“Music has Charms to Soothe a Savage Breast”: The Effect of Music on Decision Making

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Abstract

This paper discusses how music can influence our behaviour and our everyday decision making, and which specific musical characteristics attribute to this effect. To this end, we will discuss the numerous dimensions of music and its influence on mood, emotion and behaviour. Furthermore, the effect of this influence on task performance is discussed and we will look at how product perception is effected. Finally, we will conclude with the knowledge that a considerable part of our behaviour, decision making and task performance seems susceptible to the influence of music, but that the dubious validity and the ambiguous reasoning of the involved studies makes the extent of this effect uncertain.
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1 Introduction

It is without doubt that most, if not all, human beings have had their fair share of experience when it comes to listening to, albeit maybe not always enjoying, and making music of some sort; be it instrumental, vocal or a combination of the two. Even if one has not actively chosen to listen to music, he or she is bound to be exposed to it. Take for instance the jingles on television and radio commercials, the background music in stores and supermarkets, the atmospheric music in theme parks or the ever so cheery street musicians.

Most, if not all, of this music is written with the intention of conveying a certain feeling upon the listener, i.e. to affect his or her mood. As it is common knowledge that music can indeed influence the feeling of an individual, merchants and advertisers make good use of it in their effort to gain the liking of the consumer, thus boosting sales. They can achieve this by using, among others, appropriate musical characteristics, as these can enhance the perception and attaching effects of objects, alter people their pace and time perception, attract additional attention and improve the perceived overall atmosphere and quality of service.

Over the years, this topic has been studied by psychologists, musicologists and marketing researchers. These studies have mostly concerned themselves with a specific subset of the topic at hand, whereas we will try to combine the observations and results in order to present a more broader overview on the effects of music on decision making.

We will start our overview by having a quick look at the different characteristics of music, after which we will discuss the influence of music on behaviour, such as mood, atmosphere, thoughts and interaction. This will be followed by a section on the effects of music on task performance, including decision making and memory and problem-solving tasks. Lastly, we will
see how music is used to influence the perception of products in order to
attract attention, to create preferences and recognition and to improve the
perceived state.

2 Dimensions of Music

When asked what is actually being defined by the word “music”, many will
find it hard to give a description that does not refer to an instance or type
of music. To address this issue, Webb (1994) tried to find the dimensions of
music that he deemed to be most important, which are as following:

• Tempo
• Pitch
• Texture
• Genre or Style
• Form
• Volume or Loudness
• Lyrics
• Meaning
• Familiarity
• Valence

Tempo is a vital part of any musical piece and can range from slow to fast, of
which each range segment can be classified in belonging to a certain class, e.g.
romantic, lively, upbeat or rock. Pitch represents the perceived fundamental
frequency and also includes its rising and falling effect. The types of instruments or voices, and their combination, can be described as the texture, and can range from simple to very complex. The genre or style reflects to which category the musical piece belongs, e.g. classical, country or R&B. Form describes, among others, whether it consists of major or minor mode and whether it is tonal, harmonic, melodic or consonant. The volume or loudness can range from almost silent to painfully loud and can be steady or variable. A musical piece can be with, without or with understandable-but-not-verbalized lyrics, all reflecting their own meaning and intention. The meaning has associations from the nature of the music itself or from past events, and can be divided in embodied and referential meaning [Zhu & Meyers-Levy (2005)]. Whether the musical piece is familiar to the listener, ranging from not and vaguely to very familiar, is described by its familiarity. Finally, we have the valence, which tells us the degree of liking by the listener.

In addition to the points above, Hailstonea et al. (2009) show that timbre – the identity of the instrument – can have a profound effect on the way music is perceived, and Yeoh & North (2009) and Yeoh & North (2010) propose the more abstract ‘fit’ – whether or not a certain musical piece fits the occasion or context.

