

## Original Article

# Sonic branding: A consumer-oriented literature review

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**ABSTRACT** Because music holds a strong power over people, and its impact on consumers is relatively direct, it is invariably an interesting medium for marketers. Although Sonic Branding – branding with music and sound – has been seen as ‘the next big thing’ in branding toward consumers for about a decade, it is a scattered field still waiting for its breakthrough. Addressing this problem, the present consumer-oriented review of literature offers new insights on the consumer perspective’s role in Sonic Branding today, and provides implications for future marketing research and practice. The present article also suggests that there is need for using a common set of Sonic Branding concepts in order to unify the field. Further, the majority of businesses do not yet understand Sonic Branding as the uniquely consumer-oriented practice it has the potential to be. Understanding the way that consumers themselves use music is crucial to successful brand management in this area. However, for theorists and practitioners alike, the immediate challenge lies in developing those concepts and labels for Sonic Branding that will unite the field, and thereby increase its future impact.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sonic branding has gained strategic importance for strong brands (Graakjaer and Jantzen, 2009). ‘Sonic branding’ means branding with sound, for instance, with music (Jackson, 2003). Music affects consumers instantly – and it can be a powerful marketing tool – notably because of its ability to invoke nostalgic memories and

strong feelings related to these (for example, Fulberg, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Kilian, 2009). With technological development the use of music and sound in consumers’ lives has changed tremendously in the last two decades, and marketers have not yet adapted.

To fully understand the consumer perspective here, the developments in branding practice and mapping of related conceptions

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of sonic branding, as well as its history, provide useful background. The area of sonic branding is young, and as a consumer culture orientation it is still nascent. Today, an in-store focus permeates the literature, and the area of sonic branding is heavily practitioner oriented. The present article seeks to find the broader impact of the research on sonic branding practices as related to consumer research, in order to point the way to future theoretical avenues for this research area, and provide managerial advice. With the aim of mapping out the sonic branding area with a clear *consumer focus* – rather than a ‘music’ focus – the literature review includes theoretically driven research, empirically driven articles, as well as strategically focused practitioners’ perspectives on sonic branding and the consumer.

Since Brüner’s (1990) oft-cited review article of music in marketing, spanning 20 empirical articles on music and marketing, little has been done to create an overview of today’s research in this area. In the 1990s, the field of music in marketing was just beginning to take shape, and consumer psychology was pre-eminent in the area (Brüner, 1990). Although the present review will seek to begin to bridge this gap in the literature by focusing on the development of sonic branding as a research area since then, the main focus here will be research concerning the interface between music and brand from a combined consumer perspective and strategic branding perspective. Researching consumers’ placement in the sonic branding literature, the meanings that sonic branding efforts can create are highlighted focusing on consumers’ own experiences and not primarily on their subconscious reactions to music in-store (cf. Brüner, 1990)

The area of sonic branding is wide – covering such diverse topics as elevator music (Lanza, 2004), consumers’ behavior in a wine store depending on the kind of music playing (Areni and Kim, 1994),

branding strategy (Fulberg, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Treasure, 2007; Lusensky, 2010), sonic warfare (Goodman, 2009) and music’s versatility as a tool for identity management in people’s everyday life (DeNora, 2000). Yet, sonic branding is often treated more or less as a heterogeneous field by marketing researchers. The present article will contribute with a proposition regarding how to unite this as a research field. To begin to see some common traits in this scattered research area, the present literature review starts by going through the main labels and concepts used on the subject.

The present consumer research oriented review of literature on sonic branding in marketing is summarized, and labeled, in the following framework (see Table 1).

## SONIC BRANDING: LABELS AND CONCEPTS USED

A wide range of industries are using sonic branding strategies. The origins of sonic branding involves a seminal concept used in the literature: ‘Atmospherics’. This is Kotler’s (1973) description of what is also known today as ‘marketing of the senses’ (Hultén *et al*, 2008; Krishna, 2013), where marketing with music is one of the marketing strategies explored. This way of investigating music as one of several parts of the in-store ‘atmosphere’, or as speaking to one of the senses, highlights music’s role as part of a larger experience in-store that requires other parts as well (colors, textures, light, smell, taste) to be successful. These are a few examples of companies with internationally renowned brands using sonic branding strategies extensively: Absolut, Clarion Hotels, Coca-Cola, Mitsubishi, Heineken, SAS airlines, Oriflame (Lusensky, 2010), Starbucks (Dominus, 2006), and Nike (Fulberg, 2003). Just like the practice spans across diverse industries, the research field is scattered across disciplines and labels. In music research in marketing, it is common to treat

**Table 1:** Consumer research oriented overview of sonic branding in the literature

Literature	Sender	Medium	Receiver	Outcome
Sound studies	Technology	Sound	Listener	Reaction
CCT (qualitative methods)	company, consumer/prosumer	Music, sound, silence	Consumer	Consumption, co-production, meaning making
Music sociology	Artist, each person	Music, sound, silence	No 'receiver', only agents	Music as everyday practice and art
Strategic brand management/sonic branding	Company	Music, (silence), store, advertising	Consumer	Purchase, enhanced brand image, enhanced consumer-brand relationship
Consumer behavior (quantitative methods)	Company	Music, store	Consumer	Purchase

the following labels as more or less synonymous: 'brand sound, sound branding, corporate sound, sonic branding, acoustic branding, audio branding, and sound mark' (Kilian, 2009, p. 43), and it is not predominantly under the label of 'sonic branding' that the literature on the subject is to be found. The labels commonly used to describe music's presence in consumer society and especially its use in marketing are sonic branding, acoustic branding, audio branding, sound branding, branded sound, music branding, Muzak, elevator music, piped music, background music, foreground music, soundscape, audiovisual identity, sound studies and sonic design. Although the aim here is to review literature on 'sonic branding', this cannot be done without widening the concept to include these different labels. Taking a broad view of sonic branding, and including various strands of research on music in marketing in this way, the present literature review proposes to fuse all of the above mentioned concepts under the sonic branding label.

