

Brand Tune Up: Building Value For Brands Through Strategic Sonic Planning

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## **Abstract**

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While often overlooked, sound and music play an important role in marketing communications strategies. To stand out in today's competitive marketplace, top companies are investing in strategic sonic planning to build value for their brands. This paper will investigate the role of sonic branding in marketing communications, and how brands can authentically and cost effectively integrate music and sound into their overall communications strategy. Looking at the history and future of sonic branding and the impact of sound and music on brands and consumers, this paper will seek to define a practical guideline for marketers and practitioners of sonic branding. The paper concludes that although it is difficult to quantify the impact of a sonic strategy, brands that embrace the principles of sonic branding can more effectively reach customers across all touch points. Moreover, the paper asserts that best practices for creating customized audio solutions differ from culture to culture.

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## **Ch. 1 – Intro**

Leo Tolstoy once stated, “Music is the shorthand of emotion” (Jones, 2010, pg. 129).

Music and sound have the power to change our mood, bring back a forgotten memory, or take us back to a specific place in time. We have all experienced the way sound is used in films to give us cues and trigger emotions. However, despite this, for many brands today the concept of sonic branding remains a mystery. Although music has been used in commercials and retail environments for decades, the majority of brands do not own any distinct sonic branding, and have given the topic very little thought (Jackson, 2003). When deployed strategically, sound and music can have a powerful impact on brand building and customer attitudes. Whether you are in a store, restaurant, hotel, office building, or baseball stadium, sound and music hold the potential to impact our emotions, moods and buying behavior. Today, it is integral for brands to embrace the power of sound, or risk being left behind (Jackson, 2003). Using a generic background soundtrack in any setting is no longer an option if a brand is going to stand out in the hyper-competitive digital age (Dorsey, S, 2005). For brands today, music can no longer be considered just background noise. Music and sound must be carefully and strategically planned to optimize their impact on branded communications.

In the past, sonic branding consisted of music selected for commercials, jingles, and office elevators. Today, sonic branding takes a number of different forms – from the Intel inside “sonic logo”, to the sounds our electronics make when we receive notifications. Sound can convey troves of new information in an instant; of all our senses sound is the one we react to the quickest (Beckerman, 2014). When strategically planned, sound can change the mood or atmosphere of any environment. However, companies need to embrace the right sounds for their

audiences by considering sonic cues, which elevate the brand experience for consumers and in turn build brand value.

Brands today must consider how to authentically integrate music and sound into their overall communications strategy. In the digital era, streaming services like Apple Music and Spotify allow people to access millions of recordings. For brands today, speaking to consumers through sound, while reinforcing their brand aesthetic is becoming increasingly important. However, for many brands, the challenge has become finding a way to efficiently and cost effectively source customized music programs that differentiate them in the marketplace (Dorsey, S, 2005). Professional music consultants can help organizations develop branded music strategies that both reinforce brand value and enhance the customer experience (Dorsey, S, 2005).

In his 2007 book *Brand Sense*, Martin Lindstrom discussed the concept of “sensory marketing”, which constitutes the shift in marketing away from focusing on the visual sense, to targeting all five senses. According to Lindstrom, 83% of all marketing dollars spent globally are focused on visual communications (Lindstrom, 2007). In addition, Lindstrom states, 41% of consumers consider sound “a central element of brand communication” (Lindstrom, 2007). It is clear that sound is a key element in determining the way that consumers perceive brands. However, Lindstrom notes that only 12% of marketing budgets are spent on sound (Lindstrom, 2007). This means that if brands fail to deploy an effective sonic communications strategy, then they are failing to make the strongest connection possible with 41% of consumers. For this reason, music and sound cannot be an afterthought added to a finished product; it must be integrated into the whole strategic planning process for any brand activation. Through strategic sonic planning, brands can create more effective and emotionally engaging marketing initiatives

(Yli- Hollo, 2016). Teemu Yli Hollo, CEO & Co-Founder of Audiodraft, a global production platform for custom audio, noted the importance of sound branding in an article entitled, *Audio branding – If you’re not doing it, you’re failing at marketing*. In the article, Yli-Hollo stated:

“Uniform sound branding also strengthens customer loyalty and emotional connection. Music and soundscapes affect our mood, our physiology, our ability to focus and willingness to stay in a certain location. So whether you are interested in creating the best possible work environment for your team, a unique and emotionally engaging shopping experience or a consistent connection with your audience regardless of the media outlet, focusing on sound marketing and your audio brand should be at the top of your to do list. Because whether it’s conscious or not, your brand will sound like something. (Yli- Hollo, 2016)”

Because our relationship with sound is mostly unconscious, much of the effect of sound on our moods and behavior is subconscious. Although we are not always aware of all the sounds we are surrounded by, this does not mean that sound is not having an effect on us (Treasure, 2011). With that said, many brands may not be aware of the unintended cues they are sending their consumers with generic sound and music selections. Yli- Hollo references Oxford University Professor Charles Spence, who recognized in his analysis of the inter-relational effects of combinations of senses, that congruent sound can increase the impact of visual marketing by 1207%, while incongruent sound can potentially decrease the impact by 86% (Yli- Hollo, 2016). This impact described by Spence is dependent on the extent of congruency, and the nature of the visual stimuli considered. Moreover, Lindstrom notes that brands that use sound and music, which “fit” their brand identity, are 96% more likely to prompt memory recall (Lindstrom, 2007). These statistics exemplify one reason why such a large percentage of resources spent each year on visual branding globally is wasted (Yli- Hollo, 2016).

Marketers need to do a better job appealing to the subconscious, “to trigger emotions and evoke desired behaviours” (Perlmutter, 2016). Bob Liodice said at the 2015 Association of

National Advertiser's conference, "...marketers are no longer getting the expected results from their advertising and promotion. Old-fashioned brand-building is becoming a relic of a bygone era" (Perlmutter, 2016). As brand marketing shifts away from traditional mediums towards both digital and IRL experiences, sound is the missing element in driving brand recognition, and creating an emotional connection between customers and brands (Perlmutter, 2016). For example, according to a 2015 SOCAN (Society of Composers Authors and Music Publishers of Canada) report entitled, *Play on: Music is the Food of Business*; "most Canadians agree (76%) that restaurants who match their menu to the music they play seem more authentic" (Robertson & Covens, 2015). Whether your business is a privately owned restaurant, or a global brand, authenticity is a key driver of customer loyalty and evangelism. Unique and authentic experiences are difficult to manufacture, but with careful planning and investment companies can harness the power of sound to foster customer relationships and bring their brands to the next level.

Sound is an incredibly strong tool in a marketer's toolbox. It has the potential to enhance experiences, and connect with our feelings and ideas in ways that can evoke authentic emotion (Jackson, 2003). If a brand can tap into the art of sonic branding, they open up a new world of communication opportunities with their audience that did not exist before (Jackson, 2003). For a marketer, conscious manipulation of sound is an essential element of modern communication. Marketers need to be vigilant of the sounds their brands use in all facets of promotion, because without careful planning they may unintentionally send the wrong message to potential customers.

While many companies have distinguished their brands sonically with great success, the concept has not been fully understood or embraced by the branding community. It is often



extremely difficult to convince marketers of the value of sound as part of a brand's communication strategy. One reason sound is not always valued in the same way as visual elements, is because there is no clear formula or guideline for aligning sound with a brand. This paper will aim to synthesize steps, strategies and guidelines that can be used to more effectively employ sound and music in communications and branding for any business.

Through an exploration and synthesis of the points of view of various sonic branding experts, this paper will provide a critical review of literature in the field of sonic branding. Focusing on the use of sound and music in retail environments, hotels and restaurants, this paper will seek to investigate the past, present, and future of the sonic branding industry.

This paper will explore three main groups of research. First, the history and future of sonic branding, where I will look at the examples of Muzak, jingles, advertisements, sonic logos and branded musical content. This group will also look towards future trends in sonic branding. The second group of research will examine the impact of sonic branding and sensory marketing on marketing and communications strategy. This group will assess from a practitioner's perspective the impact of audio branding on both brands, and consumers. Lastly, the third group of research will investigate a number of sonic branding case studies and will seek to suggest an applied methodology for strategic sonic planning. This group will combine the research of a number of prominent academics in the field of sonic branding to develop a methodology or guideline to be used by both marketers and practitioners of sonic branding.

My methodology for researching and writing this paper began with me locating books written by some of the top practitioners in the field of sonic branding. After reading through these books, I used the Ryerson library to locate studies the books had referenced. Furthermore, through the Ryerson library I was able to locate a number of additional resources related to the

field of sonic branding. Through each study and resource I located, I looked at the references list to find additional resources. The writing process required me to synthesize my arguments based on the resources I found. There was a lot more research available in this area than I would have been able to include in this paper. For this reason, creating an outline, which clearly articulated my argument, was a challenge. I used the resources I had read thoroughly to choose appropriate case studies, examples and quotes. These examples gave me a framework for my argument. This paper used the basic format of a computer science thesis.