While these characteristics of music are used and perceived globally, wide differences can exist between cultures, situations and age groups [Webb (1994)]. This adds to the complexity of the research on this topic. There are, however, still enough inferences that can be made, which we will discuss during the next few sections.
3 Behavioural Influence

As noted previously, music can have a profound influence on certain aspects of one’s behaviour. This might not come as surprise, as most of us tend to listen to a certain type of music when we want to feel better, when we try to create a specific atmosphere or when we just want to relax after a hard day of work.

Taking the term “behaviour” in a broad sense, we will first discuss the effect music can have on our mood and the particular emotions it can evoke. Secondly, we will read how music can stimulate certain thoughts, and in the last part, we shall see that even the interaction between people is not safeguarded from the power of music.

3.1 Mood and Emotion

Mood can be defined as an emotional state in which certain emotions tend to be common or as “feeling states that are subjectively perceived by individuals”[Webb (1994)]. Much of our behaviour is related to how we feel at a certain time, thus making mood and the underlying emotions a key element in how we behave during the course of a day.

Instances when our emotion is influenced by music are plentiful; a cheesy scene of a motion picture can bring one to tears if that scene is accompanied by “sad” music[Webb (1994)]. Although there are many factors that play a role in how a musical piece is perceived to induce a certain feeling, such as the characteristics we have seen previously, Hailstonea et al. (2009) note that timbre may play a crucial role.

In their study, they conducted two experiments in which twenty-three younger and twenty-four older adults had to select to which emotion each of forty novel musical pieces belonged. The musical stimuli were recorded on four different instruments and were controlled for tempo, melody and vol-
Evidence was found that there might be a significant relation between timbre and emotional judgement for both younger and older adults. Sadness and happiness were well recognized, whereas anger and fear were less well recognized.

Mood can be influenced, both positively and negatively, by listening to music. J. Ganser (2010) studied the effect of music induced mood on social behavior. In order to induce both a positive and a negative mood among the ninety-seven participants, they experimented with the following five different conditions:

- Music with prosocial lyrics
- Music with antisocial lyrics
- Uplifting music without lyrics
- Annoying music without lyrics
- No music

There were between seventeen to twenty-one participants for each experimental condition and each participant was instructed to take part in both a filler and a word completion task. In addition, they were not told the real reason for having music in the background, but believed it was to test the influence of music on their task performance.

It was found that music had a statistical significant effect on one’s mood, with uplifting music and music with prosocial lyrics resulting in a more positive or less negative mood, while annoying music and music with antisocial lyrics resulted in the opposite effect, namely a more negative or less positive mood. Unexpectedly, the no music condition seemed to normalize the mood, as it led to both a less positive and a less negative mood. It is also interesting
to note that the effect of music that leads to a less positive mood is much stronger than that of the other conditions.

There is still much discussion on how and why music can influence one’s mood. J. Ganser (2010) believes that the popularity of the songs might be a crucial factor, as it is due to the popularity that these songs get played more and more often. Hearing these songs again will therefore evoke the positive thoughts and feelings that one also had when the song was played before. In contrast, the annoying music was of a fast and repetitive nature, which were thought of to be distracting and irritating.

Their theory, however, raises some questions. One instance being, as to whether using popular songs for a condition does not create interference, e.g. with the familiarity affect. Moreover, it remains unclear in what characteristics the popular songs differ from the annoying ones.

### 3.1.1 Lyrics

As we discussed previously, lyrics can notably influence the mood of an individual, both positively and negatively [J. Ganser (2010), Greitemeyer (2009), Anderson et al. (2003), Webb (1994)]. According to the study of J. Ganser (2010), lyrics even are the biggest contributing factor for influencing individuals with a negative mood.

Anderson et al. (2003) focussed entirely on antisocial lyrics, specifically violent. In a series of five two by two factorial experiments, they compared the effects of humorous, non-humorous, violent and non-violent lyrics and
their combinations on college students. Their results report that the participants who listened to a song with violent lyrics felt more hostile and had more aggressive thoughts than those who listened to a similar song with non-violent lyrics. In addition, they note that this effect is short lived, unless the individual tends to often listen to violent songs, thus creating a violent personality.