Because the term 'sonic branding' is the term most frequently used both in the strategic branding literature (Jackson, 2003) and in the field of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) as a description of how sound is made to interact with brands to create meaning (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1999), I chose to use sonic branding, rather than any other label, as the over all label in this consumer-centered article. Sonic branding has been suggested to increase brand 'loyalty' (Fulberg, 2003). Further, it has been defined as consisting of various 'elements' which all 'affect us emotionally and increase brand recognition, oftentimes beyond our awareness and our field of action' (Kilian, 2009, p. 36). Thus, it is defined as beneficial to brands, and as something that consumers often do not even consciously perceive of. This ability of branding with music and

sound to go virtually unnoticed, and still affect people, opens up widely for discussions about ethics and possible manipulation on the part of stores and brands (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008; Gustafsson, 2005). Interestingly, 'sonic branding' is one of the few concepts which includes music as well as other sounds in the label, as 'sonic' means 'relating to sound or using sound waves' and 'denoting or having a speed equal to that of sound' (Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2010).

The 'sonic branding' label, or concept, also makes an explicit connection to brands and branding, which seems useful because of the potential for future research on both music and sound in the branding area.

The mentioned labels are not consistently used between marketing researchers doing research in what I define here as the 'sonic branding' area. For instance, there is a more frequent use of the labels 'audio' and 'acoustic' branding in, for example, Nordic and German texts (see Bode, 2009; Kilian, 2009), whereas UK- and US-based writers seem to be using 'sonic' (for example Schroeder and Borgerson, 1999; Fulberg, 2003; Jackson, 2003) or 'sound' branding (for example, Treasure, 2007) to a greater extent. By way of comparison, 'audio branding' is defined as 'process of brand development and brand management by use of auditory elements (audio branding elements) within the framework of brand communication' (Audio-branding-academy.org, 2015). 'Acoustic branding' has thus been described as the 'process' by which it is carried out (*ibid.*). Thus, if 'audio' is the approach, 'acoustic' is the practice. However, the immediate difference between the two labels when reading articles about them is that practitioners prefer the term 'audio', and theorists prefer 'acoustic' branding, and they do not make any difference in whether this is about the approach or the practice (see Bode, 2009; Kilian, 2009). Generally, both these terms are also described as synonyms of 'sonic

branding'. Indeed, one or both of these concepts are often introduced together with sound branding and sonic branding when defining them: 'Audio branding – also known as sound branding or sonic branding – describes communication through sound, using brand sound elements like an audio logo, a brand song, or a brand voice' (Bronner and Hirt, 2009: p. 11). This kind of piling of the labels by mentioning them together seems to prompt the suggestion made in the present article: namely that a more coordinated use of the term 'sonic branding' would help unify the field and increase its impact on a wider audience. These various labels being used create confusion among those interested in learning more about the area. This confusion is unnecessary because there is in fact already a consensus among researchers about the synonymous meaning of these labels, as they are often mentioned together when defining the central concept.

In the CCT literature, sonic branding investigates consumer practices in relation to, for instance, consumer agency, identity and community (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Importantly, the role of the DJs as 'prosumer' of music has been a recurring sonic theme in CCT. DJs are seen as having a special role in music production and consumption because of their increasing power over what music consumers listen to. As a 'prosumer' the DJ becomes a looking glass through which music as combined production and consumption can be amply studied. The phenomenon of the prosumption of music carried out by the DJs indeed magnifies co-production issues compared with, for instance, the case of consumers making playlists for their personal MP3 players. However, possibly, the extent of the empirical and theoretical interest in 'the DJ', in the sonic branding literature can be explained further by the fact that several influential researchers and sonic branding consultants have had a career as DJs and/or

music producers in the past (Giesler and Pohlmann, 2003; Heitanen *et al*, 2010; Lusensky, 2010). In a recent article, Oakes *et al* (2013) propose jazz music as a branding tool that consumers can use to create their own meanings. Likewise transgressing boundaries between theory and practice, user and producer; Kubacki and Croft (2004) describe the divide between the arts and marketing practice as an ongoing moral struggle. While jazz and rock musicians see their influence on marketing practice, marketers tend instead to see only their own impact on the jazz and rock scene, they argue. Kubacki and Croft (2004) thus picture the arts versus commerce divide, which is at the basis of the sonic branding literature (Oakes *et al*, 2013), in a way that illustrates the dialectical nature of music creation in the business context. Importantly, a special issue in *Consumption Markets and Culture* (Bradshaw and Shankar, 2008) explores the boundary of consumption and production as applied to various music scenes, styles and uses. The special issue is ground breaking in the sense that it clearly marks out music as a site for interesting future research in consumer culture research.

