Stop Me if You’ve Heard this one Before:

Consumer Responses to Familiar Music in Marketing Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Many companies use familiar music, as common knowledge dictates that consumers should transfer positive feelings for familiar music to an associated brand. Yet in some instances, consumers may disapprove of brands using familiar music. The marketing literature does not account for this phenomenon: that consumers may be familiar with music but dislike brand usage of it. Our proposed conceptual model of consumer response to marketing music centralizes familiarity to the process. We posit that familiarity encourages increased interactions with music, and that the more individuals attend to music in marketing settings, the more they will form judgements about how the music was used by the brand. We predict these judgements will be more pronounced when consumers feel ownership for the familiar music. Several potential outcome categories may result from this processing: outcomes concerning the individual’s identity, the music, and the brand. We conclude by outlining directions for future research.

Keywords: marketing with music, music familiarity, consumer stimuli processing, consumer identity, psychological ownership, consumer behavior, auditory marketing, sensory marketing
STOP ME IF YOU’VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE:

CONSUMER RESPONSES TO FAMILIAR MUSIC IN MARKETING CONTEXTS

A recent Squarespace commercial, aired during the 2021 Super Bowl, showed office workers languishing in boredom until the corporate clock struck five, when their world suddenly turned bright and they happily logged into Squarespace to begin working on their passion projects in the hours after their day jobs had ended. The commercial was set to Dolly Parton’s classic song “9 to 5,” a song that would be familiar to many not only as a theme to a hit movie, but as “an anthem for working women, uniting women together under one battle cry for fair working conditions” (Walthall 2021). However, in this ad, Squarespace altered the familiar refrain to:

Working 5 to 9, you’ve got passion and a vision
Cuz it’s hustlin’ time, whole new way to make a livin’
Gonna change your life, do something that gives it meaning
With a website that is worthy of your dreaming

The ad closed with the written message, “Make your 5 to 9 full time;” ostensibly a call for workers to pursue their passion by working during the day and then freelancing outside of work hours. Perhaps surprisingly, the reaction to the ad, and the use of the song, was quite negative. Many viewers felt the advertisement had twisted a song that had once been about reforming the work environment into a glorification of a system that requires hustling with two jobs just to get by (Jarvis 2021). A Washington Post article called it “Dolly Parton’s betrayal” (Judkis and Rao 2021) while a Newsweek headline titled “Dolly Parton Is Awesome But This Super Bowl Ad Shows We Live in a Dystopia” (Sirota 2021) attempted to parse out separate feelings for the performing artist, brand message, and reworded song.
Squarespace’s use of a familiar song is hardly unique. In fact, the use of familiar music in marketing is ubiquitous, from background music in office buildings, stores, restaurants, and advertisements to foreground music and jingles (Kellaris 2008). Companies typically expect the use of a familiar song will activate positive associations with the song that may then spill over to the brand. In one company-sponsored study, 80% of consumers claimed they would pay more attention to and better remember advertisements that featured their favorite song (Citigroup 2018, p. 71). Perceived consumer demand for familiar music is reflected in the six-hundred and fifty million dollars spent annually by companies on synchronization royalties (payments for rights for the use of music in visual media TV, film, the Internet, video games, etc.; Citigroup 2018).

Although the use of familiar songs is commonplace, the Dolly Parton example provides a puzzling counterfactual. Anecdotally, such a backfire effect is more common than one might think. For example, Ford aired an advertisement depicting a series of frustrating life circumstances—such as being locked out of the house, or getting a basketball stuck between the rim and the backboard—as a narrator says: “No one likes being stuck. That’s why Ford is developing new ways to help you move through life.” Playing in the background was Nina Simone’s anthem of the Civil Rights Movement, “I Wish I Knew How it Would Feel to be Free” (Taylor and Dallas n.d.), a music choice that drew the ire of many viewers who were familiar with the history of the song (Gibson 2017). Additionally, politicians use familiar music to connect with audiences in emotion-laden campaign commercials (Mas, Collell, and Xifra 2017) and at political rallies (Herndon 2019). However, many performing artists have sued politicians to stop the use of their music at political events, for fear of unwanted associations with their music (Solender 2020).
Perhaps unfortunately, the scholarly literature is limited in its ability to explain when and why using familiar music might backfire. A number of studies have found that positive feelings about a piece of music are associated with positive outcomes for brands (e.g., Alpert and Alpert 1990; Bitner 1992; Chebat, Gelinas-Chebat, and Filiatrault 1993; Hui, Dube, and Chebat 1997; Andersson, Kristensson, Wästlund, and Gustafsson 2012). And familiarity with music (vs. unfamiliarity) has been shown to affect behavioral outcomes such as perceived time spent in stores (Yalch and Spangenberg 1988, 2000; Bruner 1990). However, prior research has not fully considered how powerful familiarity might be in exposing deeply embedded associations and memories that consumers may relive as they are exposed to familiar music in marketing contexts.