Following this introductory section, which will introduce my contributions and the history of sonic branding, the second chapter will outline my thesis. In the thesis section, I will clearly define the arguments and questions to be explored over the course of the subsequent chapters of this paper. Chapter three will be a literature survey, which will provide a deeper investigation of the main groups of research. This section will also look at trends for the future of sonic branding. Furthermore, this section will look at detailed reports and case studies, which both define the impact of sonic branding on a marketing strategy, and provide real world examples of successful sonic branding. Chapter four will seek to outline a methodology or guideline for marketers and sonic branding practitioners. Using a combination of guidelines by various experts in the sonic branding field, this section will outline recommendations for effective use of sound and music in marketing communications. In addition, the methodology chapter will also investigate the impact of sonic branding through statistics provide by a Toronto, Ontario based audio consulting company working with a global hotel chain. Furthermore, this section will briefly look at my research methodology for this paper. Finally, chapter five will provide a conclusion and summary of the arguments in this paper. Lastly, I will discuss future research I would like to undertake in order to push my knowledge of this field further.

## What is sonic branding?

Sonic branding can take many different forms. There is a long history of brands using jingles and music in commercial advertising to sell products (Jackson, 2003). However, today there are a multitude of touch points to reach stakeholders with branded sonic communications (Jackson, 2003) (See Figure 1). Sonic branding can take the form of a sonic logo like Intel Inside or Duracell. It can also take the form of branded content composed specifically for the purpose of promotion. Everything from the sounds your computer makes when it turns on, to the music you hear when you are on hold on the phone, is sonic branding (See Figure 2). Branded environments like retail stores, hotels and restaurants can harness the power of sound to change the mood and atmosphere in their spaces (Jackson, 2003).

Each sonic touch point presents a unique opportunity for branded communications.

However, Daniel M. Jackson notes in his book *Sonic Branding: An Introduction* that:

“It is vital to remember that the essence of sonic branding is twofold: the creation of brand expressions in sound and the consistent, strategic usage of these properties across touch points” (Jackson, 2003, pg. 9).

Jackson asserts that the sonic branding approach sets itself apart from audio branding strategies before it, because it takes into account both the creative side of brand expression, and the strategic management necessary to produce effective communications (Jackson, 2003). Jackson also notes that in the past, creative decisions when it comes to sound and music often dominated over consideration of a brand’s communications strategy (particularly in the realms of T.V. and radio advertising) (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Sonic branding requires careful consideration of sound and music in the early planning stages of a brand’s communications strategy. Effective sonic branding echoes brand values and attributes, and builds brand value. When integrated authentically, sound can open up a new world of communication for brands to

unlock previously unseen potential (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Through careful consideration of each touch point where businesses connect with their stakeholders, they can more effectively harness sound in their communications.

## **History of sonic branding**

Historically, people and brands have instinctively used sound for branding for centuries. Religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all examples that have harnessed branded sound as an important element of their communications (Bronner & Hirt, 2009). Sound and music has been used in religious practice to spread messages and as a soft means of control. However, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the strategic use of sound for marketing. Telephone canvassing is an early example of “sound only” marketing, which dates back as early as 1903 (Jackson, 2003). The earliest example of music being used for advertising was in the United States in 1905 (Jackson, 2003). In 1908, an American named Gus Edwards wrote a song that became famous among fans of Oldsmobile vehicles. Later, after recognizing the popularity of the song, the Oldsmobile Motor Company went on to use the song in advertising (Jackson, 2003). Oldsmobile is an early example of a brand intuitively using a piece of music that already resonated with their audience to strengthen their marketing communications. However, before telephone canvassing (telemarketing) and advertisers using recorded music in campaigns, came the jingle. Dating back to the turn of the twentieth century, “the jingle was seen as being the very height of cultural sophistication” (Jackson, 2003, pg 11). The first recorded jingle was entitled “Have You Tried Wheaties?” by General Mills in 1926 (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Jingles are short, catchy tunes, often with rhymed verses created to help consumers remember the brand attributes of a particular product. Radio became the medium of choice for commercial advertising in the 1920s, which became the perfect platform for the jingle (Jackson, 2003). The

radio, unlike advertising in newspapers and magazine's before it, enabled brands to use sound and music to describe their products and services. As a result, the 1920s saw tremendous growth in using sound to communicate with customers.

In 1934, a company called Muzak was founded to design music to soothe people's fear of riding in office elevators (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). What became commonly known as 'elevator music' not only had a calming effect while riding the elevator, it was also said to keep employees "motivated and engaged" (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Although Muzak was not being used as a marketing tool at the time, the concept of using music to influence people's moods was born. According to Jackson, Muzak was:

"widely employed in American industry throughout the 1940s to manipulate the feelings of factory and office workers." "...Through the 1940s and 1950s, Muzak became more complex and scientific. Taking a research-based approach, Muzak identified that music in the workplace improved morale, productivity and even workforce attendance records" (Jackson, 2003, pg. 13).

Muzak "started a revolution" in using music to create atmosphere in offices, businesses and many other public and private spaces (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Muzak is a pioneering example of a company that was able to successfully use the conscious manipulation of sound to influence people's subconscious behavior in physical spaces. While today Muzak is often a term associated with generic 'elevator music', the company still exists today under the parent company, Mood Media (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013).

Into the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, sonic branding shifted away from the jingle. Brands began purchasing the rights to full songs recorded by popular artists for advertising. Brands like Coca-Cola had the resources to license tracks from artists like Marvin Gaye and other popular artists (Jackson, 2003). Arguably the most iconic sonic branding campaign in history came in 1971, when Coca-Cola released their ad "I'd Like To Buy The World a Coke" (Allen, 2015).

Coke rewrote the words to the song ‘I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing’ (In Perfect Harmony) by Hilltop, to read, “I’d like to buy the world a Coke”. The commercial featured 500 young people of different ethnicities singing the chorus together on a hilltop in Italy (Allen, 2015). The “I’d like to buy the world a Coke” campaign was a global success, and still resonates strongly with audiences to this day (Allen, 2015). By the mid 80s, popular music in advertising became commonplace. In 1985, another major soda brand, Pepsi was responsible for a landmark campaign that would forever change the history of sonic branding. Pepsi teamed up with “The King of Pop”, Michael Jackson for a collaborative song and advertisement entitled ‘You’re a Whole New Generation’. The song and ad were set to the tune of ‘Billy Jean’ and immediately became a hit. The reaction to the song was huge, and people began calling their local radio stations to request the Pepsi version of Michael Jackson’s song (Jackson, 2003). After this campaign, major brands began using more and more popular music in their advertising (Jackson, 2003). In the 1980s, it also became more common for stores and other retail spaces to use music in their environments (Jackson, 2003).

Many brands today have developed complex sonic strategies as part of their communications. However, while brands like Coca-Cola and Pepsi can afford to pay top dollar for the best talent in popular music, smaller companies need to develop sonic strategies that are within the reach of their budget. The future of sonic branding section in Chapter three will look at current and future trends in the landscape of the sonic branding industry. In addition, I will explore how the current environment is more conducive to the development of affordable customized programs for businesses of all sizes.

## **Contributions**

The contributions section will provide an introduction to the main groups of research to be explored in this paper. These groups include:

1. The impact of sonic branding on brands and customers
2. Case studies and applied methodology (sonic branding guidelines)

Through a look at research and case studies from sonic branding practitioners, this section will provide a background on sonic branding. This section will examine sensory marketing and the impact of sound and music on brands and customers. Moreover, I will introduce the concepts of strategic sonic planning, soundscapes and will examine the effects of background music in a retail setting.

## **Impact of sonic branding on brands and customers**

In his book *Sound Business: How to use sound to grow profits and brand value*, Julian Treasure notes the work of Michael Tomasello on human cognition. Treasure states that Tomasello recognizes “that we have to learn a range of socio-cognitive skills in order to use language – while our musicality is there from the beginning” (Treasure, 2011). Musical instincts are engrained in us from the time we are born. Humankind’s connection with music across history and culture is undeniable. In his book, *This Is Your Brain On Music: The Science of Human Obsession*, neuroscientist, Daniel Levitin analyzes the neurological and cognitive effects of music. Levitin suggests that music is so essential to our humanity, that we are genetically “hardwired for music” (Levitin, 2006). While our instincts for music are part of centuries of evolution, humans are not always conscious of all of the sounds surrounding them (Levitin, 2006). In the modern world, we are constantly bombarded by sound. In a world flooded with communications trying to reach potential customers, it is important for brands to stand out from

the crowd. Although people are not always aware of all the sounds they are taking in, sounds that do not fit in (good and bad) will attract attention. The human instinct for sound is used to protect us from potential danger (Beckerman, 2014). For this reason, we cannot turn off our sense of sound in the same way we can close our eyes. Loud or unpleasant noises will always have an effect on a person (Treasure, 2011). This is why it is important for brands to be conscious of the messages they are sending with sound. Without a proper sonic strategy, brands may as well be speaking to their audiences in the wrong language.

We are able to “intuitively understand the story and emotion of sound” (Bronner & Hirt, 2009). However, to fully understand the role of sound in communications, we need to first look at how sound fits in to a multi-sensory branded experience. Martin Lindstrom notes, brands today need to transform themselves into full multi-sensory experiences to most effectively reach customers (Lindstrom, 2007). Furthermore, Lindstrom suggests that brands can be built on the strength of a sonic strategy. Through music that plays on websites, in stores, or on hold, brands can be built with a consistent sonic strategy across all touch-points (Lindstrom, 2007). Brands such as luxury hotels, retail stores, and restaurants have a particular opportunity to brand physical spaces with sound. Many brands like these have developed extremely sophisticated sonic strategies “particularly through zoning and brand-led music choices” (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Zoning is the development of separate music strategies for different areas of a space like a hotel or restaurant.