In the guest edited special issue on 'The production and consumption of music' in *Consumption Markets and Culture* (Bradshaw and Shankar, 2008), the goal is to discuss and transcend the borders between production and consumption in music, inspired by music sociologist Attali's (1985) writings on the politics of music. The articles in the special issue covers a range of topics: the social and romantic role of the Jamaican dancehall (Olsen and Gould, 2008), the resisting potential of Tibetan music (Morcom, 2008), the role of anti-apartheid music as 'retro' today (Drewett, 2008), the role of jazz in film plots (Holbrook, 2008), and self-identity and music (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). The guest editors put forth a wish that these articles 'will contribute to wider discussions of music more generally within our

field' (Bradshaw and Shankar, 2008). This wish expresses the comparable newness of this kind of work on music in the field of CCT, by stressing the need for more studies and more diversity in consumer research on music, rather than proposing that a certain focus in the area would need more attention.

Another way to investigate music in marketing is to see it as primarily a memory device, in other words, studying music as 'mnemonics', rather than as a cue for the sense of hearing. Tom's (1990) marketing study of consumer responses to nine advertisements, with the brand name removed, suggests that original music in advertising is more effective as a memory device than parodies of songs (where the brand name has been included), or original recordings of hit songs. Van Dijck (2006) also investigates recorded music's role for both personal and collective memory processes and culture. Tempo (for example, Milliman, 1982, 1986) and perceived time in relation to type of music playing (Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990) have also received much attention. Consumers' reaction to background music, especially in terms of purchases made, is well researched in the literature on in-store music (see, for example, Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990).

Mapping the sound landscape to propose sonic branding strategies, Kilian (2009, p. 41) provides a 'typology of brand elements' where the sound is divided into two categories: 'narrowly defined' and 'broadly defined'. The narrowly defined ones are those that are made especially for that brand, like jingles and sound logos, whereas the broadly defined elements are those that come from collaborations and voices. While the typology is useful as a framework for discussion for practitioners and researchers alike, it could be made more functional if Kilian (2009) engaged in a discussion about how to use it. He presents a figure of the 'brand formation process', directed to

practitioners, but does not offer a discussion of the implications of the typology.

On a similar, although theoretically driven note, Bode (2009) is mapping out the workings of music depending on the context where it appears. He argues that music is a 'stimuli', and as such it cannot be extracted from its cultural context without becoming a hollow 'artifact' (ibid.). In the consumer-oriented sonic branding literature, Bode's (2009) review of music studies in advertising takes an important stand for interpretive research on music. Although Bode (2009) places this research in 'acoustic branding', he seems to be interested mainly in the interplay between music and images, rather than in music and brands. Further, Bode agrees with Adorno *et al's* (1970) tradition in which music is seen as an inevitably vague signifier – which basically means that the music gains meaning from its context/changes meaning depending on the context. In Bode's (2009) research this is a question of musical 'fit' with the ad context, and he makes an attempt to create a model that fuses music and cultural context in advertising. Bode's model of musical 'fit' is useful because it connects advertising to music, taking into account that *incoherence* between picture and music may very well be part of what creates meaning for consumers.

Like Bode (2009), Beverland *et al* (2006) investigate the concept of 'fit'; however, they connect it to brand values rather than ads. For a store to attract new consumers, they argue that a 'music-brand "fit"' is especially important. They define 'fit' as 'congruency between music and other atmospheric in-store variables ... and perceptions of the brand' (Beverland *et al*, 2006, p. 983). According to Beverland *et al* (2006), the reason why musical 'fit' and 'misfit' are important for consumers and brand managers is that the music can mediate the relationship between them in a number of ways depending on whether the

consumer perceives a 'fit' with the brand values or not. A perceived 'fit' can lead to a favorable experience of the brand and even increase consumers' brand loyalty, they suggest. A perceived 'misfit' could diminish the perceived status of the brand, or enable a brand to reposition itself. The methods used by Beverland *et al* include interviews with 20 consumers using projective techniques, probing about certain music. The empirical material represented by detailed quotes from the consumers (Beverland *et al*, 2006) suggests that consumers do consider, and react to, in-store music in relation to the way they perceive the brand in question. Thus, it is suggested that there is an important connection between a brand and its use of music, strategically toward consumers. Music's 'fit' or 'misfit' has got importance in consumers' meaning making with ads and in the store (Beverland *et al*, 2006; Bode, 2009). Sonic branding has the potential to fill the brand with meaning through the music, although the context needs to be taken into account when using music.

Social control through commercial or public use of music, and the related ethical considerations, emerges as another main concern in the literature (see, for example, Attali, 1985; DeNora, 2000; Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008). At the same time, it is widely argued that today's consumers are so used to sonic branding practices in-store that they have come to see it merely as 'background noise' (McGinn, 2002). In spite of this view of in-store music, however, McGinn (2002) sees sonic design as still holding largely unrealized possibilities for industrial design. She mentions Nokia's innovative use of ring tones, which were more thought through than the original 'ring' of a telephone, as a way to bring the sound and the industrial design together and include the user in a successful manner. Whereas McGinn (2002) champions the possibilities of sonic branding to achieve a connection between a sound and a brand,

she also sees sonic branding practices as verging on ‘coercion’ (p. 87). In other words, she considers the potentially manipulative aspect of corporate sonic branding practices problematic. While designers should explore the possibilities of sonic branding, they must also take their ‘responsibility’ regarding the power of music to affect people on a near subconscious level, McGinn (2002) argues. This is similar to DeNora’s (2000) and Bradshaw and Holbrook’s (2008) view of corporate power and the use of piped music, which will be discussed further in a later section, in relation to how music functions in people’s everyday lives.

