

# The impact of music in restaurants

A great soundtrack can enhance a restaurant experience, make guests stay longer and spend more. In this study, we wanted to find out just how much music matters.

Do you think the music you hear in a restaurant matters? And how much does it matter?

Interior design strategies are vital for any successful restaurant. Menus, lighting, seating layout, materials, and colors all combine to deliver a great customer experience and to bring the brand to life.

Of all sensory inputs, we respond quickest to sound. It's the sense that reaches the brain first and functions as an organizer for the rest of our senses. Whether we realize it or not, sound guides our choices every single moment.

So why are sounds and music so often overlooked as part of the design strategy? Mainly, it's because nobody has tested exactly how music that matches a brand influences sales, emotions, and guest experience.

Until now.

The difference in overall sales  
when playing music that  
matched the brand compared  
with playing randomly selected  
popular songs.

19%



# The biggest experiment of its kind.

Previous research\* has shown that music can influence sales and customer decisions. But technical constraints limited the size and scope of those studies and made it difficult to determine the exact impact music had on sales.

Surprisingly few studies have examined the business impact of in-store music that reflects a brand's values. And no earlier studies have looked at the impact of playing music by artists from outside the charts that nevertheless is a good fit for the brand.

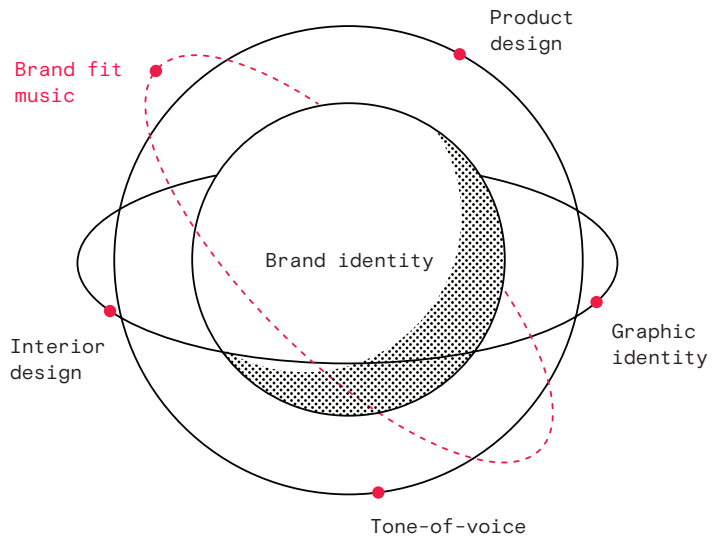
## **A system change**

Soundtrack Your Brand's streaming solution made it possible to schedule music across an unlimited number of locations. Now we could see precisely how music moved sales, second by second. This technology revolutionized how music is played and the way we can measure its impact.

## **A massive study**

This study, analyzing a pool of nearly two million purchases, is by far the biggest study on the subject to date. Researchers from The Swedish Retail Institute and Soundtrack Your Brand combined rigorous quantitative research with in-depth fieldwork research. Each method helped paint a picture of just how music moves sales, what effect brand fit music has on customer satisfaction, and what role song popularity plays.

\*Among others Milliman, 1982; Areni, 2003; Lammers, 2003; North et al., 2000 & 2003.



## What is brand fit music?

Studies show that music can have a significant impact on the brain and our behavior. Music mainly activates areas of the brain associated with emotion, motivation, planning and reward.

This study compared the effects of brand fit music and popular music.