Martin Lindstrom discusses the example of the Intel Inside sonic logo. He uses this example because it stands out as a brand that has created a distinct and memorable sonic representation. Studies have shown that in many cases people remember the Intel Inside sonic logo, also known as “the wave,” better than their visual logo (Lindstrom, 2007). With distinct,



well-planned sound, Intel has created a memorable sonic cue, which helps customers to recognize the name and brand of a product many people have never seen (Lindstrom, 2007). “The Wave” is an example of the power of strategic sonic branding to increase brand recognition and build brand value

McDonald’s with their “I’m loving it” tagline is another example of a memorable sonic cue. However, in his book *The Sonic Boom*, Joel Beckerman points out that considering all of potential sonic touch points McDonald’s has with their consumers, their sonic strategy has a lot of room for improvement. The success of Intel’s sonic logo is surprising considering the brand does not have its own branded spaces, and communicates with its customers through a minimal number of sonic touch-points. With this said, Beckerman notes, that of the places we see McDonald’s branding, we rarely hear or feel their brand outside of the last three seconds of their commercials (Beckerman, 2014). The opportunities for a brand like McDonald’s to reach it’s consumers with sonic branding are endless. Beckerman states:

“If McDonald's used sound to its full of advantage, people could be hearing and feeling its sonic story in overhead music in the stores, at live events it sponsors, from the toys it gives away, on its website, and more. The corporation could build contests around it, bring in artists to re-record it, have it greet you at the door if you’re the thousandth visitor of the day” (Beckerman, 2014, pg. 66).

Beckerman notes the sonic communications opportunities that are being missed by McDonald’s. However, many other brands are missing these opportunities as well. Understanding and leveraging the strength of a sonic brand consistently across all touch points must be a key consideration for all brands today.

According to the 2015 SOCAN report *Play on: Music is the Food of Business*, “More than 2/3 of Canadians (68%) agree the atmosphere created by music impacts their decision to return to or recommend a restaurant” (Robertson & Covens, 2015). In addition, more than 1/4 of

Canadian's surveyed by SOCAN said, "they would have a negative reaction if they were in a restaurant with no music" (Robertson & Covens, 2015). It is clear from these statistics that sound and music play an integral role in creating a desirable mood and atmosphere in a branded space. However, for brands to effectively build a sonic communications strategy, they must first strategically put together a comprehensive sound identity (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). A complete sound identity is made up of five parts: a sonic logo (eg. Intel Inside), a brand song (eg. 'I'm lovin' it'), sound icons (eg. the sounds your electronics make), branded soundscapes (or zoning), and telephone (eg. hold music) (Bronner & Hirt, 2009). This kit can serve as the backbone of a brand's "sonic communications" strategy. With a distinct sound identity in place, brands can develop a better understanding of their sonic DNA. In turn, they are able to create more effective and focused communications, which appeal to their target demographic (Beckerman, 2014). Understanding the identity of the consumers you are trying to reach must be a priority when developing a sonic strategy.

In the 2013 book *Hit Brands: How Music Builds Value For The World's Smartest Brands*, Daniel M. Jackson argues that music is a defining aspect of people's identity. Furthermore, Jackson suggests that music is an example of a "social currency", which helps people to connect with one another (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Jackson states, "throughout the history of humanity people have been using music to identify ideas and beliefs, tribes, teams and nations" (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013, pg. 31). Jackson points out the significant role of music as a driver of culture and a force, which shapes the identity of consumers. Jackson asserts that music holds the power to unite people of different backgrounds. Brands can harness the uniting force of music in their communications, but only when they effectively marry their brand identity with the values of their target audience (Jackson, Jankovich

& Sheinkop, 2013).

Musical decisions for communications must align authentically with a brand's style, typography, product lines and other assets within the brands portfolio (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Jackson points out that branding guru, Sam Sampson saw a corporate identity as the first stage of building a relationship with a potential customer. Sampson acknowledged that much like making a first impression, the core components of a brand's identity are the elements that consumers can see and hear (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). For brands interested in using music and sound as part of their corporate identity, they must understand that it requires a commitment to strategic planning across all communications and touch points. Moreover, sonic branding has the potential to build the value of existing brand assets by using sound and music to shift the positioning of a product's identity in the marketplace. In addition, Jackson asserts, if:

“the feelings (in the music) are in line with the objectives of the brand, then we start to have something really special – a musical identity that is no longer a signpost, simply pointing at a destination, but is now also a symbol for some of the ideas of the brand” (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013, pg. 37).

This quote exemplifies the fact that it is important for brands to not only consider music that is “popular” or “cool”. Brands must use music that both authentically represents their identity, and resonates with their target demographic (Jackson, 2003). Moreover, Jackson acknowledges the need for brands to work with professional audio consultants and agencies when putting together a sonic branding strategy. Professional consultants can develop a complete sound identity for a brand, taking into consideration existing assets, brand values, and the identity of the consumers they are aiming to reach (Jackson, 2003).

## Applied methodology and case studies

The final section of this chapter will introduce the concepts of strategic sonic planning, soundscapes and will examine the effects of background music in a retail setting. Looking at a study investigating the role and impact of music in retail environments, this section will seek to introduce an applied methodology, which can be used by marketing professionals, and sonic branding practitioners alike.

Coined by Canadian composer and author, R. Murray Schafer, the term soundscape means “the entirety of the sound in any one location”. Schafer’s concept of a soundscape is “essentially an auditory landscape” (Treasure, 2011, pg. 29). Initially, the term was intended to describe outdoor locations with regards to noise pollution coming from urban areas. The growth and evolution of cities has resulted in the destruction of many natural soundscapes. Treasure references the work of Jean Francois Augoyard and his book *Sonic Experience*, in which he describes the concept of the soundscape: “The concept of ‘soundscape’ is ‘concerned with the quality of listening [and of] what is perceptible as an aesthetic unit in a sound milieu” (Treasure, 2011, pg. 29). Augoyard argues that the experience of a soundscape entails the relationship shared between the listener and their perceptions and biases (conscious and subconscious), and the acoustic factors of the specific space they are in. (Treasure, 2011). In addition, Treasure also discusses the book *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?* by Barry Blesser. In Treasure’s analysis of Blesser’s book, he highlights Blesser’s discussion of the soundscape by acknowledging the unique ‘aural architecture’ which sounds are forced to interact with in any space. Blesser states, “Just as light is required to illuminate visual architecture, so are sonic sources to illuminate the aural” (Treasure, 2011). With that said, it is important for brands to consider the concept of soundscapes when they are designing the architecture of new branded spaces.

When designing soundscapes, Treasure notes the importance of distinguishing background sound from foreground sound. He points out that this is not a distinction that is the same in every setting. Background, or ambient noise is quieter and easier to ignore and tends to be more continuous and less variable in terms of volume and pitch. On the other hand, foreground sound is generally louder, more intrusive and contains more variation (Treasure, 2011). Through the example of a restaurant, Treasure points out that background noise could include: other people talking, the sound of cutlery, or low-level music. Moreover, in the same example, Treasure acknowledges that foreground noise may include: the people at your table, the sound of your own cutlery, or a waiter speaking to you (Treasure, 2011). Although the distinction is situational, brands must keep the distinction between background and foreground noise in mind when designing soundscapes. Having a clear understanding of the interplay between background and foreground sound in a soundscape is an essential element in defining a sonic strategy for that space. Developing a deep understanding of a soundscape requires businesses to take a number of factors into account, including: the acoustic qualities of the space, the target demographic you are trying to reach, and a mood or atmosphere which is congruent with your brand aesthetic. Once a business has a deep understanding of a specific soundscape, it is possible to design an effective sonic strategy. When designing a sonic strategy for a soundscape, Treasure notes the need to focus on elements such as pitch (frequency of sound) and sound level (loudness or volume) (Treasure, 2011). Regarding the tuning standard for musical pitch Treasure states,

“The modern standard is for the A above middle C to be set at 440Hz (“concert pitch”) but this was adopted only in 1939, and still varies from country to country” (Treasure, 2011, pg. 32)

440 Hz has been the standard for tuning in the U.S. since the 1920s and was adopted as the international standard in the 1955 (although not universally accepted) (Jones & Kapelman, 2015). In addition, Treasure notes that the volume of a normal conversation ranges from 40 to 60 dB. In comparison, the front row at a rock concert would have a volume range between 120 and 130 db. Any sound above 85 dB is the beginning of where we would encounter hearing damage (Treasure, 2011). Therefore, it is important for brands to carefully consider a reasonable range for the volume of sounds used in their soundscapes.