In this article, we contend that the multi-layered relationship between an individual and a piece of music can lead to complex interpretations of when and how it is used. We posit that familiarity with music encourages increased interactions with music, and that the more individuals attend to music in marketing settings, the more they will form judgements about how the music is used by the brand. These judgements are predicted to be more pronounced when consumers have a personal connection with the music. Depending on how the individuals feel about the brand usage of music, we also unveil several categories of consequences concerning the individual’s identity, the music, and the brand. Individuals may have to reconcile the music usage with their identity that was previously associated with the song. Individuals may approach or avoid music that was used by brands. We also predict that individuals may alter their spending patterns, time, or attitudes with the brands that use familiar music.

This article contributes to the literature in a number of ways. First, the classical marketing approach has characterized music as something akin to a stimulus response cue, with studies
primarily concerned with how music affects mood, and subsequently, attitudes about the brand. We set forth an additional and complementary process in which familiar music invites active engagement from the listener. Scholars have shown that consumers use music to actively construct identity (Abolhasani, Oakes, and Oakes 2017; Shankar, Elliot, and Fitchett 2009), yet a pathway of active engagement with music has not been fully articulated in the marketing understanding of music processing. The implication is that familiar music may encourage deeper immersion in a marketing encounter with a brand, but that such immersion may sometimes lead consumers to a sense of discordance between the music, the brand, and themselves.

This article also contributes to the identity literature by drawing from and extending the notion of psychological ownership to music in marketing contexts. Drawing on prior work which shows that deep experiences or repeated exposures to specific music can encourage the development of psychological ownership of that music (Danckwerts and Kenning 2019; Sinclair and Tinson 2017), we propose that consumers’ judgements of familiar music in marketing are amplified when consumers have a deep personal connection with the music. Reprising the notion of psychological ownership in music, we explain a process through which stored memories and experiences in a piece of music can become consequential for consumers and brands.

This article also suggests that theorists widen the aperture regarding the outcomes of music in marketing encounters. While previous research on music within marketing has primarily focused on brand outcomes, we trace complex interpretations of music to several categories of outcomes. First, we propose that encountering familiar music in a marketing context is likely to prompt significant outcomes related to a listener’s sense of self. Encountering familiar music in marketing may even force consumers to reevaluate previously associated identities with music, a process we refer to as identity reconciliation. Second, we suggest that a
variety of music-focused outcomes are likely. Building on prior research relating consumers and brands (e.g., Fournier 1998), we propose that individuals’ interactions with music can change their relationship with the music.

This article provides insights for practitioners as well. When practitioners include familiar music in marketing, they should carefully consider the many ways in which consumers might have encountered that music before. We propose that practitioners should strive to uncover as much as they can about consumer familiarity with music: whether the music is well-known, to which demographic it is well-known, and other previous uses or associations of the music. Our biggest takeaway for practitioners is that using familiar music is not a guarantee of endearing consumers to a brand. Consumer familiarity with the music may or may not promote outcomes that match brand intentions.

In the following sections we further describe our propositions, outline considerations for practitioners, and provide directions for future research.

**CONSUMER ENCOUNTERS WITH MUSIC**

Music permeates nearly every sphere of one’s life. Individuals routinely encounter music in stores and restaurants, in advertisements, when watching television or when listening to the radio. Because of the ubiquity of music and its ability to affect listeners so profoundly and in such varied ways, marketers have taken notice.

The marketing literature has understandably incorporated a stream of music-related research, exploring how consumers respond to music in a variety of settings. Generally, this literature has described music in marketing as a stimulus response cue. Music has been studied as a foreground or background cue in advertisements and retail atmospheric settings (Yalch and Spangenberg 1988, 1990). When listeners devote little attention to music, as in background
music, it may still affect the listener’s mood (Bruner 1990; Alpert and Alpert 1989, 1990).

Digging more deeply, some scholars have examined the effects of music theory elements such as tempo, instrumentation, or pitch (Watt and Ash 1998, p. 3; Scherer and Oshinsky 1977; Wedin 1972). Most studies of music in marketing show that certain aspects of the music contribute to mood outcomes (e.g., happy, anxious), and that mood outcomes influence behavioral outcomes (e.g., time spent in stores, amount spent, brand attitude; Bruner 1990; Yalch and Spangenberg 2000). Perhaps unfortunately, the literature has so far overlooked an individual’s previous experiences with a piece of music, which could potentially prompt idiosyncratic interpretations and perhaps novel outcomes beyond mood and brand attitudes.

