

Dissertation Proposal

Research in Practice

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Memory, Music & Colors*

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Memory, Music, and Colors in Branding

An Independent Research Project

In today's world, where brands compete for consumer attention through a multitude of stimuli, building a strong brand identity goes beyond visual and textual elements. Multisensory experiences have become an essential tool, allowing a brand to differentiate itself, connect with its audience, and persist in collective memory. In this context, sound emerges as a powerful element that, far from being a mere complement, plays a leading role in creating emotional relationships and conveying core values.

This paper explores three key concepts: Memory, Music, and Colors. Each section analyzes how these elements interact to shape brand perception. Memory—the ability to encode, store, and retrieve information—becomes the vessel in which experiences linked to auditory stimuli are recorded. Music goes beyond a mere sequence of sounds; it is an emotional language capable of expressing the inexpressible. Finally, colors—primarily visual—work hand in hand with sound to create integrated synesthetic experiences, supported by systems like Pantone and inspired by artistic theories from figures such as Wassily Kandinsky.

This research aims to demonstrate how the fusion of memory processes, musicality, and colors generates a significant impact on branding strategy.

1. Memory

Memory is the complex system through which our brain encodes, stores, and retrieves information. Not only is it essential to our personal and collective identity, but it also plays a fundamental role in how we perceive and remember brands. To understand its significance in the context of sound branding, it is crucial to understand its different types and functions. According to the model proposed by Atkinson and Shiffrin (Human Memory: A Proposed System and its Control Processes, 1968), memory can be divided into three main systems:

- Sensory Memory: This is the first stage, where stimuli, including sounds, are received and briefly retained. This type of memory is very short-lived, but it acts as the gateway for all

incoming information, determining which information progresses for further processing.

- Short-Term Memory (or Working Memory): This stage retains information for a few seconds or minutes, enabling conscious manipulation. The "phonological loop" (Baddeley and Hitch, 1974) is a key component for sound processing, allowing internal repetition of auditory information for temporary retention.

- Long-Term Memory: This is where information is stored more permanently, enabling emotionally significant and frequently repeated stimuli to become deeply ingrained for future recall.

In this context, auditory memory becomes particularly significant. The ability to recall a melody, a specific tone, or even the sound of an advertisement relies on how the brain processes and reproduces auditory stimuli. For instance, when we hear an iconic jingle, the "phonological loop" immediately retains this information in short-term memory. Through repetition and emotional association, it eventually transfers to long-term memory. This process is key to understanding why certain sounds become part of our emotional and cultural repertoire.

NeuronUP portal in (The Memory: definition, types, exercises and evaluation. 2022) highlights that memory is a fundamental mental capability that allows us to record experiences, feelings, and ideas, ultimately shaping our identity. When a brand uses specific sounds—be it effects, melodies, or distinctive voices—it creates direct associations with personal experiences. This elevates sound from being a mere fleeting stimulus to becoming a powerful trigger for deep memories.

This mechanism is exemplified in famous advertising jingles. One excellent example is McDonald's, which has strengthened its bond with consumers through the repetition of a recognizable sound. Ads like the classic "McDonald's – You Deserve a Break Today" (1982, available on YouTube) frequently evoke feelings of nostalgia and familiarity, embedding these sounds within collective memory. The consistent repetition of these jingles ensures their long-lasting emotional impact, turning them into cultural touchstones.

Atkinson and Shiffrin's (1968) memory model demonstrates how auditory stimuli move from sensory memory to short-term memory, ultimately becoming rooted in long-term memory,

particularly when paired with strong emotional connections. This journey underscores the importance of sound branding in crafting meaningful interactions with consumers.

As Proust eloquently reflected in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913), "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." Each sound we hear—whether it's the music from an advertisement or the signature sound of a product—can serve as a bridge connecting the present with emotionally significant memories. These auditory cues not only reinforce a brand's identity but also create lasting emotional bonds.

2. Music

Music is much more than a structured sequence of sounds; it is a universal language capable of expressing emotions and communicating values without the need for explicit words. Its inherent emotionality makes it a powerful tool for sound branding and for the making of a brand identity that resonates deeply with audiences.

Victor Hugo, in *Les Contemplations* (1856), expressed in memorable words that, "Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to remain silent." This quote highlights the ability of music to convey feelings that often cannot be described in words. In the area of branding, music becomes the emotional voice of the brand, articulating messages that other forms of communication often struggle to convey.

The concept of an audio logo clearly exemplifies this idea. When a brand designs a concise musical motif closely aligned with its values and personality, it establishes an instantly recognizable element. Iconic examples can be the Netflix's "ta-dum", the McDonald's "Ta ra ta ta taaa", and the Intel's short melody. These audio logos transcend mere identification; they serve as emotional anchors, shaping perceptions of the brand in terms of trust, familiarity, and relatability.

Alison Wong's doctoral research (*Sound Branding: The Role of Music in Consumer Perceptions, Behaviours, and Practitioner Beliefs*, 2018) emphasizes music's profound impact on consumer behavior. According to Wong, "Music can induce moods that directly influence purchasing behavior, making consumers feel more connected to the brand." This observa-

tion highlights music's measurable ability to drive consumer decisions and foster emotional loyalty. When a musical component accompanies an advertising message, its emotional resonance enhances both memorability and consumer engagement.