3.2 Guiding Behaviour

We have already discussed how music and the accompanying lyrics can be used to influence one’s behaviour. Only a small step is needed to bring us to the topic of how music stimulates certain thoughts or even actively guides the behaviour of someone.

Both the studies of J. Ganser (2010) and Greitemeyer (2009) were aimed at discovering whether it was possible to stimulate prosocial thoughts, specifically empathy, by exposure to implicit background music. In four studies, Greitemeyer (2009) exposed individuals to songs with prosocial or neutral lyrics in order to measure the effect this type of music would have on their helping behaviour, which was directly related to the amount of money people donated.

Evidence was found that supported their hypothesis, which led them to believe that exposure to songs with prosocial lyrics increased the accessibility of prosocial thoughts, led to more interpersonal empathy, and fostered helping behavior. A similar study by J. Ganser (2010), however, yielded no such result, although he suspects that this might have been due to certain limitations in his experiments.

Music also appears to have an effect on social interaction, as demonstrated in the study of Phillips (2004). His study involved seventy-two undergraduate
and graduate students, which were divided into three groups. Two groups were exposed to background music, either classical or rock, and the third group was the no music condition. Each of the groups were instructed to solve a ranking task together, with the possibility of communicating anonymously with each other by the use of a computer.

The results show that participants in the classical music condition contributed more off-task comments to one another than the no music condition and about the same number of off-task comments as the punk music group. These off-task comments were mostly of a personal nature. This was a confirmation of an earlier study by Jensen (2001) which showed that participants listening to classical music are more likely to disclose personal information than those listening to no music.

According to Webb (1994), the tempo of background music can influence the pace at which individuals walk. Music with a fast tempo tends to speed people up, while music with a slow tempo tends to slow them down. This effect occurs almost instantly and is therefore not related to a change in one’s mood.

In addition, he claims that the loudness of music also seems to influence one’s pace. As participants did not report to notice the difference in loudness and did not seem to dislike either the louder or less loud condition, it can reasonably be assumed that this change in pace is unrelated to one’s desire to “escape” the music.

4 Task Performance

Students can often be divided in two separate groups, with in the first the students who can or even must study their literature under the company of music, and in the second, the students who really need a quiet surrounding
to be able to achieve the same. This scenario raises the questions of whether task performance benefits from music, whether it suffers from it or whether it does not even make difference.

To this end, we will start discussing the effect on cognitive tasks, such as memory and problem-solving tasks and decision making. Secondly, we will briefly discuss the effect on sensorimotor tasks.

### 4.1 Cognitive Tasks

Whether background music affects cognitive task performance is a long-standing issue with many seemingly contradicting studies. One of the studies that looked into this claim is of J’ancke & Sandmann (2010), in which the effect of background music on a verbal learning task was researched. In their study, they divided seventy-five participants into five groups of which each represented a different condition. These conditions were as following:

- Music with a fast tempo and being in-tune
- Music with a slow tempo and being in-tune
- Music with a fast tempo and being out-of-tune
- Music with a soft tempo and being out-of-tune
- Noise

*Note that all music pieces were created specifically for this experiment in order to prevent familiarity effects.*

Their results show that there was neither an enhancement nor a decrease in verbal learning performance between the background stimuli conditions when compared to the control, i.e. the no background stimuli condition.
Figure 2: Results from J’ancke & Sandmann (2010)


They did, however, find that the different conditions evoked different cortical activation, which they believed to be a compensatory mechanism that allowed task performance to be kept constant even as the background music draws ever more attention.

A similar study was performed by Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2009), in which seventy-seven participants were asked to take part in a logical reasoning task while musical stimuli, consisting of unfamiliar samples from four different genres and generic noise, played in the background. The results of the logical reasoning task showed no significant effects of auditory interference on the performance of the task, thus confirming the results of J’ancke & Sandmann (2010).
As there was some correlation between the conditions and the task performance, Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2009) suspect that the performance might be mediated by the type of cognitive task one is asked to do. Their experiments were too limited, however, for this theory to be tested thoroughly.