In the 2015 SOCAN report *Play on: Music is the Food of Business* “More than half of Canadians (57%) say they are likely to enjoy their shopping experience more when they hear music in a retail store”. In addition, about half of respondents (52%) said they preferred to hear a mix of all types of music while they shop. Furthermore, 16% said they preferred to hear pop music, and 15% said they preferred to hear no music at all. Lastly, 18% respondents of respondents aged 55- 64, and 37% of respondents aged 65 and over, said they would prefer no music at all. In comparison, only 9% of respondents aged 18-54 said they would prefer to hear no music at all (Robertson & Covens, 2015). For theses reasons, it is imperative for brands to consider the specific demographic(s) they are targeting when designing a branded soundscape. Factors such as age and gender must be taken into account when considering the design of a strategic sonic plan.

In a 2006 report entitled: *Setting the tone with the tune: A meta-analytic review of the effects of background music in retail settings*, Francine Garlin of the University of Sydney examined the impact of background music and it’s use in retails settings. Garlin’s analysis synthesizes information taken for 32 different studies to analyze the effects of music on “value returns, behavior duration and affective response” (Garlin, 2006). In her analysis, Garlin states,

“customer value is not reducible to “functionality versus price. Instead it is composed of both the functional and emotional benefits customers receive, minus the financial and non- financial burdens they bear”. (Garlin, 2006, pg. 755).

Garlin acknowledges that for brands, attracting customers is all about bringing value to their lives. If a brand does not align with the values of a customer, that person is unlikely to see value in purchasing that brand. On the other hand, if a consumer feels that a brand directly reflects his or her own personal values, then they are much more likely to identify with that brand (Garlin, 2006). As discussed by Lindstrom, brands can be built by through the strategic use of sound. Therefore we must acknowledge the value sound can bring to both consumers and brands. In her study, Garlin also discusses the impact of music on customer moods, attitudes and buying behavior. With regards to the impact of background music on financial returns brought to businesses by sound, Garlin states,

“...responses to experiences in-store influence the likelihood of behaviors which directly impact an organization's financial returns. The literature reports on studies which highlight managers' implicit beliefs in the ability of background music to facilitate top- and bottom-line returns to business” (Garlin, 2006, pg. 756).

In addition to the impact in-store music can have on the bottom line sales for a business, Garlin also notes the significant impact in-store music can have on customer attitudes and perceptions:

“Background music in-store is attributed to influence customer perceptions, specifically degree of attention and information processing of critical store elements such as visual stimuli and salesperson's arguments. In addition, North et al. (1999) suggest that music can ‘prime’ the selection of certain products by stimulating customers to recall related knowledge. Feelings of pleasure intensity and customer perceptions generated from background music effects can also enhance or create customers' attitude towards the store and/or its elements” (Garlin, 2006, pg. 756).

From this quote, we can understand how music, when deployed effectively, can influence

customer mood, behavior and buying patterns in stores. Moreover, Garlin suggests music can impact customers rate of recall as well as length of time spent in a store or section.

In the book *Audio Branding: Brands, Sounds and Communication*, by Kai Bronner and Rainer Hirt, Aaron Day discusses a case study entitled, *The Samsung Global Sound Project: Cross Cultural Innovation*. In this study, Day, who is a sonic branding practitioner based in Berlin, Germany reflects on his experience developing a global audio strategy for Samsung in Korea. In this study, the primary lesson Day acknowledges is the importance of being aware of cultural differences when designing a sound strategy. Day states, “In North America and Europe, the descending minor third interval is often used to denote a failure or error sound – “uh oh!” in devices” (Bronner & Hirt, 2009, pg 224). Considering the intricacies in timbre and pitch and the way they are understood in different cultures, Day states,

“Trying to develop universal sounds or universal branded sounds without considering the way users experience them can be a recipe for at worst, disaster or at best, mediocrity” (Bronner & Hirt, 2009, pg. 224).

For this reason, it is important to note, when designing sound for a global audience, what may be appropriate for one culture may not always be appropriate for another.



## **Ch. 2 – Thesis**

This paper will argue that it is essential for brands today to consider how to authentically and cost effectively integrate music and sound into their overall communications strategy.

While developing an effective audio communications strategy poses a difficult challenge for businesses large and small, investing resources in hiring professional audio consultants can be the difference between a brand standing out from the crowd, and being left behind in a competitive market. It is also important to note, that while the right sounds in marketing communications can have a positive impact on the connection customer's share with a brand; using the wrong sounds can have an equally dramatic negative impact (although often unintended) (Johansson & Moradi, 2015). Brands must consider what they sound like and consciously select the sonic cues they send in their communications. If sound is incongruent with the message and values of a brand, it can leave a customer feeling confused or turned off. Brands are much more likely to reach customers and be perceived as authentic if they are able to effectively leverage the power of sound in their overall communications strategy. Considering sound as an integral part of the whole communications planning process must be a priority for brands aiming to stand out in today's competitive global market. Looking at case studies including: Abercrombie & Fitch, Topman, Coca-Cola, and Bud Light, I will analyze and highlight examples of successful (and not so successful) uses of sound in marketing for retail, hotels, restaurants and other global brands. Moreover, looking the example of a Toronto, Ontario based audio consulting company working with a global hotel chain; I will explore an example of a successful implementation of a branded soundscape.

Through an analysis of various prominent academics in the field of sonic branding, this paper will seek to provide a background and guideline for marketers and sonic branding

practitioners for incorporating sound as part of an overall communications strategy. Through an exploration of the three groups of research outlined in the introduction, I intend to answer the following questions:

1. How can brands effectively leverage the power of sound and music to build value and create deep emotional connections with their target customers?
2. What can brands do to strategically use sound and music as a communications tool to effectively distinguish brand attributes, develop authentic emotional connections with audiences, and drive sales?
3. What guidelines can brands follow to build value through sonic branding?

## **Ch. 3 – Literature survey**

The literature survey will continue my investigation of the main groups of research introduced in chapter two. The literature survey will begin with a focus on the current state of sonic branding and trends for the future. In this section I will discuss examples such as Bud Light and Spotify. In the second section of this chapter I will focus on the impact of music on mood and purchase decisions in marketing. In addition, this section will visit the concept of “music as engagement”, a chapter written by sonic branding expert, Richard Jankovich in Daniel Jackson’s 2013 book, *Hit Brands*. The second section will also discuss the example of the UK clothing brand, Topshop. Finally, the third section of the literature survey will cover the application of music in branding through a look at the effect of tempo and mode on in-store selling. In addition, this section will investigate the effect of background music on store evaluation through the example of Abercrombie & Fitch.

### **Future of sonic branding**

Top brands today are investing their resources in strategic sonic planning. Yet, considering the opportunity sound represents many brands are still unaware of the need to engage consumers in multi-sensory marketing experiences (Jackson, 2003). Connecting with consumers at all touch-points and optimizing their brand experience is essential. Customers today want to experience brands both physically (using their five senses) and digitally. The UX design of an app or a website are perfect places for companies to consider their sonic strategy and reinforce their brand aesthetic. Building sonic cues into an app or a website’s design can create a more memorable and user-friendly experience. On these platforms, music and uniquely composed branded sounds can be integrated to build brand value (Bronner & Hirt, 2009).

The digital era is changing the relationship between brands and musical artists. The landscape of the music industry and the relationship between brands and recording artists is constantly shifting. Moreover, the rise of sonic branding has created an environment where many musical artists are looking to brands as music distributors in order to connect with new audiences. In fact, as I will discuss in the example of Red Bull, many independent artists are looking for ways to work with brands. What used to be considered “selling out” for an artist is now considered a savvy business partnership (Jones & Kapelman, 2015). The massive databases of music available for free on YouTube and paid subscription services are making it more difficult for artists, both new and old to reach audiences with their music. Today, working with brands and having a song used in branded content is an opportunity for artists to reach new audiences. For artists today, having a brand use their song in an advertisement could be almost equivalent to having a hit song on the radio 30 years ago (Jones & Kapelman, 2015).

The main goal for brands using sound and music must be to create value for themselves, their customers, and the musicians and agencies that connect them all together (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Introducing audiences to new music is one way for brands to build value for their customers. However, a sonic strategy can also more simply consist of carefully planned music, which emphasizes brand values. From a brand’s perspective, all sonic design decisions need to be made with target consumers in mind (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Sonic branding builds value for customers and businesses through a combination of “practical, emotional and reputational factors” which combine to deliver measurable business success (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Value to the customer is the most important element of sonic branding because this is what translates into brand recall, and ultimately brand loyalty (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013).

The struggling music industry is finding new ways to bring value to brands in addition to licensing tracks for commercials. With album sales declining, labels have focused on their work with brands to make up for losses (Jones & Kapelman, 2015). For example, in 2012, country star, Jason Aldean released a song titled, “Take A Little Ride”. After the release of the track, Aldean entered into a sponsorship with Bud Light. Originally, the song contained the lyric “...grab a little Shiner Bock” (another beer brand). Aldean pulled the original version of the song from radio stations and released a new version of the song with the lyrics updated to “...grab a couple rocky tops” (Jones & Kapelman, 2015). Lyrics like these are sculpted around brand taglines without ever mentioning a brand specifically. “Take A Little Ride” is just one example of product placement in song lyrics. Though product placement in music is not a new trend, it is interesting to consider the influence brands are having on popular artists and song lyrics. Moreover, due to the high cost of working with popular artists, many brands today are working more with independent artists to create songs for branded campaigns (Jones & Kapelman, 2015). With the rise of social media over the past decade, brands and independent artists are now able to connect much more easily. For this reason, today there is a more affordable landscape for brands interested in working with artists (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). In addition, the rise of sonic branding agencies over the past decade has made it easier and more affordable for businesses of all sizes to license customized audio programs (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013).