**FAMILIARITY WITH MUSIC**

People hear songs multiple times. With each repeated exposure, listening becomes less taxing, as individuals encounter the music each time with more accumulated knowledge about it through a process of increased familiarity. Music familiarity is a function of the degree of exposure to the music. Familiarity resides on a continuum, from a listener never having heard the music before, to a listener having extensive knowledge of the music—such as being able to recall the lyrics or melody from memory. As individuals become increasingly fluent with a piece of music: they can predict what will come next, such as the chord progressions or lyrics (Baker et al. 1986).

Familiar music activates more than just a stimulus response. Evidence from the music and neuroscience literature suggests familiarity elicits an active engagement from listeners. From the first few notes of a song, listeners sort through their memory for relevant note combinations, or *musical lexicons* (Peretz et al. 2009), to find a match in memory. Once recognized, the music and its contextual associations are layered into the existing schema of music knowledge (Peretz,
Hearing familiar music involves an active process of retrieving and re-coding memories, adding new information to that which has already been gathered (Fraser 2014). Thus, familiarity sparks a different type of processing and engagement from consumers: we argue that it changes the way consumers interpret music in marketing.

Based on our understanding of music familiarity, we propose that it should be centralized to the understanding of music in marketing. In the following sections we outline our model of consumer responses to familiar music, the ensuing processing routes, and the consequences of familiarity for the individual, the music, and the brand.

**A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER RESPONSES TO FAMILIAR MUSIC**

We propose a model for when and how consumers respond to familiar music in marketing encounters (Figure 1). The model outlines when and how familiar music promotes engagement from consumers, shapes diverse forms of evaluative judgements, and drives behavioral outcomes related to the individual’s identity, the brand, and the music. The model also points to key moderators of these relationships: conspicuousness of the music and consumers’ psychological ownership of the music. We now explain the reasoning and theoretical support for each of the relationships in the model.

**Engagement with music.**

Individuals may engage with the same music to different degrees. For example, they may simply turn their attention to listening to the music’s lyrics, or they may tap their foot to the rhythm, or even sing along. We extend Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić’s (2011) definition of customer engagement as “a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships (p. 260, emphasis original). Engagement with certain music is different than liking that music. That
is, consumers may be engaged with a target without liking it, or like a piece of music without being engaged with it. Engagement is thus the consequence of a motivational experience, while liking is the consequence of a hedonic experience. Both lead to a stage of approach or avoidance of the focal target (Calder and Malthouse 2008).

We contend that the more familiar a piece of music is, the more an individual will engage with it. Familiarity is tracing along with the memory of a melody in one’s mind, leading to new conclusions based on the context of re-hearing. Moreover, merely recognizing familiar music may provide satisfaction in identifying a match of the music in memory. This satisfaction at the result of an identified match is likely to drive further engagement. Based on the psychological recognition processes described above (i.e., the process of sorting, reordering, compatibility, etc.) it follows that that the more familiar these musical lexicons are, the easier it will be to engage, as music that is highly familiar is likely to be attached to many nodes of the associative network, and therefore more easily accessible for retrieval.

P1: The more a piece of music present in a marketing encounter is familiar to a consumer the more that consumer will engage with the music.

The moderating role of conspicuousness of the music.

Consumers engage more with focal targets that they notice more (Parr and Friston 2019). As with other elements of the marketing mix, certain characteristics may bring attention to music during a marketing encounter. Such conspicuousness can be thought of as the degree to which music is noticeable due to its features or its placement within a marketing context. In music theory, a number of elements may heighten conspicuousness, such as tempo, mode, instrumentation, volume, and more. In addition, music may become more conspicuous due to contextual clues, such as whether the music is in the foreground or background, or whether
original or re-worked renditions are used. Overall, music conspicuousness may be thought of as
existing on a continuum, from low to high. Examples of highly conspicuous music are very loud
music, music used in the foreground, or music intended to be the focal point of a marketing
message (such as in the “9 to 5” example). At a high volume, music shuts out more of the other
stimuli competing for consumer attention. Examples of the low conspicuousness would be slow
and quiet music played in the background so as not to compete with the other stimuli in the
environment.