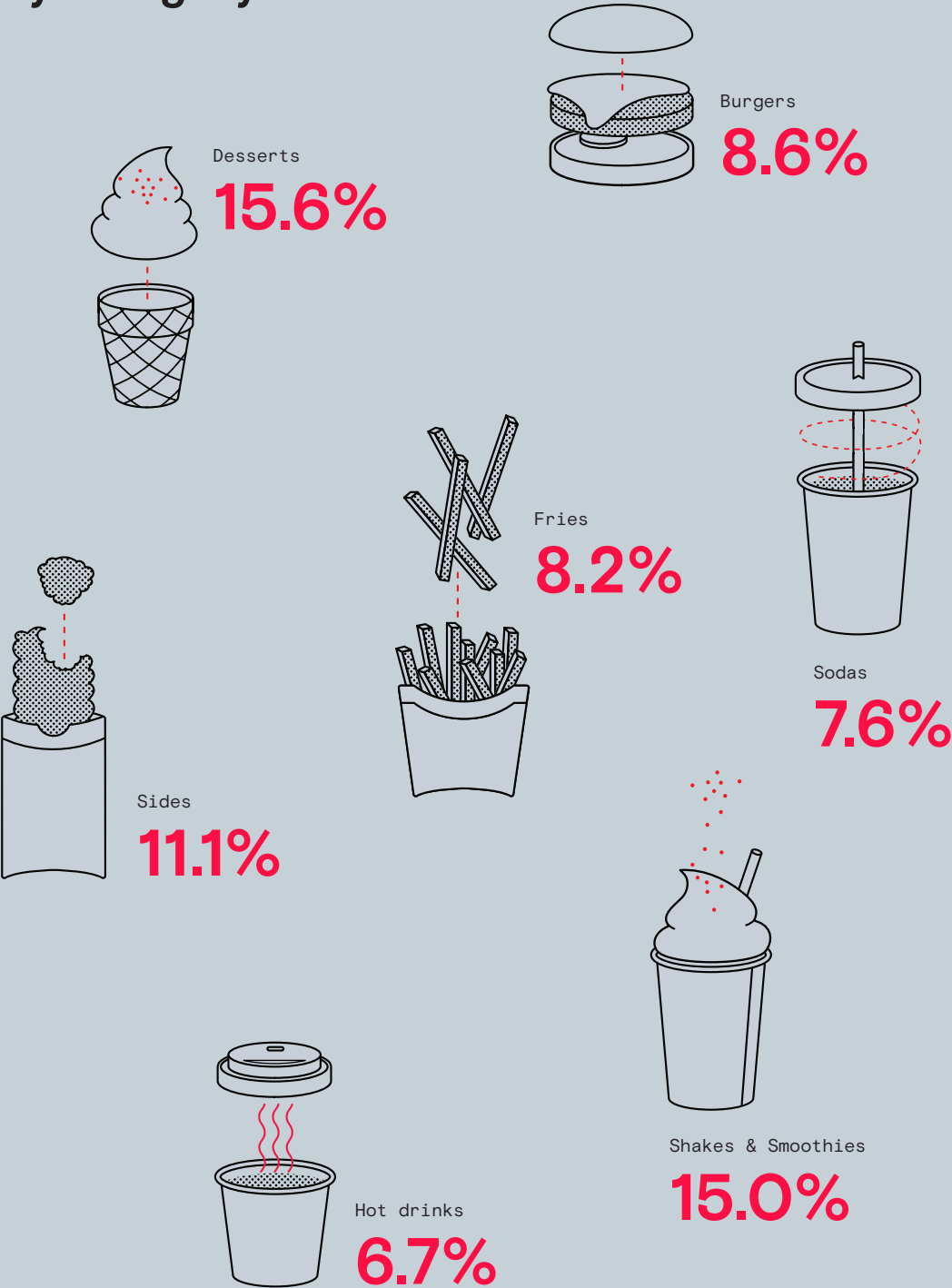
But what is brand fit music? Music with a strong brand fit matches the brand's personality. It's music that "feels" like the brand. In the same way that the chosen interiors, materials and lighting in a restaurant can evoke certain emotions, music can also play an integral part in how a brand is perceived. Because the sound is unique to the brand, it becomes ownable and helps a brand build stronger and longer lasting relationships with its customers.

Customer fit music, by contrast, is music that matches the customers' taste in music. But the more diverse the customer base is, the more difficult it becomes to develop a distinct sound that matches the full spectrum of musical preferences. An entirely diverse customer base yields a list of the most popular current songs across all genres – and as a consequence, this sound is not ownable.