Red Bull is an example of a company with an extremely innovative music strategy. In a 2014 Forbes article entitled, *Red Bull Schools You On Music*, author Melissa Locker discusses the Red Bull Music Academy (RBMA) with Many Ameri, one of the academy’s co-founders. The RBMA was founded in 1998, and has since developed into a global project operating in over

90 countries. Ameri stated, “The idea was to create a series of global workshops that connect local musicians with like-minded creators, visionaries and genre-specific pioneers” (Locker, 2014). The RBMA hosts thousands of artist workshops globally each year. The RBMA also sponsors music festivals and gives lesser-known artist an infrastructure through which they can collaborate, learn from mentors and record in Red Bull studios. Working with local Red Bull teams around the world, these artists are able to bring their dreams to life. Musicians across the globe are connecting and inspiring each other through the RBMA (Locker, 2014). Co-founder of the RBMA, Many Ameri, stated:

“The idea of allowing people to express themselves to make the music they are into and to help them expand their musical vocabulary and create a space where they can be inspired by others. For us, it was really at the heart of this brand,” (Locker, 2014).

Red Bull is an example of a company that has successfully integrated their core values into their music strategy. The slogan “Red Bull gives you wings” embodies the creative freedom and passion that come with both extreme sports and music. Working with independent and obscure artists is a perfect brand fit for Red Bull (Locker, 2014). However, for the brand Amari says:

“This is not just *aligning* yourself with an artist”. “That’s not the approach here. It’s getting yourself into a situation where you can speak eye to eye with each other and create projects together and be part of the creative process, but always with the intention to enhance what the artist wants to do (Locker, 2014).”

An authentic desire to work with, and help artists has helped Red Bull create a global network through the RBMA. Using a strategy that aligns with their core brand values, Red Bull has earned credibility in the music industry and has developed relationships with many “commercially- shy” artists (Locker, 2014). Many of these relationships have led to exciting projects and collaborations for both the brand and its fans. For brands, Red Bull is an example of a company that has perfectly aligned their core brand values with their sonic communications strategy. By using music as part of their brand experience, Red Bull has built value for both their

brand and audience. Red Bull's music strategy has allowed them to develop an authentic connection with their audience, which in turn has helped drive sales (Locker, 2014).

Spotify is another example of an industry leading music company which has partnered with brands across industries to support their music strategies. One example of a successful Spotify partnership is their agreement with Playstation. Through their partnership, Playstation customers have streamed over five billion songs from Spotify since 2015 (Spotify, 2016). Furthermore, as of June 23, 2016, Spotify is now in more than 28 of the world's largest car brands, "from Ford to Tesla". According to statistics from Spotify, they are installed in 75 million cars (Spotify, 2016). Although Spotify does not offer customized music services for businesses, partnerships like these and many others have helped brands enhance their sonic strategies. In January 2016, Spotify created a digital music experience for Starbucks, which allowed customers to save songs they heard in Starbucks stores to a Spotify playlist (Perez, 2016). Regarding their partnership with Spotify, Starbucks Chairman and CEO, Howard Schultz Stated:

"Music has played a pivotal role in our stores for over forty years and we have been at the forefront of how to integrate it into a retail environment". "Today is the next era in that experience. We are merging the physical and digital, providing new access points for Spotify as they continue to grow globally, placing more control into our customers' hands and giving artists the world's largest stage for them to share their talent." (Perez, 2016)

As highlighted by Schultz's statement, music plays a key role in the brand experience for Starbucks. By using new technologies like Spotify, brands can use music to enhance their customer experience. Through partnerships like this, Spotify is giving brands the power to do exciting new things with their music strategies. Collaborations like this one can help brands connect the in store experience with the daily lives of their customers. With the main goal for brands being brand recall and being top of mind for consumers, sonic strategies like this one can help brands connect with their consumers through multiple touch points.

On July 20, 2016, Spotify introduced programmatic ad buying across their audio ads globally. This change will give advertisers access to over 70 million users on Spotify free (Spotify, 2016). Programmatic ad buying allows advertisers to target specific user demographics with their ads. Using musical taste to segment markets and demographics, Spotify's new programmatic ads are another way brands can integrate music into their strategic communications planning.

In sum, the changing landscape of the music industry in the digital age is shifting the way artists, brands, and the companies and agencies that connect them together are interacting. Brands are finding new ways to connect with, and work with artists who strategically align with their communications strategies. Moreover, in 2013, brand sponsorship of "live music events reached a record high of \$1.3 billion" (Allan, 2015). It is clear that music and sound are becoming even more important to branded communications strategies in the digital age. With the rising importance of sound in communications, we have seen the creation of numerous sonic branding agencies worldwide. Sonic branding agencies can provide professional audio consultants who can help brands build effective sonic strategies. Finally, in addition to music consulting, sonic agencies have been created with a focus on composing original branded sounds (eg. NBC news theme or Super bowl theme). Agencies like these are another niche in the sonic branding market with tremendous opportunity for growth in the coming years (Beckerman, 2014).

### **The impact of music on mood and purchase decisions**

This section will focus on the impact of music on mood and purchase decisions in retail and restaurant settings. Moreover, I will visit the concept of "music as engagement", a chapter written by sonic branding expert, Richard Jankovich in Daniel Jackson's 2013 book, *Hit Brands*.



In a study entitled *Music Influences On Mood and Purchase Intentions*, Judy Alpert concludes, "...Music may have significant impact on audience moods and purchase intentions, without necessarily affecting intervening cognitions (Alpert & Alpert, 1990)." In addition, Alpert also recognizes that, "mood states have an important influence on behavior, evaluation and recall" (Alpert & Alpert, 1990). Considering the impact music and sound can have when properly deployed in marketing communications, it is important for marketers to deploy sound thoughtfully. It is significant for brands to recognize that the power of sound is its ability to become part of an environment. Sound is the element that brings the mood or atmosphere of an environment to life, but it is not necessarily always the conscious focal point. When music blends into an environment seamlessly it can enhance the experience for customers. According to SOCAN, 55% of business owners surveyed stated, "the music I play impacts whether or not customers will return to my store or restaurant" (Robertson & Covens, 2015). Music can have a significant impact on the mood or atmosphere in any environment. Moreover, whether in branded physical spaces, commercial advertising or in the digital sphere, sound and music play an important role in all brand communications.

A report by Gordon C. Bruner entitled *Music, Mood and Marketing*, notes, "the music effectively used to serve one purpose may be inappropriate for another" (Bruner, 1990). For this reason, it is important for marketers to be keenly aware of the sonic footprint of their brand. While maintaining consistency across touch points is key, it is important for brands to remain flexible and to understand where and how they are reaching their customers with sonic communications. He suggests that in an in store setting, marketers "might attempt to match the emotion of some music to that expressed in the visual and/or verbal portion of an ad" (Bruner, 1990). Bruner acknowledges the importance of consistently aligning brand values with a sonic

identity across all touch points. In addition, Bruner also notes his findings regarding the impact of the type of music played on purchase intentions, stating,

“One finding was that happy music produced happier moods in subjects, but sad music produced the highest purchase intentions. The authors concluded that structure and expressiveness of background music can evoke different moods and purchase intentions toward advertised products” (Bruner, 1990, pg. 98)

Dependent on the setting and demographic, different music can produce different effects on target consumers. When used in advertising or a retail setting, sad music holds the potential to increase purchase intentions by developing an emotional connection to a product or brand with a consumer. Sound and music can be used as an aspirational element in branding, and sad music can be used as a cue to show consumers how a certain product or brand can help them become a better person. However, it is also important to consider the impact of the structure of the music used in addition to elements such as pitch, volume and tempo. Through strategic sonic planning, marketers can harness the power of music to influence the mood and emotions of consumers at all brand touch points.

In the book *Hit Brands*, Richard Jankovich discusses the topic of using “music as engagement” for marketing. In a chapter of entitled “Music As Engagement”, Jankovich discusses the universal nature of the impact of music. Jankovich looks at the example of a 2009 study by the Max Planck Institute, in which:

“A group of Mafa farmers from Cameroon, Africa and a group of German citizens were selected to determine whether they felt music in the same way. These two groups of people experienced very different lives – different technology, cultures, religions, geographies and family structures. Both groups were played identical pieces of music and then asked to identify emotion within the passages – to classify each piece of music as happy, sad or fearful. Despite having no shared cultural touch points or societal similarities, they both identified the same emotions within the same pieces” (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013, pg. 82)

This study confirms that there is a universal language of music that can be understood by people around the world. The impact that music can potentially have on our emotions from a marketing and purchase perspective is significant. However, although this study confirms that music influences mood and emotion in similar ways for people of different cultures, it is still essential for practitioners of sonic branding to keep cultural differences in mind when developing a strategic sonic plan for a brand. Furthermore, Jankovich discusses the concept of “using music as a message”. Jankovich asserts that,

“some brands use music as a foreground component of their brand – becoming a tastemaker, being known for their music taste and style. These brands encourage their audiences to discover new music and share what they have found, creating a conversation among their shoppers” (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013, pg. 87)

Examples previously discussed such as Red Bull and Starbucks, exemplify this type of approach to sonic branding. Creating a conversation about music with a brand as the connecting force is a powerful way to build brand value through strategic sonic planning. Using sound as a focal point of a communications strategy can help brands connect in a meaningful and consistent way with their consumers. However, brands need to be deeply in touch with their own identity before they can effectively represent themselves with sound (Treasure, 2011).