Conspicuousness moderates the relationship between music familiarity and engagement,
such that when a familiar song is conspicuous, it should lead to more engagement than if the
same familiar song was inconspicuous. That is, given that a song is familiar, the more that song
is conspicuous, the more we expect a song to prompt engagement from consumers. This concept
is rooted in the psychology literature of attention and salience. Due to limited processing
capacity, individuals typically attend first and most fully to the elements of their environment
that are the most salient (Taylor and Fiske 1978). Conspicuous music demands consumer
attention, encouraging the listener to attend to the song by enticing the listener’s focus away
from other competing stimuli. As P1 states, we expect that familiar music will prompt a process
of encouraging engagement as familiar content has already been encoded by the listener at least
once, and therefore facilitates further processing. P2 builds on that to propose that the more
conspicuous a familiar song, the more that familiar song will lead to engagement.

P2: The effect of music familiarity on engagement with the music is moderated by
conspicuousness of the music such that the effect becomes stronger as the music
becomes a more conspicuous part of the marketing encounter.

Evaluative judgement.
Consumers engage with, process, and evaluate countless stimuli during any given marketplace interaction (MacInnis and Jaworski 1989; Petty and Cacioppo 1984). Music invites engagement, stirs emotions (Watt and Ash 1998, p. 3; Scherer and Oshinsky 1977; Wedin 1972), and carries meaning (Watt and Ash 1998; Tolbert 2001). As Cross and Tolbert (2009) put it, “When we engage with music, we tend to feel that it has significance; it appears to mean something, even if that meaning is entirely personal to us” (p. 33).

We predict that the more a consumer engages with music, the more they will make judgements about the brand usage of that music. This is expected because at high engagement with music (e.g., consumer information processing levels; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; MacInnis and Jaworski 1989), consumers’ motivation to attend to complex marketing cues increases (e.g., MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991) and they are more likely to evaluate the compilation as a whole: whether the brand, the specific message, and other contextual cues make sense with the music. Consumers are known to proactively contribute to their interactions with brands, rather than just passively accept information (Hollebeek 2011; Vargo and Lusch 2008). Following this logic, it is expected that consumers may allocate resources (including cognitive, emotional, or physical resources) to a brand interaction depending on the perceived value they gain from the specific interaction (Higgins and Scholer 2009). Our model predicts that the evaluation process will be more thorough the more engaged a listener is with the focal target, the music.

We conceptualize evaluative judgement as an umbrella term that includes three elements: judgements of music appropriateness (Babin, Chebat, and Michon 2004), judgements of music fit (MacInnis and Park 1991), and the cognitive effort expended forming these judgements (Klein and Loftus 1988).

**Appropriateness.** Upon hearing familiar music used by a brand, consumers are likely to
begin judging the appropriateness of the pairing. This is due to the fact that consumers have expectations and previous connotations concerning familiar music, as they have heard it before. They may have personal history attached to it, or may be knowledgeable about the music’s background. Appropriateness is the judgement by consumers of whether or not a brand should rightfully have chosen this music, due to standards of society. For example, many listeners found Ford’s choice to use the Nina Simone song to be inappropriate, disrespectful of its origins as an anthem to the Civil Rights Movement.

**Fit.** Judgements of fit concern tangible elements of a song and whether it fits with brand image or message. This type of judgement considers such elements as the lyrics of a song, obvious characteristics such as tempo, instrumentation, and genre, and other tangible elements that may help determine how well matched a song is with a brand or marketing context. Consumers may believe that a brand and song are a good fit, but object to the brand usage based on judgements of appropriateness. For example, consumers may encounter song lyrics that fit well with the intended brand message, yet the song use may still be considered inappropriate.

**Cognitive effort.** In addition to judgements of appropriateness and fit, there is an overarching category of cognitive effort to be considered. Cognitive effort refers to the amount of energy individuals expend making judgements of appropriateness and fit. Including the element of cognitive effort improves our conceptualization of the judgement process. Some individuals may spend more effort judging music-brand pairings than others. This may be due to a variety of factors, including personal connection or knowledge about the music, mental capacity available to them, and ability to synthesize various marketing stimuli to be considered at once. Cognitive effort helps us understand the attention and energy individuals devote to this task.
**P3a:** Engagement with music will promote judgements about the appropriateness of music in a marketing context.

**P3b:** Engagement with music will promote judgements about the fit of music in a marketing context.

**P3c:** Engagement with music will promote greater cognitive effort on the part of the consumer, overall, to formulate judgements about how music is used in a marketing context.