1.8 million  
transactions.  
2,101 customer  
surveys.

This is the biggest study ever done anywhere in the world to  
look at the effects of music in commercial settings.

# Difference in sales by category.



# How the study was done.

To test our hypotheses, we packaged the music into four different playlists.

## **1) Brand fit A.**

Songs that fit the brand. Includes both songs from Spotify's top 1000 Sweden list and songs that are less well known.

## **2) Brand fit B.**

Songs that fit the brand. Includes only songs from Spotify's top 1000 Sweden list. Only well-known songs.

## **3) No brand fit.**

Songs randomly selected from Spotify's top 1000 Sweden list. Only well-known songs.

## **4) No music.**

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By comparing 1 with 2, we could study the effect of less popular music in the playlists.

By comparing 1 + 2 with 3, we could investigate how music that reflects the restaurants' brand values pushed sales.

By comparing 1 + 2 + 3 with 4, we could examine how much the mere presence of music moved sales.



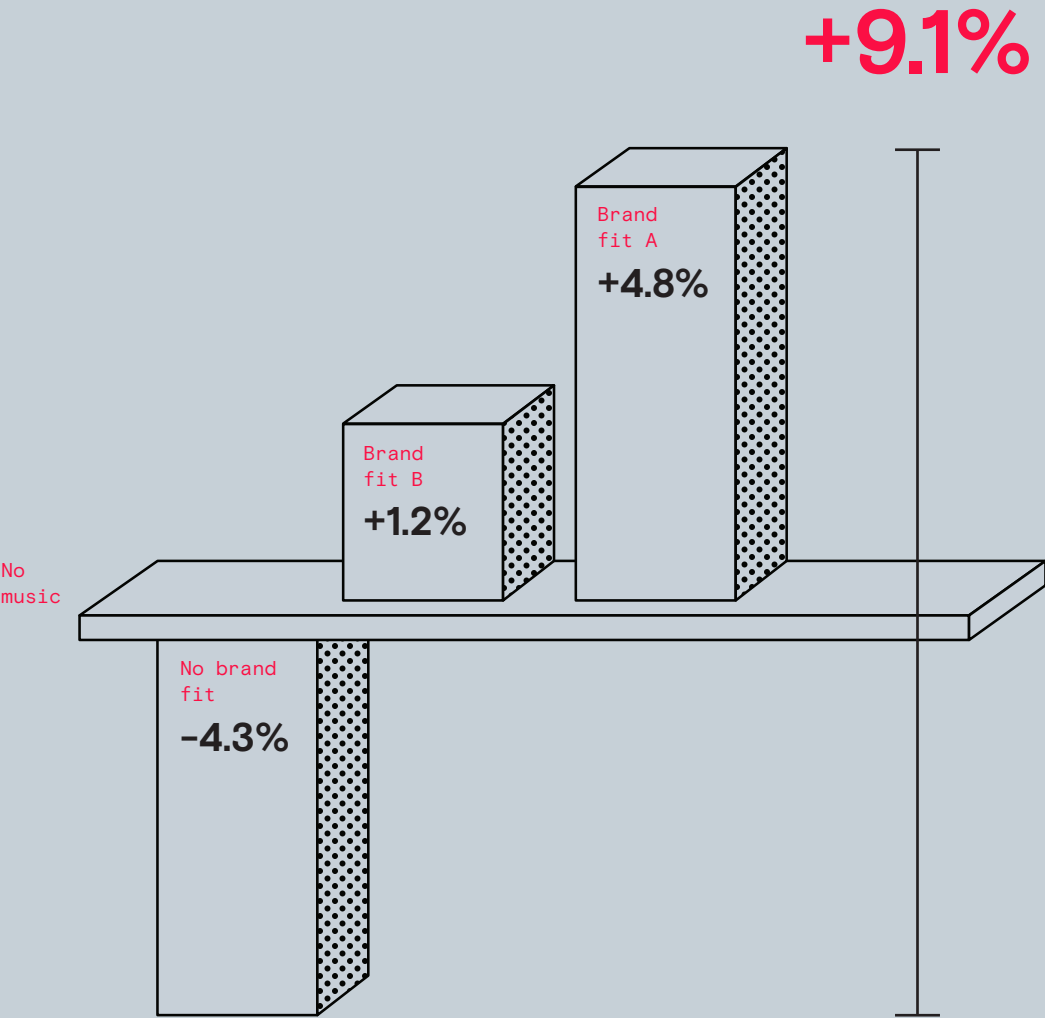
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Congruence  
between in-  
store music and  
brand values  
increased sales.