A 2015 study entitled: *The influence of soundscapes on the perception and evaluation of beers*, analyzed the effect of soundscapes on people’s evaluation of the taste of beer. In this study, three experiments were conducted in which participants tasted beer while listening to a different soundtrack. Although participants were not informed that they were drinking the same beer in each test, the study concluded that, “the soundtracks influenced the participants’ rating of the beers’ taste and strength” (Reinoso, Carvalho & Wang, 2015). Furthermore, the study suggests that restaurants and bars should consider, “adopting new multisensory techniques while designing eating/drinking experiences” (Reinoso Carvalho & Wang, 2015 pg. 32). This study

illustrates the importance of well-designed soundscapes, particularly in environments where people are eating and drinking. Soundscapes, which take into account the principles of sonic branding, can enhance the customer experience and even change their perceptions. In fact, according to SOCAN's 2015 study, 63% of business owners surveyed stated, "When I play music customers like, they stay in my store or restaurant longer". In addition, 42% of business owners said, "When I play music customers like, they spend more money in my store or restaurant" (Robertson & Covens, 2015).

In her book, *Fashion and Music*, Janet Miller examines the deep cultural connection between fashion and music since the 1950s. The book investigates the ways that music and musicians play a defining role in forming people's identity, taste and consumption habits when it comes to fashion (Miller, 2011). Miller argues, "fashion and music provides a lens through which to examine themes of gender, sexuality, ageing and youth, ethnicity, body image, consumer culture, fandom and postmodernity (Miller, 2011, pg. 6)". Musical genres such as rock, punk and metal all have distinct fashion conventions. These fashion trends are an implicit agreement of a shared style between fans and artists (Miller, 2011). Fashion and music hold a similar power to connect people with an identity that makes them feel like they are a part of something larger than themselves. When used as part of a communications strategy for fashion brands, music can have a powerful impact on shaping taste and consumption patterns of consumers (Miller, 2011).

British clothing brand, Topshop is an example of a brand with a distinct music strategy. Topshop is a brand that is committed to working with artists and agencies that are creating new trends in music (Harding, 2009). In addition, Topshop generally tries to keep a low profile when working directly with artists (Harding, 2009). According to an article entitled, *Top of the shops:*

*Topman and Topshop bring their music-centric branding to the U.S.* the company understands the impact that “over branding” or trying too hard to appeal to a target demographic can have:

"Our customers are shrewd," says Gordon Richardson, director of design and product development. "We want to encourage collaborations between designers and musicians, but we want to do it with integrity (Harding, 2009)."

Through Topshop's commitment to the integrity of their music strategy, the brand reinforces its attributes through music, which reflect both their values, and the values of their customers.

Working with underground and independent artists, Topshop has developed a deep understanding of their target demographic including their aesthetic preferences and social aspirations (Harding, 2009). For Topshop, using music is not a subconscious element their brand. Music is used at the forefront of their communications strategy. With music as a central element of Topshop's communications strategy, they have defined a distinct identity in the eyes of their customers, which has contributed to the strength of their brand.

### **Application of music & sound in branding**

The third and final section of the literature survey will explore the application of music in branding through a look at the effect of tempo and mode on in-store selling. Furthermore, this section will investigate the effect of background music on customer store evaluation through the example of Abercrombie & Fitch.

A 2001 study entitled, *Background music pleasure and store evaluation: intensity effects and psychological mechanisms*, by authors, Laurette Dubé & Sylvie Morin investigates the impact of background music on the psychological mechanism which react to sound and effect store evaluation. This study surveyed 110 shoppers (85 females and 25 males) to explore the impact of background music. According to Dubé & Morin:

“...results were indicative of a powerful mediating effect of the attitude towards the servicescape and the sales personnel. It was found that the attitude towards the servicescape, influenced by pleasure intensity, in turn, affected store evaluation both directly and indirectly via its positive effect on attitude towards the sales personnel and a strengthening of the relationship between attitude towards the sales personnel and store evaluation (Dubé & Morin, 2001).”

The results of this study clearly indicate that there is a direct correlation between the feeling customers experience towards a retail space and its employees, and the background music that plays in a space (Dubé & Morin, 2001). Music can be a powerful tool for shifting mood, atmosphere, and customer attitudes. As highlighted by Dubé & Morin, it is essential for brands to take into account the powerful impact that background music can have when designing soundscapes for retail settings. Furthermore, Dubé & Morin point out that, “consumers avoid unpleasant and approach pleasant environments” (Dubé & Morin, 2001). As I will investigate with the example of Abercrombie & Fitch, stores can strategically appeal to certain target audiences with specific genres and volume levels, in turn these brands can alienate consumers outside of their target demographic.

It is clear that background music in retail settings can have a significant impact on customer attitudes and behavior. However it is important to note the impact of technical aspects of music and how they contribute to its effect on consumers. A 2011 study entitled, *It is all in the mix: The interactive effect of music tempo and mode on in-store sales* by Knoferle, Spangenberg and Herrmann explores the impact of tempo and mode on in-store music design and retail sales. Knoferle, Spangenberg and Herrmann emphasize the fact that practitioners of sonic branding have focused too much attention on the impact of tempo (the speed at which a piece of music is played) and not enough attention on the mode of music played (set of musical notes forming a scale and from which melodies and harmonies are constructed) (Knoferle, Spangenberg and Herrmann, 2011). Knoferle, Spangenberg and Herrmann discuss the interplay between tempo

and mode and the varying effectiveness of different combinations of mode and tempo.

“The current research reports a field experiment wherein the positive main effect of slow tempo on actual sales reported by Milliman (J Marketing 46 (3):86–91, 1982, J Cons Res 13 (2):286–289, 1986) is qualified by musical mode. A significant interaction between tempo and mode was evidenced, such that music in a major mode did not vary in effectiveness by tempo while music in a minor mode was significantly more effective when accompanied by a slow tempo. That is, the Milliman effect was eliminated for music in a major mode. (Knoferle, Spangenberg and Herrmann, 2011, pg 325)”

Combinations of mode and tempo must be experimented with to create a distinct sonic identity that works for a brand. Knoferle, Spangenberg and Herrmann also highlight that significant investment must be made by marketers to effectively incorporate music in to the design of retail environments (Knoferle, Spangenberg and Herrmann, 2011). Understanding the impact of tempo and mode in addition to elements such as volume and frequency are key factors that must be considered when putting together a sonic communications strategy or designing a soundscape.

In addition to customer attitudes and behavior, background music can also impact cognitive processes. In a study from 2001, entitled, *Environmental background music and in-store selling*, Jean-Charles Chebat, Claire G  linas Chebat and Dominique Vaillant recognize that music triggers cognitive processes that impact mood, customer attitudes, and purchase decisions. Chebat, Chebat, and Vaillant conclude that:

“...the effects of music on attitudes toward the store, the salesperson, and the visit to the store are moderated by cognitive processes (number of thoughts and depth of information processing), whereas previous studies focused on emotional moderators. (Chebat, Chebat, and Vaillant, 2001, pg. 115)”

While other studies such as *Music Influences On Mood and Purchase Intentions* by Judy Alpert look at the impact of music on mood and purchase intention, Chebat, Chebat, and Vaillant focus on the impact of increased cognitive activity in a retail setting. The study asserts:

“Soothing music (i.e., both pleasant and low arousing) is shown, as predicted, to increase cognitive activity when other cognitive stimulation is low (mainly when sales arguments are weak). However, retailers are warned that enhancing cognitive activity is no panacea since it is found here that higher cognitive activity is associated with lower attitudes. It is proposed that music *fit* with the store may explain such results. Music fit and cognitive processes triggered by store music are strongly suggested as avenues of store atmospherics research” (Chebat, Chebat, and Vaillant, 2001, pg. 115).

Chebat, Chebat, and Vaillant recognize that increased cognitive activity in a retail environment can be associated with lower overall customer attitudes towards a space. For this reason, it is essential for marketers and practitioners of sonic branding to create a branded audio strategy, which becomes a subconscious part of the shopping or dining experience. Correct fit, as noted by Chebat, Chebat, and Vaillant is key to developing a sonic communications strategy, which enhances the customer experience and in turn builds value for a brand.

In a 2011 study entitled, *Developing a functional method to apply music in branding: Design language-generated music*, Warren Brodsky points out that marketers and brands have both handled music in a way that “rarely reflects criteria attributable to the brand” (Brodsky, 2011). In his study, Brodsky seeks to develop a strategy for applying music in branding by creating a “template for composition”. Through a look at four studies in two different countries, Brodsky’s investigation found:

“...that consumers could decode composers’ intentions to express brand characteristics and product features, and were consistently successful in designating design language-generated music to the appropriate brand” (Brodsky, 2011, pg. 261).