**The moderating role of psychological ownership.**

Songs can sometimes have great significance to a person. A song that is played at a couple’s wedding may be thought of as “our song;” citizens often think of national anthems as belonging to them; and although there is no formal statement of such, there is a sense of proprietorship with the song “Sweet Caroline” by many Boston Red Sox fans. We contend that the degree to which individuals feel possessive of a song will influence how and how much they will engage in evaluative judgments of its use by a brand.

We extend the concept of psychological ownership which has been used to explain a person’s attachment to material and nonmaterial targets such as homes, (Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2003), jobs (Mayhew, Ashkanasy, Bramble, and Gardner 2007), and ideas (Baer and Brown 2012). Psychological ownership is defined by Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2001) as the state in which individuals feel like a target of ownership is wholly or partially “theirs” (i.e., “It is mine!”; Pierce et al. 2001). Psychological ownership of music is the degree to which the music is incorporated as part of oneself through ownership (i.e., “That’s my song!”). It includes such things as autobiographical memories associated with music (Janata, Tomic, and Rakowski 2007), music-evoked images (Fraser 2014), experiences that make a song personally or collectively
meaningful (e.g., Meyer 1956; Fraser 2014), and emotion-laden experiences (sometimes referred to as indexicality; MacInnis and Park 1991).

Psychological ownership should not be confused with familiarity, which is the accumulation of knowledge about a song. Psychological ownership positions a song as an extension of one’s self (Belk 1988; Dittmar 1992). Individuals can find their identities within a song, and find the song within their identities (Kline and France 1899). Suppose, for example, that a listener could sing from memory two different songs. One of the songs brings back memories of an eventful road trip in college, while the other was simply a very popular song that is played often on music outlets the listener frequents. The endowment effect, under which individuals perceive objects have increased value after they have taken possession of them, suggests that the more consumers have attached memories to music (i.e., music-evoked autobiographical memories; Janata, Tomic, and Rakowski 2007), the more they will value it (e.g., Thaler 1980; Knetsch and Sinden 1984; Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1990; Shu and Peck 2011). Persistent, even in the streaming age, (Danckwerts and Kenning 2019; Sinclair and Tinson 2017), consumers may develop feelings of psychological ownership for music by controlling the music (i.e., incorporating it into playlists, sharing it with friends), or coming to know the music intimately (i.e., familiarity, learning songs word-for-word), and investing the self into the music (i.e., attaching episodic memories to music; Pierce et al. 2001).

Our model predicts that psychological ownership moderates the relationship between engagement with the music and evaluative judgement about the music. That is, while engagement with the music should promote evaluative judgements about how the music is used, we expect this to be even more the case when consumers have a vested interest in the song due to psychological ownership. With psychological ownership comes a heightened awareness of how
the target is used (e.g., MacInnis and Park 1991). This awareness stems from the desire to protect ownership, and by extension, oneself, as psychological ownership is related to how people view themselves in terms of the music. Thus, we expect that if consumers feel psychological ownership toward music, consumers will likely pay even greater attention to how the song is used by others because of the way this usage reflects on themselves.

**P4: Psychological ownership of the music moderates the effect of engagement with music on evaluative judgements of music.** In other words, when individuals feel psychological ownership for music, they will judge fit and appropriateness to a greater degree, and expend greater cognitive effort overall.

**OUTCOMES**

The model reveals several outcomes that are uniquely evident when brands use familiar music. Previous research has not centralized familiarity to the conceptualization of consumer music processing, and has typically identified only brand or mood outcomes. These outcomes include such measures as mood (Alpert and Alpert 1990; Bruner 1990), attitude towards the brand (Park and Young 1986), brand recall (Wallace 1991; Levrini, Schaeffer, and Nique 2019), brand purchase intention (Alpert and Alpert 1990), amount of money spent on the brand (Caldwell and Hibbert 2002), and perception of time spent in a brand’s store (Yalch and Spangenberg 2000; Caldwell and Hibbert 2002). It should be evident from these prior studies that music has generally been addressed as an atmospheric stimulus (Raja, Anand, and Allan 2019) that may have consequences related solely to the brand playing the music (for an example of an exception, see Chang and Kim (2022) who found that inspiring background music in a commercial influenced participants’ feelings toward a diversity protagonist portrayed in the commercial.) We expand this prior research, identifying additional categories of outcomes; more
specifically we contend that familiarity can lead to identity outcomes, music outcomes, and brand outcomes.