According to the study by Phillips (2004), the genre of the musical stimuli might have a part in influencing the task performance. As discussed earlier, his study consisted of three conditions; classical music, punk music and no music. To test the performance of the participants, each group had to work together in a problem-solving task.

It was found that participants in the classical music condition performed better than those in the punk or no music condition. The author believed that the participants in the classical music condition appeared to be more involved in the task, leading to better scores on the problem-solving task and an increase in the use of hyper-personal communication.

A series of experiments to research the effect of music on economic decision making were conducted by Fujikawa & Kobayashi (2010). Their goal was to research whether familiar and unfamiliar background music and white noise could affect the behaviour of the participants, who were asked to make decisions in choice under risk and intertemporal choices.

The task that tested deciding under risk involved participants having to choose an economically better option. During the run of this task, participants were offered the choice between a hundred percent certainty of receiving a specific amount of money, and the less-than-certain possibility of receiving a larger sum of money. The possibility varied between a relatively low and a relatively high value.
In the second task, which involved intertemporal choices, participants were asked to make a decision as to whether they would prefer a certain amount of money soon, or a larger amount of money significantly later. The range of this interval could vary between a few days and a month.

Forty-two undergraduate students took part in both tasks and were divided amongst four groups; two of which either had familiar or unfamiliar music, one in which white noise was to be heard and the last one in which no auditory stimuli was present. In order to make certain that the stimuli in the unfamiliar condition were not recognized, the musical pieces used were composed and recorded by the authors.

Their results show strong evidence that background noise affects performance in both decision making under risk and intertemporal decision making. In addition, they observed that background noise, compared to the other conditions, increased risk-taking behaviour and increased the preference for early payouts.

4.2 Non Cognitive Tasks

One could reason that both listening to music and performing cognitive tasks share a common cognitive capacity. If that is the case, it might be possible to infer this from studies that involve non-cognitive tasks, i.e. that listening to music and performing a non-cognitive task show no negative interference. There is compelling evidence that points in that direction.

In the study of Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2009), which was partly discussed earlier, their seventy-seven participants were also asked to take part in a creative task. This task involved a modified version of the Alternate-Uses Test in which the participants were instructed to name alternative uses for everyday objects. Performance on the task was measured in terms of ideational frequency.
Their results showed that participants performed better on the creative task when this was accompanied by solely instrumental background music or noise\(^1\). In contrast, performances dropped when musical pieces with lyrics were played.

Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2009) believe that the mental resource of this creative task, ideational fluency, is predicated upon a basic level of cognitive ability, and that the latter only accounts for a small percentage of the former. This could imply that creative and cognitive tasks may be assumed to use different cognitive abilities.

A study by Gul (2009) examined the influence of different types of musical tempo on typing performances. In his experiments, twelve undergraduate students were instructed to type sixty sentences during three different conditions. During the first condition, participants were exposed to a fast paced black metal song, whilst the second condition exposed them to a slow paced musical composition played on the violin. The control condition contained no music.

The results showed that a faster tempo leads to a faster typing speed, with both the fast and the slow tempo condition showing an increase compared to the no music condition. A similar outcome was found for the amount of entry errors, with the fast tempo and no music condition in first and last place respectively\(^2\).

Gul (2009) believes that the resulting speed difference can be explained by the fact that fast tempo music arouses people more than slow tempo music. In addition, he hypothesizes that one’s accuracy decreases as the

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\(^1\)Note that introverts performed only slightly better under the music condition compared to the no music condition, and that extroverts performed significantly better under the noise condition compared to the no music condition.[Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2009)]

\(^2\)Ironically, the fast tempo condition, and thus the fastest typing speed, was slower than both other conditions when error correction was accounted for.
demand on one’s working memory increases, thus forcing people to divide their attention among multiple processes.

