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Can background music move you (to spend?)

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Music can cheer you up. It can soothe your nerves. It can invigorate your body.

And it can make you open your wallet.

Background music, experts say, stimulates the brain in different ways. When you walk into a business where there's music playing, your brain might react to the song subconsciously, making you spend more money, exercise harder, feel more relaxed and so on.

Scientific research shows that different sounds excite different parts of the brain and prompt certain behaviors, says author Vicki Kunkel, of Naperville, who has researched this topic extensively for her persuasion enhancement company.

Up-tempo music revs up the brain's impulsive and adventurous feelings, while slow tempo music activates the emotional part of the brain, Kunkel said.

In other words, the light rock music in the grocery store stirs emotions, prompting emotional eaters to put more food in their carts. Dance music in restaurants leads customers to spend less on the food but to eat faster, Kunkel said.

"Companies spend very big bucks - on what types of sounds and music activate this behavior. It's kind of scary in a way. We're not aware of it. It's very subconscious," Kunkel said. "Music doesn't just influence our buying behavior, but it also perceives how we view the quality of the service. Slow pop music and fast classical selections make consumers think the merchandise and quality are better."

Even stores like Abercrombie & Fitch and Hollister blast music out of their stores for a reason (company representatives declined to be interviewed). Teenagers tend to spend more money when their body can feel the music rather than just hear it, Kunkel said.

"The purpose is not to engage you in the song. They want the music to activate the parts of the brain that get you to engage in the types of behavior they want," said Kunkel, whose latest book, "The 8 Primal Factors That Create Blockbuster Success" is due out in November.

The Fitness Formula health club chain not only buys preprogrammed music for its lobby, locker room, workout room and spa areas, but also purchases matching scents.

"You have different sensory experiences in the spa and the locker room," said Fitness Formula owner Gale Landers. "It's a whole integrated brand experience."

The philosophy about music is slightly different at the Monarch Landing retirement community in Naperville. There, the music takes you down memory lane. That helps put the 260 residents -- and visitors -- in a happy mood.

"It's music that they associate with good times," said Greg Mruminski, the director of sales and marketing.

There are other benefits to good background music. At Chipotle, the mix of world music prompts customers to ask "What's playing?" and gives the chain restaurant a unique feel, says Bari Baskin, the company's regional marketing consultant.

"We don't want to play the same music that everybody else plays," she said.

Chipotle

Locations: 56 Chicago-area restaurants

Theme: World music

Playlist created by: In-house staff

Music available for purchase? No, but some of it streams at chipotle.com

Massage Envy

Locations: Geneva, Wheeling, Glen Ellyn, Lake Zurich and South Elgin

Theme: Music that "transports" the listener. Each song is 15-20 minutes long.

Playlist created by: At Peace Media

Music available for purchase? Yes, at atpeacemusic.com

Michael Benghiat, "Sacred Space," "Dreams," "Cascades," "Travels" "Meditation"

Emil Gagliardi, "A New Beginning"

James Mikael, "Song of Universal Love"

Native Flute Ensemble, "Sacred Renewal"

David Feder, "The Ride"

Jay Yarnall, "Slow Moon"

Eliana Gilad, "Child"

Monarch Landing retirement community

Location: Naperville

Theme: Music associated with good times

Playlist created by: The staff, using residents' input

Music available for purchase? No

Glen Miller, "In the Mood"

Benny Goodman, "Begin the Beguine"

Artie Shaw, "S' Wonderful"