**Identity outcomes.**

Music is a means of identity expression and formulation for individuals (Hargreaves and North 1999). Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, and Warlop (2012) define identity as “any category label to which a consumer self-associates that is amenable to a clear picture of what the person in the category looks like, thinks, feels, and does” (p. 5). Consumers may encounter multiple, conflicting identities as part of the consumption process, and are often forced to self-regulate the salience of each (Reed et al. 2012, p. 27-28; Mok and Morris 2009, 2010; Zou, Morris, and Benet-Martínez 2008; Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, and Morris 2002). Brands often attempt to use familiar music to connect with consumers by making certain consumer identities more salient (Abolhasani, Oakes, and Oakes 2017). Our model predicts that using music to cue certain identities may prompt identity outcomes for the individual, as a person sorts through how they relate the music to brands, others, and themselves.

We predict identity outcomes to be one of the natural consequences of evaluative judgement. Individuals carry “normative expectations” about the type of people who listen to certain music (Abolhasani, Oakes, and Oakes 2017, p. 474). Following research on brand personality (Aaker 1997), we expect that individuals extend their “normative expectations” of humans’ music tastes to brands as well, forming expectations for how music should be used in marketing based not only on how they identify with the music, but also how they view themselves in terms of the brand. This provides an area for consumer relationships with brands to be strengthened or potentially confounded. Consumers who find identity-relevant music in a marketing environment are likely to engage in reflexive responses (e.g., *what does this mean for*
my own identity?) due to a heightened awareness of their extended identity and a desire to protect their idea of the “self” from possible threat (i.e., self-affirmation theory; Sherman and Cohen n.d.).

Once these identity processes are activated, consumer responses can play out in a number of ways. For example, we propose that when consumers greatly disapprove of brand use of music, it may lead to a conflict in how they view the self in relation to the brand. A threat to one’s sense of self may ultimately lead to distancing from either the music or the brand. Consider the example of an aging consumer who hears an advertisement for a retirement home featuring a song that they associate strongly with their youth. This places the consumer at an uncomfortable crossroads of conflicting identity: a song that connotes youth presented alongside a brand that connotes aging. The following two sections discuss mental processes (identity reconciliation) and behaviors (identity signaling) that may be used to cope with such conflict.

Identity reconciliation may occur in many instances of encountering familiar music. Let us consider a person who is watching news coverage of a United States presidential campaign. As the candidate is walking onstage, the individual hears a song playing that is identity-relevant to her. The individual shifts into assessing the situation in terms of her own identity. She feels her identity has been threatened by the politician using one of her favorite songs. It feels like something has been stolen from her. To cope with this threat, she may reconcile her identity by claiming true identification with the song, perhaps saying to herself, “the politician misused it, and has no idea what the song is really about.”

Consumers may also engage in identity posturing and signaling behaviors. These are driven by a desire to signal closeness to or distance from a certain identity. Individuals may change how they dress, what stores they frequent, who they spend time with, or what they talk
about in order to restore a consistent and whole sense of self. Research has identified that consumers sometimes “demonstrate resistance to perceived commodification of those beloved musical subcultures” (Abolhasani, Oakes, and Oakes 2017, p. 485). Consider a consumer who enjoys wearing T-shirts from their favorite subversive punk band, whose music was then used in an advertisement for a mainstream laundry detergent brand. Although the music’s irreverence may seem to some an unconventional choice for the brand, the fan may look for ways to restore their self-concept as running against the grain, perhaps by no longer wearing the T-shirts, or by engaging in behaviors that demonstrate their anti-establishment ways.

The identity outcomes described above are clearly not comprehensive, but are illustrative of ways that the use of familiar songs in marketing contexts can lead to the sorts of evaluative judgements that challenge one’s sense of self and result in unexpected identity-related reactions.

P5: Evaluative judgements will inform and lead to identity outcomes such as identity conflict, identity reconciliation, and behavioral changes to signal a desired identity.

Music outcomes.

We expect that evaluative judgements of music will promote incorporating this new brand-music connection to the existing set of information they have stored in memory. Consumers are constantly learning. When they encounter music in the marketplace, they may add the music and its connection to the brand into their schema of music knowledge, or their “associations between the sound of the music and extramusical concepts” (Shevy 2008, p. 477). If brands use familiar and personally relevant music, it is likely that individuals will more easily remember the usage (even if they disapprove of the music usage) due to the Self-Referential Encoding paradigm (Rogers, Kuiper, and Kirker 1977), which states that individuals have better memory for things that they can connect to themselves (Klein and Loftus 1988). A study by
Fraser (2014) identified long-term benefits for brands utilizing songs that had personal, private memories attached, since they are “apparently processed more extensively and already present in associative networks, which can be expanded with the addition of brand and message elements” (p. 824). For example, if consumers hear a familiar song as part of a Ford commercial, they may associate that song with Ford in the future, even in different contexts.