Music's versatility enables brands to create unique auditory landscapes tailored to their identity. This entails precise selection of rhythms, tonalities, instrumentation, and even the strategic use of silence to shape a coherent sound narrative. Roland Barthes, in *Image, Music, Text* (1977), reminds us that silence and pauses are equally essential to conveying meaning. And so, it is not only the presence of sounds that matters, but also the absences, the spaces between the notes which are equally crucial in shaping the auditory experience.

From this perspective, music can be seen as a storytelling language capable of evoking emotional realities that resonate with consumers. Melodies not only entertain but also create personal connections, transforming a brand from a mere product into a meaningful experience. Coca-Cola's #TasteTheFeeling campaign (2016) illustrates this approach, utilizing music to evoke shared emotions and build connections that leave lasting impressions.

Integrated into branding strategy, music contributes an additional dimension that enhances the brand message. It fosters immersive experiences where consumers connect with brands on an emotional and sensory level. Music ensures that a brand is not just remembered but felt, creating intimacy and fostering loyalty. Furthermore, music serves as a unifying element in multichannel branding strategies. Whether featured in online advertising, television, or in-person events, music maintains emotional consistency across all consumer touchpoints. This alignment strengthens brand recognition and reinforces a lasting sense of trust and familiarity.

Supported by Wong's findings (2018), it becomes evident that music has the unique ability to transform fleeting interactions into memorable experiences. Sound branding elevates music beyond its traditional aesthetic role, positioning it as a pivotal element in shaping how consumers perceive and emotionally engage with a brand.

In the increasingly competitive landscape of modern branding, music offers brands a way to differentiate themselves by tapping into the emotional core of their audience. By weaving

melodies into their identity, brands connect with consumers on a deeper level, creating lasting impressions that foster loyalty, recognition, and trust.

3. Colors

Colors are far more than simple visual perceptions; they are experiences that transcend physiology and psychology, transforming into symbols filled with emotions, cultural meanings, and universal associations. On a physical level, colors are the result of the interaction between light and surfaces, which reflect different wavelengths captured by our eyes. This physical process is then interpreted by the brain into perceptions that influence not only how we see the world but also how we feel about it.

Each color elicits emotional responses that vary depending on the context and individual. For example, red often symbolizes passion, energy, and urgency; blue conveys tranquility and trust; yellow evokes joy and positivity. These connotations, deeply rooted in various cultures, also give colors symbolic meanings. White, for instance, may represent purity and peace in many Western contexts, while in Eastern cultures, it is often associated with mourning.

The theory of color has been extensively studied by artists, designers, and scientists. Wassily Kandinsky, in his influential text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), argued that colors are not merely visual elements but possess a spiritual dimension capable of evoking deep emotions in the viewer. "Colour is a power which directly influences the soul," Kandinsky claimed. According to him, each color resonates internally, creating experiences that go beyond pure aesthetics. This synesthetic conception suggests that when colors are combined with other stimuli, such as auditory elements, they generate a rich and multisensory experience.

Precision in the use of colors is crucial to ensuring a brand's visual coherence. This is where the Pantone Matching System (introduced by Lawrence Herbert in 1963) becomes a global standard ensuring consistent color reproduction across all communication materials, from advertising to physical products. The use of Pantone is not only technical but also emotional: each color carries psychological associations that strengthen a brand's value perception. For

example, warm tones like orange and red may evoke feelings of passion and closeness, while cool tones like blue and green convey modernity and serenity. This system ensures that colors become an integral part of a brand's narrative, fostering connections on both visual and emotional levels.

In the field of sound branding, colors take on an expanded role through their integration with auditory stimuli. This combination not only reinforces a brand's identity but also creates a synesthetic experience where colors and sounds complement one another to convey emotions and values in depth.

An example of this synergy can be found in advertising campaigns that pair soothing melodies with a color palette dominated by blues and greens to evoke serenity and trust. A clear demonstration of this is seen in Samsung's promotional material for its "Galaxy AI" update (Samsung 2025 – The Next Big Thing Is You, YouTube). Similarly, more intense tones, such as red and orange, harmonize with energetic melodies to evoke passion and dynamism. This multisensory combination enhances emotional impact and creates a more memorable and integrated experience.

When sounds are reflected in a well-defined color palette, a brand's communication becomes more cohesive. Returning to the example of McDonald's jingle, the recognition of the sound is further reinforced by the visualization of the brand's iconic colors—red and yellow—which activate the consumer's memory. This synergy between sound and color is one of the key factors behind McDonald's global success, demonstrating the powerful potential of combining sensory elements to communicate a brand's identity effectively.

The integrated analysis of the three dimensions—Memory, Music, and Colors—highlights how the combination of senses is essential to creating a memorable and impactful brand identity. These elements, when working in harmony, go beyond their individual roles to form a rich emotional experience that deeply connects with the consumer.

Colors provide a visually symbolic dimension, while music generates emotional responses that directly reach the subconscious. When these stimuli merge with other sensory ele-

ments, they build a multisensory narrative that not only informs but also evokes emotions and transforms the consumer's perception. This integration of visual, auditory, and emotional processes strengthens and prolongs the memory of the brand within the audience, ensuring the brand is not just recognized but truly felt.

In a highly competitive market, where the saturation of stimuli is constant, this sensory synergy emerges as an indispensable strategy. It is no longer sufficient to stand out visually, all senses must work cohesively to provide a seamless experience that transcends the moment and firmly embeds itself in the consumer's memory. This ability to forge deep connections is what makes sound branding a fundamental pillar for brands seeking to remain relevant and enduring within their environments.

Based on this research and conclusion, the guiding question for the final individual project proposal would be: What is the role and significance of sound in contemporary brand strategy?

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