### SONIC BRANDING: LISTENER VERSUS CONSUMER

Recently, it has been suggested that it would be hard to claim ‘sound’ as typical of the discipline of sound studies because it is key in many disciplines (Hilmes, 2005). ‘Sound studies’ is a field coming out of sociology, intersecting with anthropology and media studies, among other areas. Sound studies is primarily concerned with the relationship between sound and technology (for example, Pinch and Bijsterveld, 2004), sound and moving images – especially in the cinema (Coates, 2008). Although the recent book by Franinović and Serafin (2013) claim to introduce a new field of ‘Sonic Interaction Design’, the standpoint of their book is very similar to that of the sound studies field, centering on the role of objects and technology. Importantly, beside technology, sound studies is also concerned with ‘the listener’ – in other words – with how people have different capacities and various goals as listeners (see Perlman, 2004).

The most frequent topic in sound studies is the way technological innovations affect how people approach listening to music (Pinch and Bijsterveld, 2004). For instance, Kassabian (2013, 2008, p. 120) argues that it

is central that our ‘attention’ as listeners can vary – sometimes we are attentive listeners, and sometimes music combined with another medium (TV, a text, the computer screen) makes us ‘inattentive’ in one way or another. This research can also provide a valuable backdrop for further studies in consumer research, as it explores and conceptualizes aspects which are part of consumers’ day-to-day lives and affect the way they become listeners. In his recent book ‘Ubiquitous Listening’, Kassabian (2013) focuses especially on how people engage with the world through *constant* listening. Also focusing on people’s everyday experience with music, Kastner (2013) explores the sonic branding of spaces from both a strategic and conceptual point of view. She argues that what people want are environments where they feel at home – what she calls ‘Heimatklänge’ (Kastner, 2013, p. 168). She postulates that ‘the sound of feeling at home’ creates ‘trustful environments’, and that making this kind of environment is a strength of sonic branding. The *listener’s everyday experience* of music is at the heart of how researchers in sound studies, as well as sociologists, depict the soundscape of today.

Stemming primarily from sociology, sound studies do have many points in common with CCT within the Consumer Research field in Marketing (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Both fields take a meaning-based approach to consumer issues in a socially and culturally constructed world. However, researchers in CCT tend to take the consumer point of view, focusing on *how the consumer perceives of and co-constructs, different phenomena* (for example, brands, music, ads and so on), whereas sound studies tend to focus more on the phenomenon itself (for example, music in movies, music technology and so on) than on the consumer or person relating to the phenomenon. As we have seen above, when focusing on the consumers, sound studies labels them ‘listeners’. For a deeper

comparison of the various perspectives on sonic branding, I will go into sonic branding in CCT and consumer research in more detail in the section on 'Perspectives', below.

## SONIC BRANDING: PERSPECTIVES

Perspectives on music and branding in the area of sonic branding can be usefully described as *polarized*. Generally, sonic branding is depicted as either a strategic tool that opens up for new possibilities for marketers (for example, Kilian, 2009), or a power tool used to steer consumers in the retail setting (for example, Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008). Another prominent tension between perspectives in sonic branding is that between the psychological perspective and the CCT perspective. Although both perspectives investigate consumer behavior, the psychological perspective caters more clearly to the corporations, whereas the CCT perspective is generally more critical toward power structures guiding consumers (see, for example, Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008), or exploring the potential role and impact of music in consumers' lives (Giesler and Schroeder, 2006).

In consumer research, Bradshaw *et al* (2006) investigate what it means to musicians that the scene space is branded whenever they play at festivals. Like Schroeder and Borgerson (2002) who explore the relationship between art and commerce in the Italian Renaissance art scene/market, they aim to shed new light on whether there is tension or conflict between music as an art performance and commerce – here in terms of brands as highly visible sponsors in the space of festivals and concerts (Bradshaw *et al*, 2006). They find that it is not necessarily so that brands occupy the space of the art and steal meaning from culture. Rather, several artists believed that they gained as artists from the collaboration with the brands, becoming more 'hip' because there is a brand that wants to sponsor them.

This is of course partly what the brands are hoping to achieve in such collaborations (Dominus, 2006). Bradshaw *et al* (2006) point out that this result is in line with previous research (for example, Brown, 2005, Schroeder, 2005), as well as anti-globalization claims (for example, Klein, 2000), arguing that marketers and artists often have the very same goals and strategies. Sonic branding and music production have many elements in common, although sonic branding is first and foremost driven by the market, rather than by artistic preferences and creativity.

On a similar note as Bradshaw *et al* (2006) asking whether there really is a tension between music as cultural expression and commerce such as branding with music, Scherzinger (2005) suggests that music is political even when it is driven by capitalism. He argues that music produced and/or used for commercial purposes have been seen as de-politicized merely because they are commercial messages. Following Horkheimer and Adorno (1997) he argues that there is a problem with the music helping to communicate a commercial and political message of agency as something that *only* occurs in terms of being a consumer. This is a contested view of the post-modern consumer that has been discussed and rejected by brand researchers. Notably, Holt (2002) rejected the notion in favor of a view of brands as something that is created in a dialectical process between brand managers, consumers and branding paradigms. Thus, the consumer is seen as having agency not only as buyer and user of a product or brand, but as producer of cultural material in the process (Holt, 2002). This process is similar to the previously described relationship between art and commerce (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2002; Brown, 2005; Bradshaw *et al*, 2006) where the two gain from one another rather than overshadow and destroy one another. Thus, whereas some researchers (for example, Scherzinger,



2005) are worried that commerce will destroy music for consumers by making it a political vehicle for turning society into a *consumer* society, other researchers in sonic branding have moved beyond this to explore *how* the intermingling of art and commerce is working in the present consumer society where brands and music are powerful cultural expressions.