5 Product Perception

So far, we have discussed numerous instances of how music can influence our mood, our behaviour, our decision making and our performance. With exception of the latter, all these aspects are eagerly being put to use by companies, marketing agencies and advertisers to maximize sales.

In the following section, we shall discuss the different ways a consumer that can be influenced by using specific music or specific musical characteristics. To this end, we will start by looking how a conditioning approach can create preferences, after which we will discuss recognition heuristics in the second part. Lastly, we will read how one’s perceived state can effectively be influenced.

5.1 Conditioning Preferences

Advertisements on the television or the radio are often accompanied by music – a jingle. After a while, consumers learn to associate that particular jingle with the advertised product, and they can often even sing along with it, willingly or not. This association of music and a product can be seen as a simple form of classical conditioning.

A study by Gorn (1982) claims to have found evidence that product preferences can be conditioned through a single exposure to an appealing or unappealing piece of music. His experiments consisted of an implicit forced choice task in which the participants had to choose between two pen colours in order to evaluate the accompanied music. The music could only be evaluated appealing or unappealing.
According to the results, there was strong evidence that individuals who evaluated the music to be appealing would select the same coloured pen on a follow-up task, even when there was no music present. The author claimed only a single exposure was needed to evoke this effect.

While Kellaris & Cox (1989) agree that product preferences can be conditioned, they oppose the fact that a single exposure is sufficient. A series of three experiments was conducted, of which one was a direct reproduction of the initial experiment of Gorn (1982), while the other two where extended versions.

None of the three experiments supported the findings of Gorn (1982) and the authors believe this is the result of demand artifacts in the study of Gorn (1982).

### 5.2 Recognition Heuristic

The recognition heuristic is a psychological model of judgment and decision making and was devised by Gigerenzer & Goldstein (2002). This heuristic states that if one of two objects is recognized and the other is not, then the recognized object will receive a higher value with respect to the criterion.

Yeoh & North (2009) and Yeoh & North (2010) believe the recognition heuristic to be applicable even when the possible options one has to choose from are unfamiliar or equally familiar to him or her. According to their study, the use of implicit background music that is appropriate to one of the options will result in a stronger preference for that option. Whether or not the music is appropriate for a certain option depends on whether it primes knowledge relation to that option. The authors call this a ‘fit’ between music and option. While similar, this is not the same as the familiarity effect, as their experiments show that unfamiliar stereotypic and unfamiliar unambiguous music will result in the same outcome.
In their first experiment, Yeoh & North (2009) investigated whether a fit between music and consumer products could influence the product preference of Malaysians. As Malaysians are made up of three major ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians, the researchers developed a forced choice task in which only the Chinese-Malaysians would be asked to participate. These participants, of which there were ninety, would be instructed to choose either a clearly Malay or a clearly Indian product whilst being accompanied by either Malaysian or Indian music. For the control group, there was a no music condition.

For their second experiment, Yeoh & North (2010) tried to reproduce their results with a free recall task. Using the same ethnic distribution as before, they created two groups of seventy-two participants each, comprised out of all three major ethnic groups. Participants were then individually instructed to recall as many of Malay and Indian food products as they could whilst either Malay or Indian music was played in the background.

The results from both experiments give support for the existence of a ‘fit’ between music and object that has the possibility of influencing one’s decision making. In case of the forced choice task, this influence approached a two to one ratio for either musical conditions and was reasonably leveled for the control condition, implying a significant effect. However, while the recall task supported the hypothesis, it was found that the ethnically Malay group did not show to be influenced by musical fit. Yeoh & North (2010) believe this is due to enculturation, which might impose some form of a ceiling effect. On another note, they observed that musical fit may only occur to individuals who are not already very familiar with the products in question.

The notion of musical fit is not yet widely excepted, as some researchers doubt the validity of the research by Yeoh & North (2009). Brodsky (2009), for instance, believes there is a lack of ecological validity and reliability con-
cerning the methods employed in their study, and even claims that it might be politically fueled.