We also expect evaluative judgements of music to lead to approach-avoidance behaviors related to music, itself. Similar to the approach-avoidance behaviors mentioned above about brands, consumers may approach or avoid music due to whether they feel that the music usage is favorable. Differentiated from the identity-related outcomes, these predicted music outcomes may be based on simply liking or disliking the music presented to them. For example, a positive evaluative judgement of music may encourage consumers to share the music with friends, and incorporate the music into their playlists or purchased collection. Meanwhile, negative evaluative judgements of music could produce avoidance behaviors. For example, hearing a familiar song in a commercial may cause a consumer to think it is overplayed, or not as “fresh” anymore, and lead them to delete the music from their playlist. Here, behaviors towards the music are based on liking or disliking the music as the result of evaluative judgements.

*P6: Evaluative judgements of music activate music outcomes such as adding new information to an existing schema of music knowledge, improved memory for music and brand, and approach or avoidance behaviors.*

**Brand outcomes due to evaluative judgements about music.**

Consumers may express their judgements about brands using music in ways that will directly or indirectly impact the brand itself. These brand outcomes (though not previously connected to evaluative judgement about music) have been the primary focus of the music
literature in marketing thus far. A positive evaluative judgement may induce consumers to frequent a store more often, incorporate the brand into their shopping list, or recommend a product to a friend. Alternatively, a negative evaluative judgement may cause consumers to throw out the brand’s products, avoid them in stores, or even tell friends \textit{not} to use them.

\textit{P7. Evaluative judgements of music activate brand outcomes such as improved memory for brand and music, and increased word-of-mouth.}

\textbf{Brand outcomes due to mood valence.}

Even at low levels of consumer processing, music is known to affect mood (Bruner 1990). While the previous sections of this paper detailed an active response approach to music, the current section articulates a complementary approach that has been robustly studied in the literature: a passive response approach to music by which music affects mood. For example, research has shown that music contributes to mood outcomes (e.g., happy, anxious), and that mood influences behavioral outcomes (e.g., time spent in stores, amount spent, brand attitude; Bruner 1990; Yalch and Spangenberg 2000).

A shift in consumer mood due to music, whether or not consciously attributed to the music, has been shown to impact brand outcomes such as time spent in stores and amount spent (Yalch and Spangenberg 1988, 2000; Bruner 1990). Many consumers may not even realize that the music is contributing to a mood state. Even when listeners devote little attention to music, as in background music, the music may still affect the listener’s mood (Bruner 1990; Alpert and Alpert 1989, 1990).

Apart from brand outcomes, the identity and music outcome categories introduced here require much processing and involvement from individuals. We do not expect that mood valence should contribute to either of these outcome categories. Identity outcomes require high
involvement from consumers and attentive capacity for reconciling the music, brand, and self. We do not expect a shift in mood state to cause this level of processing. Accordingly, we do not expect mood to affect music outcomes, as this category requires enough engagement with the music to reference back to it, formulate ideas about it, or otherwise orient behavior towards it. If consumers are not engaged with the music in the first place, behavior towards the music itself should not be expected to occur (e.g., Alpert and Alpert 1990).

P8. Mood valence leads to outcomes involving low-level processing. This makes identity outcomes and music outcomes unlikely. However, altered mood state due to music may still result in brand outcomes such as improved memory for brand and music and increased word of mouth.

DISCUSSION

Although brands routinely play familiar music as a marketing tactic, familiarity with music has been overlooked in the marketing literature. We contend that familiar music used in marketing contexts reveals novel processes and outcomes for marketing scholars, especially those interested in the use of music. Music familiarity prompts an intricate process of engagement, formation of judgements about the usage (which are amplified when played in concert with music for which the listener feels psychological ownership), and ultimately, leads to varied outcomes in which an individual may reassesses their own identity in terms of the music-brand pairing, may approach or avoid the music, and may alter attitudes and behaviors toward the brand. The model provides many substantial insights for researchers considering music in marketing contexts.

Active engagement. We propose an active model of engagement that is triggered by familiar music. In marketing, music has typically been addressed as a stimulus response cue, or
as a determinant of brand attitudes. However, we propose that familiar music may prompt more active engagement from consumers than had previously been identified in this context. In other non-music contexts, familiarity has been shown to encourage consumer engagement (e.g., Acharya 2020). Research on consumer engagement with social media has theorized that active engagement is mainly driven by two types of attachment: attachment based on bonding with a community and attachment based on identity or self-concept (Hinson, Boateng, Renner, and Kosiba 2019). Applying this theoretical approach to this context, it fits that familiar music should facilitate active engagement from the listener. Though suggested by scholars that consumers use music to actively construct identity (Abolhasani, Oakes, and Oakes 2017; Shankar, Elliot, and Fitchett 2009), an active engagement model of music in marketing has not yet been fully articulated. Our model contributes this approach to the marketing literature. This active engagement process for brand use of familiar music could lead to a number of interesting research questions, such as how bonds with music differ from bonds with brands, and the types of outcomes facilitated by either.