In sum, the main conflicts in the sonic branding literature center on differences in the view of the consumer's role in relation to music – in other words, of (i) The power of music in relation to consumers, and (ii) The power of *branded/commercialized* music in relation to the consumer. This means that the conflicting perspectives are about how to act when music lends itself to being used by actors, such as companies, with the intent of affecting consumers to perceive of a brand in a certain way. Before I discuss the research on these perspectives (that is, music's function for companies and its function for consumers, respectively) in more detail, I will discuss the history of sonic branding, below, to map out the general historical context of this literature.

## SONIC BRANDING: HISTORY

In practice, sonic branding is inevitably connected to trademarks (see McCormick, 2006). McCormick (2006) describes the development of legal protection of sounds used in branding. He reminds us that sound in advertising goes back to when electronics was first introduced in the media, stressing the example of the lion roaring at the beginning of every MGM film. Although brands have been using sounds for as long as the technology has existed, they have only recently started to trademark their sounds, McCormick suggests. Because the previous sounds mainly were jingles – original songs that incorporated the brand name – they were already protected by copyright. However, the newer use of sounds and

music are not always as distinct. Although there is a need to trademark, these sounds often lack the distinctiveness that trademarks laws ask of a sound that is to be registered. In other words, it is not enough for brands to create a sound that is different from that of competitors, it must also be distinctive enough for the legal system to allow it to be trademarked (McCormick, 2006). In spite of sonic branding's long history, we are only beginning to copyright sounds (*ibid.*) – so this is one area in which sonic branding may still develop much as a practice.

The sonic branding research tradition is usually seen to have started with Milliman's article in 1982 on music tempo in a restaurant and then to have gained in interest as a research area in marketing in the early 1990s with Scott's seminal article on jingles and advertising images (Scott, 1990). Further, Yalch and Spangenberg's (1990) article about consumer's perceptions of background and foreground music in a clothes store was a relatively early contribution to this new research area. Soon, Kellaris and Kent (1992) examined consumers' perception of time from a psychological perspective. Their findings suggest that consumers perceive that time moves more slowly when listening to favored music, as compared with faster when listening to atonal music. As Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008) point out, although these findings have been cited frequently, the notion that time would move faster when listening to atonal music compared with favored music does run counter to common sense – a claim that makes these early findings debatable today.

The psychological approach to music in marketing research thus set the agenda in this research area during the 1980s to early 1990s (for example, Milliman, 1982, 1986; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990; Macinnis and Park, 1991; Kellaris and Kent, 1992; Areni and Kim, 1994). However, following such articles as Scott (1990) about the

meaning of jingles in advertising, stressing that the interpretation of music is culturally and personally constituted, research on music in marketing later shifted to a more holistic approach. Shortly after Scott (1990), Bitner's (1992) 'servicescapes' stressed the role of music for 'physical comfort' in a retail setting, fueling the qualitative approach to sonic branding. Bitner (1992) argues that all stimuli are eventually evaluated together – meaning that consumers do not evaluate a servicescape based on only one factor – several stimuli are evaluated at the same time. Noise and music are background /ambient conditions and can for instance affect perceptions of time (Bitner, 1992). In later years, there has been a boom in marketing text books about in-store 'marketing of the senses' (see, for example, Hultén *et al*, 2008), an extension of what Kotler, already in 1973, called 'atmospherics'. In other words, this means using sound, smell, taste, touch and sight strategically as opportunities for marketers to target.

Although music has existed as a part of the retail experience long before sonic branding, music has not been fully exploited as a means of strengthening and communicating the brand identity, according to Jackson (2003). He argues that sonic branding began in the 1980s with the way radio was operating at the time and started booming in the mid-late 1990s while the Internet bubble was growing and was still growing in 2003. In recent strategic literature, the setting up of the experience in the store is centered on – rather than the consumer's experience of it.

Surely, the depiction of the history of sonic branding depends on whether the brand, the consumer, the servicescape or the music is in focus. Before the 2000s, the listener or consumer *per se* was seldom the focus of any sonic branding research – rather the effect or outcome of the use of music was in focus. In the following section, I will discuss how brands have been depicted when in

the strategic focus in this kind of research. It is remarkable that corporate strategy and consumers' everyday lives are treated as completely separate spheres, without a common denominator, in the existing strategic literature. There is no real interest in the consumers' agenda, which is paradoxically something that the other research strands reviewed here tend to focus on.