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Professor Sven-Olov Daunfeldt  
HUI Research

# How music affects sales.



Playing music that fits the brand makes guests more likely to buy additional items. In our experiment, dessert sales rose by more than 15%.


15.6%



# Findings.

The researchers set out to discover just how much brand fit music could influence consumer behavior and perceptions. Quite a lot, as it turned out.

- Playing music that reflects brand values makes a big difference in sales compared with playing random popular songs.
- Playing a mix of popular and less known songs that still have a good brand fit turns out to be a recipe for even higher sales.
- Playing music that has a good brand fit with the restaurants evokes a broad range of positive emotions among the customers.



Your senses collaborate to create a unified impression of your experience. People tend to think of sight first, but when it comes to designing for the senses, we respond just as strongly to sound. In fact, sound reaches the mind first, much quicker than touch or vision. Music is one of the most useful components in an efficient interior strategy.

# Statistically significant results.

The research team designed the qualitative part of the study using a so-called Latin Square. The point of the Latin Square is to block out random influences such as time and location-specific factors. During 20 weeks, we tested 16 restaurants, which yielded 2232 unique daily observations.

The method, combined with a difference-in-difference regression analysis, makes this the most robust study of its kind.

Pre data		Experiment period				Post data
11 Jan-7 Feb		8 Feb-28 Feb	29 Feb-20 Mar	21 Mar-10 Apr	11 Apr-1 May	2 May-29 May
Restaurant 1	Brand fit A	No music	No brand fit	Brand fit B	Brand fit A	Brand fit A
Restaurant 2						
Restaurant 3	Brand fit A	No brand fit	Brand fit B	Brand fit A	No music	Brand fit A
Restaurant 4						
Restaurant 5	Brand fit A	Brand fit B	Brand fit A	No music	No brand fit	Brand fit A
Restaurant 6						
Restaurant 7	Brand fit A	Brand fit A	No music	No brand fit	Brand fit B	Brand fit A
Restaurant 8						
Control Restaurant 1	Brand fit A	Brand fit A	Brand fit A	Brand fit A	Brand fit A	Brand fit A
Control Restaurant 2						
Control Restaurant 3						
Control Restaurant 4						
Control Restaurant 5						
Control Restaurant 6						
Control Restaurant 7						
Control Restaurant 8						



# Afterword.



When it comes to playing music in stores and restaurants, common sense suggests the perfectly reasonable idea is that one should play music that the patrons enjoy. However, our research shows that this approach often proves surprisingly ineffective as a way to increase sales.

Three years ago, researchers at HUI Research – the Swedish Institute of Retail – wanted to investigate if music that aligns with a brand’s values moves sales. Until then, researchers across the world had conducted smaller field studies on how music influences sales and customer perceptions. However, those studies had been limited to the effects of different music characteristics, such as tempo and music style.

We wanted to take a radically different approach – investigating how the congruence between music choice and brand values affects sales.

Earlier research suffered from technological restraints. Playing the exact same songs at the same time across many stores or restaurants was simply unfeasible. That’s when a startup called Soundtrack Your Brand knocked on our door and said they had the tools to help us conduct a much more extensive field study. And so we did. It’s the largest field research on the influence of music in restaurants to date, and the results were mind-boggling.

This field study is only the beginning. Soundtrack Your Brand’s streaming technology has opened the doors for even larger and more comprehensive research. Stay tuned, and keep listening.

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