As discussed previously by Richard Jankovich in his reference to the 2009 study by the Max Planck Institute, Brodsky acknowledges that music has a universal language that can be understood by people around the world (Brodsky, 2011). The feeling a composer intends to convey through a piece of music can consistently be identified by those surveyed regardless of their geographic location. Furthermore, Brodsky notes that using music for branding requires



marketers to embrace design language (DL), which reflects the brand image. Regarding DL, Brodsky states:

“In an effort to develop specific music that can tap into the essence of the brand, common sense would encourage exploring design language (DL) as a template for music composition. DL is the catchphrase of a concept otherwise referred to through an assortment of expressions, such as: brand DNA, brand grammar, brand footprint, brand identity, brand personality...” (Brodsky, 2011, pg. 263).

Using design language, marketers and sonic branding experts can create powerful audio communications strategies, which create deep connections with consumers. When music directly reflects a brand’s DNA in an authentic way, consumers are more likely to remember a brand (Lindstrom, 2007).

The example of Abercrombie & Fitch is commonly referenced in sonic branding studies and articles. In a 2011 journal article entitled, *Sensory marketing: the multi-sensory brand-experience concept*, Bertil Hultén describes the “signature sound” of Abercrombie & Fitch, stating:

“A heavy bass present in every song characterizes the firm's music. The music played is very loud and gives the impression of a night club. The songs are mixed to build up expectation that something more is under way. There are no gaps between the tracks and therefore the tempo level and sound pressure are constant in the store. Customers like the music and many dance in time to it. Employees also dance, which gives the relaxed feeling of party and of “living it up”” (Hultén, 2011).

Abercrombie & Fitch expresses its brand identity through a combination of songs by famous artists, which they mix together to create the desired atmosphere for their target consumer in a retail setting (Hultén, 2011). However, Jackson notes in his book *Hit Brand's*, that retailers like Abercrombie use a bold strategy like this one to not only appeal to a certain demographic, but also to keep people outside of that demographic away. This strategy creates an atmosphere where young men and women are shopping without their parents. Without parents, teens are forced to

Speak to sales consultants whom they can easily relate to for suggestions and help with sizing. Once they are done shopping they bring their parent in to the store to pay for their purchase. Generally, parents who come in to the store cannot wait to leave, and this makes it much easier for teens to convince their parents to purchase the items they selected (Jackson, Jankovich & Sheinkop, 2013). Abercrombie & Fitch is just one example of a brand harnessing the power of music to drive sales. However, it is important for all brands to note the impact a custom audio strategy can have on customer attitudes, moods and sales.

## Ch. 4 – Methodology & sonic branding guidelines

The methodology and sonic branding guidelines chapter will outline a methodology or guideline for marketers and sonic branding practitioners to use in practice. Using a combination of guidelines by various experts in the sonic branding field, this section will explore best practices for effective use of sound and music in marketing communications. Furthermore, this chapter will also investigate the impact of sonic branding through statistics provide by a Toronto, Ontario based audio consulting company working with a global hotel chain.

In his book *Sound Business: How to use sound to grow profits and brand value*, Julian Treasure notes four “golden rules” for using sound in branded communications. First, Treasure notes the importance of “making sound optional”. While he acknowledges this is difficult to do in physical spaces, he notes that through the concept of soundscaping or “zoning”, we can create separate areas of sound within a space. (Treasure, 2011). Second, Treasure discusses the importance of making appropriate sound choices. Treasure notes that sound selected for a sonic branding strategy needs to both align with brand values and image, and be appropriate for the context in which it is used (Treasure, 2011). Third, Treasure asks the question, how is sound adding value for your customer in a particular context? He states that if you cannot answer that question when designing a soundscape, “silence is golden” (Treasure, 2011). Lastly, Treasure discusses the importance of trial and error. He states that sound must be “Tested and tested again” (Treasure, 2011). The impact of sound is dependent on many factors such as the context and demographic you are trying to reach. In addition, reactions to certain sounds can differ from culture to culture. Using Treasure’s “Golden rules of sound”, brands can create effective sonic communications strategies through experimentation.

In his book *Audio Branding: Brands, Sound and Communications*, Kai Bronner outlines four key criteria that should be considered when creating a strategic sonic plan (Bronner & Hirt, 2009), pg. 66-67):

1. **Fit:** Ideally the sonic identity of a brand will authentically “reflect the brand’s values and interpret its attributes into sound or music”.
2. **Distinctive:** In order to stand out from the crowd, branded sounds must be distinct. Indistinct or generic sounds can easily be mistaken for other brands.
3. **Memorable:** Sounds that are curated or composed with brand fit and distinctiveness in mind must also take into account the extent to which sounds can be remembered or recalled.
4. **Flexible:** Musical flexibility requires sound to be adaptable enough to maintain consistency across all touch points. Moreover, technical flexibility refers to the ability to deliver optimal playback of audio on all devices and applications.

Each of these elements plays an integral role in the success of a strategic sonic plan. In order to create a sonic strategy that will be effective across all touch points, brands need to thoughtfully integrate each of these elements into the sounds they select and compose for mass communications. Without brand fit, sound will be incongruent with the brand it represents. When sound is not distinct, it does not stand out from other branded communications and therefore it is less likely to be remembered by your target audience (Bronner and Hirt, 2009). Finally, sound must maintain the flexibility to be played back with clarity on any device, and at any touch point.

In a 2015 study entitled, *What Does Your Brand Sound Like? A Quantitative Study of Matching Background Music In Consumer Durables*, Johansson & Moradi state:

“...average sales increased by 31.7% when brand fit background music was played compared with when incongruent background music was played in the store.” (Johansson & Moradi, 2015, pg. 8).

However, on the other hand Johansson & Moradi note, “the wrong choice of music can damage your brand image and reduce sales”. Johansson & Moradi outline four essential guidelines for brands to use sound as part of their communications strategy:

### **1. Take control of your speakers:**

Awareness of the sounds you choose to represent your brand is essential. For physical space, it is necessary to “Implement a centralised music management system, where you can continuously monitor the background music's effect on your brand image and sales” (Johansson & Moradi, 2015, pg. 11).

### **2. Match Expectations:**

Building a strong brand requires consistency across all customer touch points. The brand “fit” of music and sound is essential for delivering a customer experience, which is consistent with the existing image of the brand (Johansson & Moradi, 2015).

### **3. Create Interaction:**

“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” (Johansson & Moradi, 2015, pg. 11). A successful sonic strategy will add to the brand experience and deliver value to the consumer. However, first this strategy needs to be designed to interact with both the environment and the consumer.

### **4. Don't stand still:**

Similar to Treasure's assertion that music should be “Tested and tested again”, Johansson & Moradi state that it is important for brands to “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” (Johansson & Moradi, 2015). With this feedback in mind, it is essential to update your brand sound regularly to keep it fresh.

Each of these sets of guidelines for using sound in branded communications (Bronner, Treasure and Johansson & Moradi), touch upon similar themes of brand fit and experimentation. However, each guideline contains specific recommendations for best practices which brands can benefit from when building a sonic communications strategy.

The owner of a Toronto, Ontario based audio consulting agency discussed the example of working with a global hotel brand in a July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016 interview with me. Since implementing a customized audio program (managed remotely) and strategy in 2012 for the hotel's Toronto location, they have seen a stunning growth in sales in their restaurant and bar (Buckman, 2016). This growth has been supported by an increase of investment in music services. Some statistics provided include (Buckman, 2016):

- 0.7 million increase in bar revenue from 2012 to 2013 (when nightly DJ residency began)

- 9 PM – 1 AM bar saw an increase in gross sales from \$1.5 million (2013) to 2.2 million (2014) & 2.7 million (2015)
- 5 PM to 1 AM dinner service – customers spending more time at their tables, and spending more money
- Average spend per customer increased almost 100% (2013–2014)

These statistics exemplify the powerful impact that investment in a sonic strategy can have to support and increase growth for a major brand. However, it is important to note the role of a professional music consultant in advising and curating appropriate sound for brands and businesses of all sizes. With an increase in investment in strategic sonic planning, results like this are possible. Moreover, it is interesting to note that investment in a strategic sonic planning is a relatively small investment compared to other marketing initiatives, but it can have a dramatic impact.

## **Ch. 5 – Conclusion**

### **Conclusions**

Sound and music hold the potential to have a powerful impact on the communications strategy of any brand. When deployed strategically, companies can build value for both their brands and consumers. Sound and music play an important role in developing authentic emotional connections with audiences and in turn driving sales. Although the impacts of sound and music on a brand's bottom line are difficult to quantify, it is clear that sound and music can influence customer perceptions, moods and purchase behaviours. Brands that embrace the principles of sonic branding are able to more effectively reach their customers across all touch points. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that although there is a "universal language" of music that can be interpreted by people regardless of their geographic location, the interpretation of sounds can still vary from culture to culture. Therefore, it is essential for marketers and sonic branding practitioners to take cultural differences into account when designing customized audio solutions for different cultures. From this paper, brands can learn that effective sonic communications strategies recognize the need to tailor brand sounds to the audience they are trying to reach. Furthermore, brands must understand the importance of brand "fit" when designing sonic branding strategies. Brands must also remember the significant impact that congruent and incongruent sound can have on brand recall. Brands must focus on using sound to both reinforce their identity and offer value in the form of an enhanced customer experience. In today's competitive global market, brands must embrace a "multi-sensory" marketing experience to stand out from the crowd. Using a generic soundtrack is no longer an option for brands today. For many brands today, the challenge is efficiently and cost effectively sourcing customized music programs that differentiate them in the marketplace. Professional audio consultants can

help organizations leverage the power of music to reinforce brand value and enhance the customer experience.