## SONIC BRANDING: FUNCTIONS FOR COMPANIES AND BRANDS

Companies can take advantage of sonic branding strategically when building their brand (Treasure, 2007). Sonic branding's functions for companies and brands, which are championed in the literature, include increasing consumer loyalty to the brand (Fulberg, 2003), making the brand a retail experience (*ibid.*) and using the music to tell the story of the brand (Westermann, 2008). Sonic branding can be used by companies as a social power tool steering consumers in a certain direction or inspiring a certain pace in-store (for example, DeNora, 2000; Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008). Accordingly, some researchers suggest the coercive use of music in public places and stores, and the power struggle this use of music can give rise to, whereas others focus solely on managerial possibilities. There is clearly a division in the literature regarding whether sonic branding is to be recommended as a marketing tool or not. Yet another research strand stresses that sonic branding has been a last minute finishing touch in most cases until very recently, meaning that in most cases it has not been used to its full potential yet (Graakjaer and Jantzen, 2009).

Jackson (2003) argues that 'sonic branding' will succeed in involving brand identity and make the brand consistent independently of where the consumer encounters it (through an event, TV, retail environment and so on.). Although music has been part of the retail experience for a long time, it

has not played that role to its fullest before sonic branding (Jackson, 2003, p. 7). The strategic part of sonic branding has been neglected, whereas the creative part has taken precedence through the years, he argues. However, there is no reason to reject the jingle – jingles are useful because they work as ‘mnemonics’ and do help consumers remember the brand. Accordingly, in Jackson’s (2003, p. 9) definition: ‘A jingle is a short slogan, verse or tune designed to be easily remembered’. Jackson’s sonic branding model emphasizes emotions, ‘trust and belief in the brand, and the ‘touchpoints’ – the various instances where consumers encounter the brand. Jackson’s (2003) main argument is that companies need a ‘consistent’ connection between brand and sound. However, considering the complexity of, for instance, musical ‘fit’ (Bode, 2009), the emphasis on consistency of the brand strategy literature seems limiting. There may be a fine line between consistency between brand and music, and the repetitiveness of cautiously fine-tuned use of music that is believed to suit the brand. In fact, music that appears to contrast the brand may seem just as relevant to consumers (Bode, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, the interplay between music and images is much discussed in the literature (Pinch and Bijsterveld, 2004; Bode, 2009). Further, managers do not know how to measure the effects of the music/sonic branding efforts, but they still want to measure it (Graakjaer and Jantzen, 2009). Music has been marginalized in the process – images and the brand traditionally get more attention (ibid.). Lately, however, companies increasingly turn to sonic branding specialists, and this means that the strategic importance of understanding music in advertising is increasing (Graakjaer and Jantzen, 2009). The sonic branding consultants repeatedly depict sonic branding as an important success factor which has been overlooked by the industry (Kusatz, 2007;

Treasure, 2007; Lusensky, 2010) – the latter having neglected music’s role in the process of creating advertising and brand image by contacting sound agencies late in the process, and having already spent most of the budget on the visual elements (see, for example, Wand, 2009).

In contrast to this alleged practice of the advertising business as a whole to start with the visual and add the sound in the final stages, sonic branding agencies tend to emphasize that they master the entire process (Kusatz, 2007). Thus, there is a tendency in this literature to elevate sound and music in branding to something that is not only generally misunderstood, but also as something which *should be understood as a strategy*. For example, Treasure (2007) relates music to silence and noise, saying that silence is not the opposite of sound because silence is a sound in itself and can be experienced as such. In other words, everything is sound (Treasure, 2007). Having a strategy about sound then seems absolutely necessary. Westermann (2008) points out that people cannot avert their hearing as easily as they can avert their eyes – in this way, a sonic message can be more effective than a visual message, but also more intrusive.

In the article ‘Using music to influence cognitive and affective response in queues of low and high crowd density’, Oakes and North (2008) investigated how crowd density affected consumers’ response to music. They found that slow-tempo music gave more positive responses over all. Further, in low crowd density, music enhanced the experience of waiting, whereas in high crowd density, it did the opposite. Not surprisingly, they also found that liking the music helped people feel more positive about the wait (Oakes and North, 2008). In a recent lab experiment, Vijaykumar *et al* (2012) found that the number of tones in a sonic logo (they call it ‘sogo’) influences willingness to pay. In other words, this kind of research treats sound as providing

subconscious information for consumers, believing that this information affects the outcome in terms of the purchase. Other psychology-oriented studies of later years include Crisinel *et al* (2012), who conducted an experiment manipulating the pitch of the music while serving toffee to respondents and tracking how the perceived taste of the toffee changed with the music. Similarly using an experiment, French social psychologist Guéguen famously found that very loud music in bars make beer drinkers drink more beer, and drink it faster (Guéguen *et al*, 2008). These two studies also imply that it is a subconscious response to music that the experiments are aimed at mapping out.

Summing up this section, the possibilities of sonic branding to communicate the brand in commercial settings are championed, and considered vastly under-realized, by brand researchers today in the managerial literature reviewed. Managerial implications based on empirical studies are non-existent in the sonic branding literature today – instead, the managerial implications are based on the writers' own experiences of the sonic branding business as managers in sonic branding agencies (for example, Fulberg, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Treasure, 2007; Graakjaer and Jantzen, 2009; Kilian, 2009; Lusensky, 2010) or on interviews with managers (in Graakjaer and Jantzen, 2009). Thus, a strong academic research area has yet to take form around these strategic issues. A conceptually oriented approach is taken by quantitative studies in consumer research, proposing that sonic branding is mostly operating on a subconscious level that can be tapped into by marketers (for example, Oakes and North, 2008; Crisinel *et al*, 2012; Vijaykumar *et al*, 2012).