5.3 Perceived State

Department stores, eating establishments and other consumer dependent locations often extensively decorate their interior in a pleasing fashion. Some even chose for a specific which may either be permanently on show or season dependent. These decorations main goal is to attract as many consumers as possible, thus increasing sales. The way the interior is organised, can influences the individual in many different ways.

5.3.1 Atmosphere

Wilson (2003) studied the effect of different musical genres on the perceived atmosphere and the spendings of consumers in a restaurant. During a testing period of twelve days in a popular restaurant in Sydney, Australia, close to three-hundred consumers were exposed to either classical, popular, easy listening or jazz while they were consuming their dinner. A fifth condition, the no music condition, was used as control.

The results showed a significant influence, as both the valence of the perceived atmosphere and the amount of money that one was spending increased when the consumers were exposed to either classical, jazz and popular music. In contrast, both values were significantly lower in the absence of music and when easy listening was played.

These results confirm a study of Areni & Kim (1993), in which the effect of classical music on wine selection was tested. They found that consumers, whilst browsing, bought more expensive wines when they were exposed to classical music.
5.3.2 Evaluation

A study by Sweeney & Wyber (2002) set out to investigate whether background music could influence the evaluation of a consumer on service and merchandise quality. To this end, they performed an experiment which manipulated two characteristics of music, namely tempo and genre. The tempo was set to be either slow or fast and the genre would consist out of either classic or top forty music.

It was found that the musical valence was particularly related to service and merchandise quality, and additionally they found that it is also raised arousal. The music characteristics had an additional effect on pleasure and service quality, with both slow top forty and fast classical music having the most likely chance of effecting one’s evaluation.

Hui et al. (1995) studied the effect of background music and its specific characteristics on the impact of the physical environment in which a service
process takes place. This concept is known as the perceived servicescape and was developed by Areni & Kim (1993). According to Areni & Kim (1993), servicescape consists of three different dimensions: the ambient condition, the relation between space and function, and the signs and symbols used. Music was proposed to constitute an ambient condition that could influence the way consumers evaluated the servicescape.

During their experiments, Hui et al. (1995) exposed over a hundred undergraduate students to one of five auditory stimuli whilst watching an interactive video of a financial establishment. Afterwards, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire regarding their feeling towards the establishment. The results showed that the use of background music did ameliorate the perceived servicescape. Interestingly, the valence of the music did not seem to directly affect their evaluation significantly. It did, however, influence the mood of the individual, which in turn affected the perceived servicescape.

5.3.3 Time Perception

A consumer who has to wait a long time before receiving service is not likely to give high praise to the establishment. To investigate whether background music could have an affect on the perceived time duration of an individual, Kellaris & Kent (1992) and Hui et al. (1995) conducted a series of experiments.

Three levels of musical modality – major, minor and atonal – acted as independent variables in the experiments of Kellaris & Kent (1992). These variables were manipulated in an existing pop-style song. A hundred-and-fifty graduate students were then asked to listen to a twenty minute recording of one of the randomly selected conditions, after which they had to answer a questionnaire.

Their results showed compelling evidence that there was a significant effect of musical modality on the perceived duration. While the perceived
duration was overestimated across all conditions, it was found that the mean duration estimated was the greatest for the major conditions, followed by, respectively, the minor and the atonal condition.

The authors believe this difference arises from the allocation of greater cognitive resources that are needed to process the more pleasant and conventional-sounding music. In addition, they believe that the increase in perceived stimulus information leads to more information to be stored in one’s memory, thus making the event seem longer.

In addition to finding out whether music would be able to influence the perceived servicescape, as discussed previously, Hui et al. (1995) investigated the effect of music on the perceived wait duration and the emotional state of the individual during that wait.