**Psychological ownership.** This research contributes to how identity theorists within marketing consider music. Previous marketing researchers have used the term indexicality, or past emotion-laden experiences, to describe consumer connection to music (MacInnis and Park 1991). We expand upon this idea by borrowing a classic construct from psychology: psychological ownership (Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2003). This not only incorporates emotional experiences one may have with music, but goes one step further to convey that a person’s sense of self can be embodied in the music. The inclusion of psychological ownership is likely to lead to a number of exciting research pathways, such as how psychological ownership may differ based on time with the song. For example, there may be a difference in the outcomes
of psychological ownership connected to a song that listeners have felt is “theirs” for 25 years compared to a song they felt was “their jam” this summer.

**Identity reconciliation.** Our model shows that brands’ use of familiar music may prompt a process of identity reconciliation. Including identity outcomes in this model builds upon the traditional assumption that familiar music used in marketing primarily results in positively valenced brand outcomes. We assert that the valence of outcomes can vary and the outcomes themselves can be directed at more than just the brand. When consumers hear familiar music, they may need to reconcile their identity: how they see themselves in terms of the music, the brand, and society. Familiar music in an unexpected or unfavorable brand context is likely to be the biggest driver of identity reconciliation. Odd music juxtapositions may be jarring for consumers, forcing them to reevaluate their ideas about the brand, music, themselves (e.g., self identity implications), and the boundaries of their social group (e.g., social identity implications). While the identity reconciliation process may have a carryover effect for brands, research should more broadly consider how consumers view themselves in relation to brands (i.e., Fournier 1998). This illuminates many interesting research areas. For example, future research might consider how brands using familiar music may contribute to sharing behaviors such as word-of-mouth (Berger 2014). It is our hope that identity theorists will pursue research on how familiar music shapes consumer behavior and consumer identity.

**Implications for practitioners.** This article also contributes substantial insights for practitioners. We suggest that practitioners should explicitly consider the multifaceted implications of consumer familiarity with the music they choose to use. These considerations include determining whether the music is well-known, to which demographic it is well-known, and other previous uses or associations of the music.
As a thought experiment, consider how we might apply our model to the Squarespace advertisement discussed earlier that featured the Dolly Parton song, “9 to 5.” Our model takes into account the familiarity of the song, just as Squarespace did. While the appeal of “9 to 5” is well known, it would have been beneficial to the team constructing the advertisement to fully consider why the song is so appealing to so many. Where the process broke down for Squarespace was not considering psychological ownership. As the theme song for a movie of the same name and premise, it is an anthem of resistance to conditions of overwork and underpay, especially for women. Squarespace nearly hit the mark with their commercial. Our research suggests that if they had considered individuals’ attachments to the song, what would have surfaced would be the theme of resistance. Instead of the message they came up with (Squarespace allows you to pursue your passion projects in the hours after work, “5 to 9”), they could have constructed a commercial using the original, unaltered version of “9 to 5,” positioning Squarespace as a way to stand up for oneself and break free from the confines of corporate mundanity. It is evident that brands using, especially altering, familiar music should consider the range of outcomes consumers may have. Squarespace might have avoided the consumer backlash had they considered the degree of psychological ownership for the song, and uncovered the embedded meaning.

CONCLUSION

Our model provides a framework of consumer responses to familiar music in marketing. By centralizing familiarity to the process, we picture consumers as partaking in active engagement. We allow for individuals to draw from their own previous experiences and associations with music via psychological ownership. Consumers formulate judgements of the music in the specific marketing context as a function of fit, appropriateness, and cognitive effort.
In addition, individuals’ outcomes are much broader than has traditionally been included in the literature; they are categorized into outcomes concerning consumer identity, music, and brand. Our model incorporates classic elements of psychology to expand the current state of music research within marketing. Of our contributions to the literature, one that is important to researchers and practitioners is to discard the assumption that incorporating familiar music will result in unilaterally positive consumer reactions. This area of the literature is full of opportunity, and it is our hope that this paper has illuminated many future research directions.
Figure 1. Model of Consumer Processing of Familiar Music in Marketing
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