## **SONIC BRANDING: FUNCTION IN CONSUMERS' LIVES**

In this section, I will discuss how the literature depicts the function of sonic branding

in consumers' lives. First, I will introduce those that are extensively dealt with and then I will discuss some aspects that are underdeveloped in the literature. People find music interesting because we do not know how music works (Treasure, 2007). The brand becomes a retail experience through the use of music (Fulberg, 2003). Some argue that music even makes people do things they would not otherwise do, because of a subconscious reaction to the music – like moving faster or slower through a store (for example, Milliman, 1982; Kellaris and Kent, 1992). Others take this approach further, arguing that the brand can lead the consumer as a social power tool that they are partly unaware of and therefore will find it hard to escape or protect themselves from (for example, DeNora, 2000; Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008). Music is often treated as noise (see Attali, 1985; McGinn, 2002), or from a contrasting viewpoint, as having to do with a certain experience (for example, Treasure, 2007; Hultén *et al*, 2008; Kilian, 2009). How music is treated is largely depending on the view taken on whether the music is seen as *mainly* something concerning the consumer, the technology or a strategic asset for the company.

Seeing sonic branding from the viewpoint of the consumer/user, 'contexts of use' are crucial when researching music, according to music sociologist DeNora (2000). It is necessary to investigate music in practice – how people actually go about using music in their everyday lives – in order to present a sociology of music, she argues. DeNora thus examines ethnographically how people use music when exercising, eating, being at home, traveling and so on. She finds that people use music, for instance, to express anger in a ritualized way, to construct and communicate something about their identities, or to help them push themselves to exercise harder. In conclusion, DeNora (2000) finds that music is vitalizing – it is here and now – music has

power which is connected with entrainment (that is, when the body works largely unconsciously or subconsciously in tune with the music). Music is also a power tool in public space, DeNora argues. Music is a practice – we act to and with music and this means that music is not something which is ‘done’ to us. When music is played in public spaces – because consumers cannot easily avert their hearing there (Westermann, 2008), they will act/react in some way to it – humming to the music, or maybe leave, and so on. (DeNora, 2000).

DeNora (2000) and the music researchers in CCT have been inspired by Attali (1985), who sees music as ‘the organization of noise’. That organization is, in turn, seen as a political, social and cultural process. Thus, society can be theorized through music (*ibid.*). Attali suggests the power that music has in forging relationships is in the pleasure that two people can take in the same music. Further, in Attali’s view pleasure in the music will be taken to its extreme, catering to people’s ‘narcissistic’ side, now that people can record their own images and ‘noise’, ‘composing’ their own music and images about themselves (Attali, 1985, p. 144). Composition can make us see ourselves, our relationships as well as our history in a new light (*ibid.*). That is, when the consumers become producers of music, another dimension is added to the power that music holds for them in their everyday lives. We all become our own DJs in our everyday lives, constructing soundtracks for ourselves and lists of music – thus reconstructing our view of ourselves (Attali, 1985). In other words, music is now available for consumers today in their everyday lives, and they use it to create and re-create themselves.

Like music sociology, sonic branding research in CCT focuses on the cultural practices of consumers in their music consumption and production. New light is shed on, for instance, the famous musicians’ own perspective of how their creation of music

as artists relates to current marketing campaigns based on music performance (Bradshaw *et al*, 2005). Another interesting CCT oriented study concerns how DJs and technology interplay in their creation of music – by calling the DJs ‘sonic cyborgs’ Giesler and Schroeder bring to the fore that the DJs become one with their technology in the process of mixing, sampling and pitching the music. Giesler and Schroeder (2006) argue that the DJ as a ‘sonic cyborg’ makes consumers of music shift from history to the present by using music in a new way, one that only exists in that moment (*cf.* Attali, 1985). The CCT perspective on music consumption differs from the sound studies perspective, as well as the strategic brand management perspective, because of how it centers on the consumers’ creating music, and making it meaningful, rather than music’s being made and played for consumers to create an effect.

There is a strong critical perspective in CCT (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008) and in sonic literature (Attali, 1985; DeNora, 2000) arguing that music in public places is used as a form of social control. Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008) fiercely oppose Muzak and other piped music in stores. They suggest that forcing consumers to listen to certain music goes against the CCT view of consumers as active agents co-producing culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), instead taking their freedom and treating them as ‘passive dupes’ (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008, p. 36). In other words, Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008, p. 26) argue that in-store background music is a sort of manipulation and ‘a means of social control’ created by marketers alone, rather than a part of consumer culture created with consumers’ involvement. Further, they claim that Muzak ‘de-aesthetizes’ music (2008, p. 31). The authors argue that the lack of critical response by consumers to Muzak in servicescapes and advertising suggests that Muzak lacks a meaningful basis in consumer

culture. Further, they see Muzak as an insult to professional musicians and ruining artistry in the name of capitalism (*ibid.*). Their perspective is interesting because it makes problematic some of the more or less taken for granted aspects of the interaction between consumers and in-store background music, such as the lack of choice between music and 'no music' when shopping. What makes it important to be attentive to the use of sonic branding and in-store background music is not only the way that this music can be unaesthetic – there are also implications because of how we listen to music. DeNora (2000) points out that music works as an efficient trigger for our memories and nostalgia (Tom, 1990; van Dijck, 2006). Because of this, music used in advertising can have a very strong effect (DeNora, 2000; Barnet, 2001). Connected to music's role for emotional ties – based on three case studies from Australia, Murphy *et al* (2013) stress the importance of building relationships through music, claiming that brand communities and emotional ties with a brand play important roles in people's lives today.