The results, obtained from their experiments, indicated that the perceived wait duration is considered to be longer when the individual is exposed to background music, regardless of the genre. This effect was the strongest for positively valenced music. According to Webb (1994), however, this will only occur with familiar music while unfamiliar, but positively valenced, music would shorten the perceived wait duration. In contrast, Hui et al. (1995) reports that the tempo of the music does not seem to influence the perceived wait duration.

6 Conclusion

We began our journey through the fields of music, marketing and psychology by asking ourselves whether music – instrumental, vocal or a combination of the two – could influence everyday decision making and if it could, then how would it work?

First, we discussed the numerous dimensions of music, i.e. its character-
istics. As we went to see, a change in almost any one of these characteristics can alter the way we feel, be it, more positively or more negatively towards a subject. It can even influence how we feel about ourselves.

There is evidence that our behaviour can be affected. Mood, for instance, seemed to be very susceptible, such that uplifting music resulted in a more positive mood. In contrast, annoying music resulted in a less positive mood. It was believed that this effect is due to the popularity of the song, inviting us to remember pleasant thoughts.

Lyrics seemed to be very influential towards behaviour, as music with prosocial lyrics had a positive effect on one’s mood and empathy. Music with antisocial lyrics, however, had a negative effect on one’s mood and seemed to evoke violent thoughts. This effect was believed to be caused by the priming of certain thoughts that were associated with the contents of the lyrics. The effect dissipated relatively quickly after the stimulus has ended.

The influence of background music on the performance of cognitive tasks did not seem to be very strong. Whilst it was found that background music did evoke additional cortical activation, which was believed to be caused by some form of compensatory mechanism, there was little effect on the performance. Some argued whether this is genre or task dependent, as classical music did seem to increase performance significantly and being exposed to noise caused an increase in risk-taking behaviour and intertemporal decision making.

Non-cognitive tasks seemed to be influenced mostly positively by background auditory stimuli, as performance increased for noise and music without lyrics. However, the more cognitive parts of the test, such as accuracy, showed a slight decrease. It was believed that listening to music uses a different mental resource, thus preventing the need to reallocate one’s attention.

Lastly, we discussed how merchants and advertisers make use of this knowl-
edge to attract consumers.

There was evidence found that music can be used in a classical conditioning approach, although creating associations with just a single exposure was no longer unsupported.

A concept in the lines of recognition heuristics, called a ‘fit’, claimed that individual preferences could be influenced by contextual appropriate music. This concept was built upon that of priming and familiarity effects, but also worked when stereotypic or unambiguous music was used. It is not widely accepted however, as some researchers doubt the validity of the studies on this topic.

The influence of background music on the perceived state of an object, be it a product or a service, is studied extensively. There was evidence found that the perceived atmosphere of a location is strongly effected by the perceived valence and the genre of the music. Classical music, especially, seemed to influence individuals into spending more money. In addition, both the quality of the service and merchandise were evaluated more highly when consumers were exposed to positively valenced music. It was believed, however, that it mostly influenced one’s mood, which in turn resulted in a more positive evaluation. Furthermore, evidence was found that musical modality, its valence and its familiarity could all effect the perceived time duration, with familiar music increasing and unfamiliar, but positively valenced, music decreasing the perceived time duration.

6.1 Discussion

As we have seen, there is evidence for many aspects of music to influence one’s everyday decision making. There is, however, little agreement on this topic and often the results of a particular study seems to raise more questions than that it gives answers. Objectivity seems to be an issue in many experiments,
as the musical taste and mood of an individual is difficult to assess.

Whether society would benefit from research on this topic remains to be seen. On the one hand, it may aid in preventing violent behaviour or violent thoughts caused by certain types of music. It might even increase performance in all sorts of differing tasks. On the other hand, it gives a carte blanche to merchants, advertisers and all other individuals who seek to take advantage of our implicit selves.

That music can influence every one of us is certain. We all experience it on an day to day basis. But how far this effect can go and which musical characteristics are the strongest, is yet to be discovered.

References


