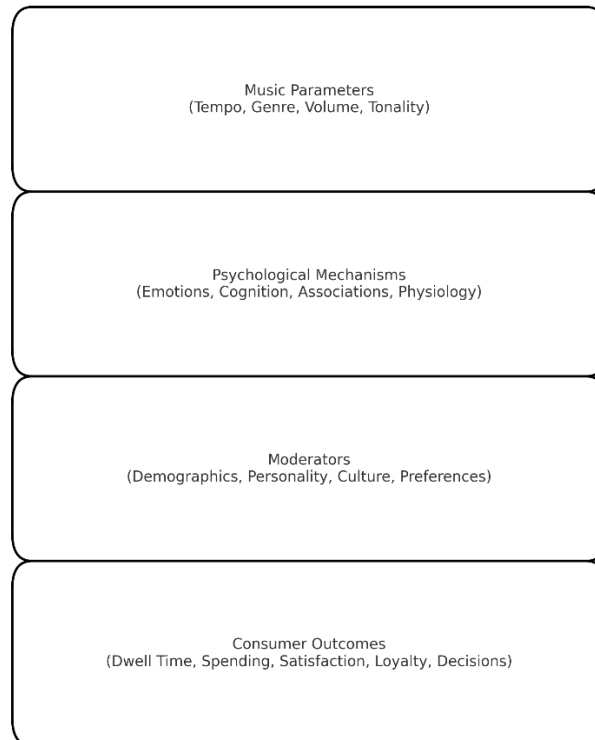


Figure 2. Conceptual model of the relationships between musical parameters, psychological mechanisms, moderators, and consumer outcomes

Source: *own processing based on reviewed literature*

The model illustrates how different musical parameters (such as tempo, genre, volume, and tonality) activate psychological mechanisms that shape consumer responses. These mechanisms include emotional induction (through brainstem reflexes, conditioning, contagion, imagery, memory, and expectancy), regulation of mood and arousal, and modulation of cognitive processing. Their effects are not uniform but depend on several moderators, most notably demographic characteristics, cultural background, service context, and individual genre preferences. Together, these interactions determine a wide range of consumer outcomes, including satisfaction, perceived congruence with brand identity, engagement, purchase intentions, loyalty, and crossmodal perceptions (such as taste or product quality).

This conceptual framework integrates theoretical insights from marketing, psychology, and neuromarketing, highlighting the pathways through which music stimuli function as strategic tools in shaping consumer behavior.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide several important insights into the role of music stimuli in consumer contexts. The structured review confirmed that musical parameters such as genre, tempo, volume and tonality are consistently linked to consumer emotions, perceptions and behaviors. Genre

choice in particular emerges as a salient moderator. It is shaped by demographic and cultural characteristics and influences whether background music is perceived as congruent with the service environment. This is consistent with prior research that emphasizes the importance of musical fit in shaping consumer satisfaction and purchase decisions.

The bibliometric analysis adds a quantitative dimension by situating the present research within international scientific discourse. Based on a dataset of 132 Web of Science articles, the analysis revealed three dominant research streams. The first stream is sensory marketing and multisensory stimuli. The second stream concerns emotional mechanisms and psychological processing. The third stream focuses on retail practice and consumer behavior. The centrality of background music as a bridging concept across these clusters demonstrates that music is not only examined as a discrete cue but also as part of holistic servicescape and multisensory branding strategies. The relatively limited number of identified publications reflects the narrow thematic intersection of music and consumer behavior. Although the sample may appear small in comparison with broader marketing fields, this focused scope ensures that the dataset captures the most relevant contributions and provides a concentrated overview of the state of the art.

At the same time, the analysis highlights several important gaps and limitations. Parameters such as volume, tonality and cultural context remain underexplored despite their practical significance. Research is also limited in relation to digital and hybrid service environments where personalization algorithms and streaming platforms play an increasingly prominent role. Moreover, the reliance on the Web of Science database may exclude relevant works from Scopus or regional journals, which points to a potential publication bias. These limitations underline the need for future research to expand the dataset across multiple databases, to include longitudinal analyses of publication trends, and to explore neglected parameters through experimental and neuromarketing methods such as EEG and eye tracking.

Overall, the integration of theoretical synthesis, empirical findings and bibliometric mapping provides a comprehensive understanding of how music stimuli function as strategic tools in consumer environments. The results confirm established patterns, notably the moderating role of genre preferences and the centrality of background music, while also pointing to blind spots that deserve closer attention. For practitioners, the findings stress the importance of aligning musical choices with audience expectations and cultural settings, since misalignment can reduce engagement and weaken the intended experiential value.

The relatively limited number of identified publications is directly explained by the narrow set of search terms. By restricting the query to combinations of “music stimuli”, “background music”, “music preference” and “genre preference” with “consumer behavior”, “servicescape”, “sensory marketing” and “neuromarketing”, the analysis intentionally focused on the intersection of music and consumer research. This narrow scope reduced the size of the dataset but ensured that only the most thematically relevant contributions were included.

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