## **Summary**

While many of the world's top brands today are investing in strategic sonic planning, there are still many companies that are lagging behind in terms of their sonic strategies. Through an understanding of soundscapes and elements such as volume, frequency, mode and tempo, brands can create sonic strategies, which distinguish their attributes and help develop deep emotional connections with their audiences. Developing an authentic connection with your audience through music is key to successful sonic branding. Brands must consider sound as a central element of their communications strategy, which should be integrated from the beginning of the strategic planning process. In addition, brands must ensure that their sonic communications “fit” with their brand, are distinctive and memorable, and are flexible enough to be used across touch points. We have entered a golden age of sonic branding and the potential for growth in this area of marketing is huge. With the shifting landscape of the music industry, it is becoming easier for businesses large and small to connect with independent artists. In addition, the rise of sonic branding agencies worldwide has created a landscape through which smaller brands can cost effectively source customized music programs.

Brands like Red Bull and Starbucks use sound and music as a focal point of their branded communications by introducing their customers to new music. However, brands can also bring value to their customers by using sound as a means of reinforcing the identity of their brand, and enhancing the customer experience. Through consistent use of a sonic identity across all branded touch points, companies can open up a new world of communication with their customers. This paper explored several strategies, guidelines and elements for effective strategic sonic planning.



Although many top brands today are investing in a sonic strategy, this is an area of marketing that will continue to grow in the coming years. Considering the small amount of investment required to develop a strategic sonic plan in relation to other marketing initiatives, it is essential for brands today to invest in this aspect of their communications strategy or risk being left behind.

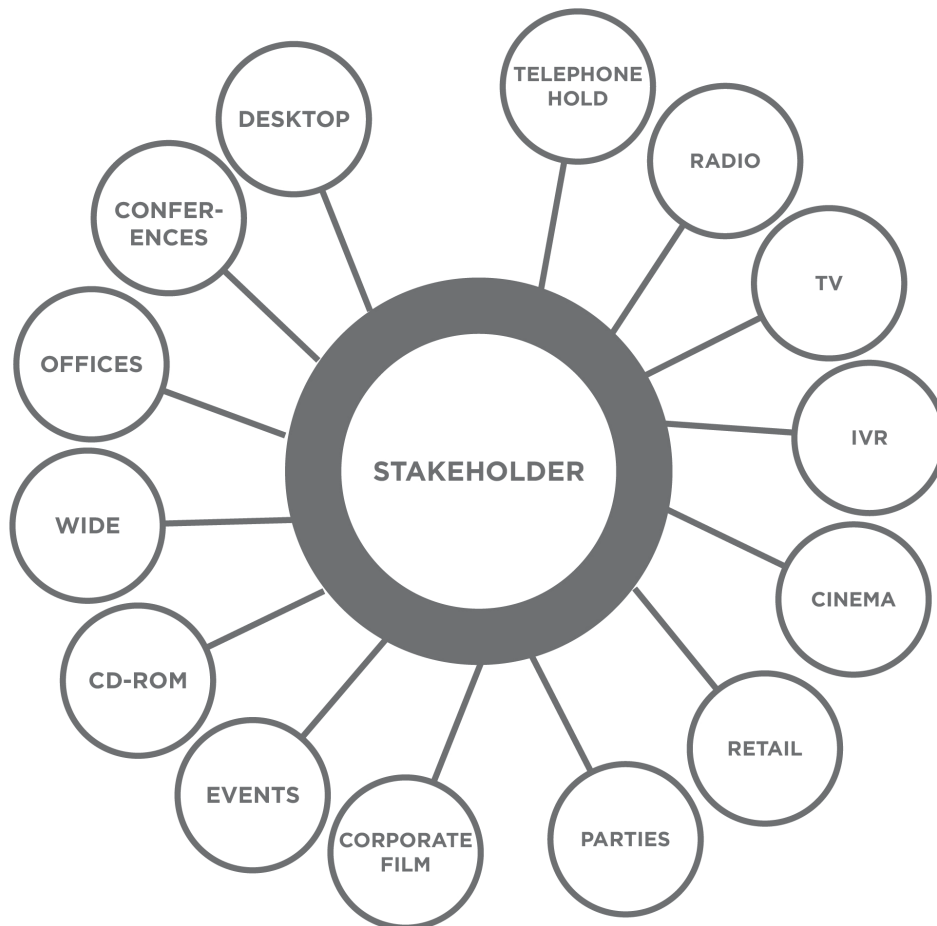
## **Future work**

This paper provided an overview and guideline of the history and future of sonic branding, the impact of sonic branding on brands and customers, and recommendations for best practices for sonic branding. Through my research, I discovered a number of areas of study I would like to explore to further my knowledge of sonic branding. Many of the studies visited in this paper (Garlin, Bruner etc.) touched on the psychological and cognitive impact of music on mood, emotion and buying behavior. These are areas I would like to explore more deeply. In addition, I would like to investigate the impact of sound and music on emotion using factors such as age, gender, and setting. Another area I would like to explore is the use of sound in virtual environments through the concept of “zoning”. Furthermore, I would like to investigate the intricacies and guidelines for designing soundscapes of different types (ie. a stadium vs. a school). Lastly, Julian Treasure notes a number of areas of sonic branding study, which I think would help me push my knowledge of this subject forward. These areas include: Psychoacoustics, Biomusicology and Ethnomusicology.

## Appendices

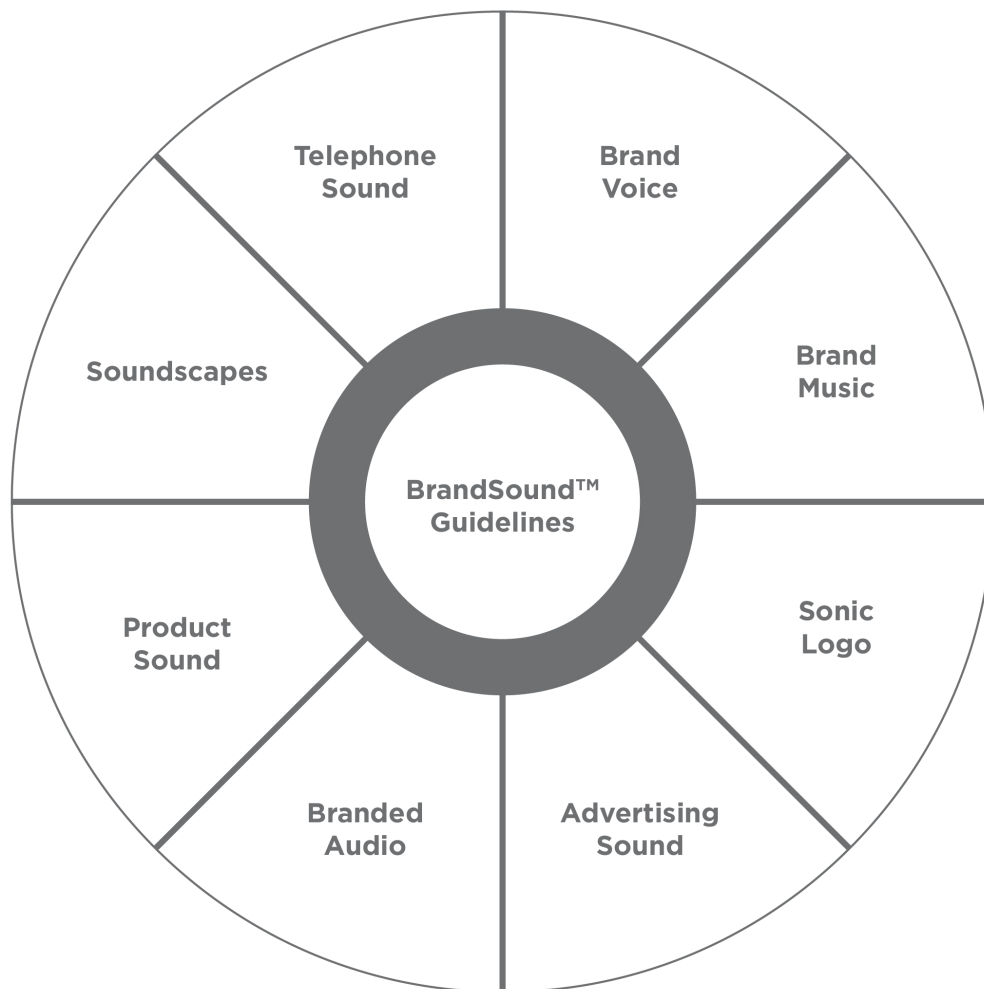
**Fig 1.**

(Jackson, 2003, pg. 6)



**Fig. 2:**

(Treasure, 2011, pg. 165)



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