Another critical perspective on music in CCT is about who controls the output of music (see, for example, Giesler and Pohlmann, 2003). Giesler and Pohlmann (2003, p. 94) argue that the control of music through online-music sharing platforms like Napster represents a way of socially taking control of the music by individualizing the choice available and not caring about copyright, and in that process being emancipated socially. Thus, it is suggested that who is in control of the music is of importance to what the music enables the consumer to accomplish through the music (*ibid.*). On that note, discussions about copyright of music have been prevalent in later years. However, the present article will not extend on that literature, as it brings up a set of completely different parameters by fundamentally questioning what the market is

and should be (see, for example, Giesler and Pohlmann, 2003).

In a literature review on music in geology research, Hudson (2006, p. 626) states that music can create 'powerful images of place, feeling of deep attachment to place', and suggests that there is a lack of analytic and conceptually rich research on music and place in his research field. Place branding through music in the field of CCT also seems a fruitful future research area because place generally provides an important marketing opportunity. This has already been explored as far as the 'retail' space, the elevator, the pains of in-store piped music and sonic branding of place (see Schroeder and Borgerson, 2002; Borgerson and Schroeder, 2003; Fulberg, 2003; Lanza, 2004; Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008). Research on sonic branding of specific places and spaces could be of large interest because it can provide rich material concerning what a place means to consumers in relation to the music that brands it, as well as concerning how place branding can be implemented by way of sound (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1999; Hudson, 2006). Further, the way that music can evoke a feeling of the 'past' which might enhance the brand experience for cultural reasons (Wu *et al*, 2013) is underdeveloped in the existing literature – there is much left to explore about the connection between music, the brand and a general sense of the past – a cultural nostalgia.

The critical perspective on sonic branding is a recent one. Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008) and DeNora (2000) argue that there are potential problems with the increasing number of spaces that are filled with music or noise and perhaps also branded. Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008) suggest that silence is a good alternative, especially as no positive correlation between the use of in-store music and the amount of shopping has been found so far. A strategic perspective on music, sound – and silence – should be integral to any practice of sonic branding.

In the next section, I will suggest some future directions for practice and research based on the present literature review.

## **SONIC BRANDING: FUTURE**

In conclusion, the present article has contributed a consumer-oriented review of the sonic branding literature, and provided an overview of the attitude toward the consumer in these presented writings (Table 1) for the benefit of brand management research and practice. The framework of this article, as clarified in Table 1, points out that the field has multiple approaches to the consumer of music (for example, as listener, consumer or agent) as well as to the outcome of sonic branding approaches (purchase, co-production, and so on). As a result of the present research, this review article calls for a clearer theoretical approach to sonic branding as an area of study in the future, because when the approach to the consumer and the outcome of sonic branding varies across the involved disciplines (for example, sound studies, CCT, music sociology, strategic brand management, and consumer behavior) the field needs to at least have the main concept in common in order to function and move forward as a research field. In other words, this needs to be done in order to bring sonic branding to the fore as a strategically strong research area in branding and not merely a set of promising disparate strands of research efforts. The research in this area needs to create a common 'umbrella' brand for itself – and it is suggested that the label used should be 'Sonic Branding' because this term has several advantages compared with the other labels that are currently used synonymously. In addition, 'timbre', 'sound', 'tempo' and 'beat' – the music terminology – needs to be made problematic from a sonic branding perspective (Treasure, 2007) because researchers, managers and practitioners need to share the music language (Fulberg, 2003).

This needs to be done in order to be able to exchange experiences, and form a more influential field united around a common set of concepts.

Because sonic branding practices are often perceived as manipulative by consumers, there is reason for the industry to reclaim the use of music and sound as a shared interest between consumers and companies, as something which benefits both consumer and brand. This can be done by using the sociological perspective as an inspiration for developing sonic branding efforts, for instance using consumer panels to get close to the consumers' own ways of using music to be able to work harder, or to experience entrainment in the brandscape (Bitner, 1992; DeNora, 2000). The brands that use sonic branding in this manner will stand out and receive goodwill, if only because the majority of businesses do not yet understand sonic branding as a consumer-oriented practice where the consumer is always invited to contribute and take part.

Importantly, the present review also reveals that the 'branding' part of 'sonic branding' is underdeveloped in the literature, whereas the 'sonic' part is focused in the lion part of the available research. I suggest that this conclusion opens up for new kinds of research in the field, focusing firstly on the 'branding' part, to give it more prominence in each instance of research. In that vein, it would be fruitful to further investigate the question of exactly how the brand is connected to music in consumers' everyday lives. Through the use of qualitative methods like those of DeNora (2000) both physical and symbolic consumer uses can be explored further (see also, for example, Hogg and Banister, 2000; Larsen *et al.*, 2010, about consumers' *symbolic* use of music). The main challenge for practitioners, based on the present framework, is to claim sonic branding as truly *strategic* and at the same time rooted in the role

of consumers in the ever-changing sonic construction of the brand's culture. When sonic branding initiatives fail to be strategic, and fail to connect to authentic consumer practices around music, its critics will remain strong. However, for theorists and practitioners alike, the immediate challenge lies in developing those concepts and labels for sonic branding that will unite the field, and thereby increase its future impact.

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