



## **In-Store Music: Branding Beyond Colors, Fonts, and Logos**


Loren Eisenlohr

Michigan State University, Strategic Communication

CAS829: Evaluation Techniques

Dr. Anna McAlister

April 30, 2021



## Literature Review

Branding is more than colors, fonts, and logos. Although, the elements of branding beyond those three visual elements are often mistakenly overlooked by marketers because they are not overtly noticed by consumers. When experiential marketing is done well, it creates an environment that attempts to manipulate behavior by employing those undetected branding elements—store layout, product displays, climate, music, trained staff demeanor, etc. Kotler (1973) used “the term *atmospherics* to describe the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers” (p. 50). It comes down to perception and emotion, and Kotler was one of the first to present the notion that store environments could elicit feelings within consumers that in turn, affect buying decisions and behaviors.

“People walk around with many wants and buying intentions that don’t materialize, until situational factors, such as motivating atmospheres, tip the scale in favor of a purchase” (Kotler, 1973, p. 54). Psychology inevitably plays a role, and many have used Mehrabian and Russell’s (1974) Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model to describe how and why atmosphere affects behavior. While originally developed to explain facets of environmental psychology, S-O-R has been utilized to examine how and why people respond within a retail space. Most simply stated, stimuli (e.g., music, layout, branding visuals) elicit an internal emotion (i.e., pleasure, arousal, or dominance) within an organism that manifests as an outward response or behavior (i.e., approach or avoidance) (Venter de Villiers et al., 2017). Perhaps unknowingly, this is the model savvy retail store owners and marketers use to make decisions regarding experiential branding and store marketing. When branding takes a more research-based, psychological approach, strategies can be better articulated and error better defined and corrected.

As previously stated, branding is often simplified and categorized into three buckets: color, font, and logo. Retail atmosphere, while shown to make a significant difference in perception, is seemingly second tier to many marketers. In many cases, it's likely a matter of misunderstanding or naivety that leads marketers to overlook experiential branding. While the purpose of visuals is obvious, the reasoning behind atmospheric elements is lesser known, let alone understood by those outside of academia. Research provides several examples of the impact of sounds or smells within a consumer's environment; however, traditional branding guides and marketing plans don't typically include how a brand is defined by anything other than visuals.

Atmosphere entails more than placing products on a shelf; it is the comprehensive experience that should be considered, researched, and implemented in multiple ways in order to determine how positive, desired effects are achieved most frequently. Kotler (1973) identified the senses most at play within store atmosphere: sight, sound, scent, and touch. When it comes to marketing, sight is the sense given most attention, yet tactile, olfactory, and aural dimensions are just as important, if not more important to consider.

For the purposes of this research, aural dimensions, specifically in-store music, will be further examined. People enjoy attending concerts, frequenting bars and turning up the volume in their cars for a reason—music resonates. Listening to music affects mood and arousal. Schäfer et al. (2013) claims self-awareness and social-relatedness is achieved when listening to music. Working off of this premise, composers write and design music with the goal of effecting emotion. “Skilled composers manipulate the emotion within a song by knowing what their audience's expectations are, and controlling when those expectations will and will not be met” (Mohana, 2016). Mohana (2016) describes music as more primitive than language, in the sense

that it taps into “brain structures that are involved in motivation, reward and emotion.” Because of this, when music is effectively applied in a retail setting, it can quite literally, motivate behavior that psychologically rewards.

Music can have a variety of effects on a variety of people, and while it’s difficult not to get caught up in the minutiae of each person’s psychological adaptations, it’s important for marketers to consider individual effect, yet apply a more generalized approach that aligns with marketing goals (North, Hargreaves & Krause, 2016). The question becomes, what is the music of a brand, and how is it most effectively applied within that brand’s brick-and-mortar? North and Hargreaves (1998) explored this concept within a café setting, playing three different types of music and evaluating the effect on customer perception. Music made a difference in not only the perceptions of the café’s primary audience, but also in the amount customers were compelled to spend. All other elements of the café’s atmosphere remained as constant as possible during field research, but when pop music was played, consumers described the café as “lively and youthful.” Classical music created a more sophisticated and “upmarket” ambiance, and the music stereotypically played presented a feeling of being “downmarket.” Perhaps based entirely on perception, the playing of classical music led to a higher average spend amongst consumers, and silence or no music played led to the lowest average spend. The qualitative and quantitative results derived through this research allow decisions regarding desired perception as related to desired spend to be made within marketing strategy.

Prior to North and Hargreaves’ (1998) exploration of music in a café setting, Areni and Kim (1993) employed a similar methodology in a wine store. Over a two-month period, Areni and Kim examined the effects of playing either top-forty or classical background music while consumers shopped in a wine store located in a large U.S. city. As was later shown in the café,

when classical music was played, shoppers spent more money. An additional interesting component of Areni and Kim's results was that shoppers did not necessarily spend more money on more bottles of wine; they sought and purchased more expensive brands when classical music played during their shopping experiences.

The generalized perception of classical music is intelligent, affluent, and elite, which is likely why it led to higher spend in the two experiments described. The constructs of such perception and social-relatedness, associating one's self with an upper-class, were seemingly manifested by classical music. A twist on the methodology of the café and wine store field experiments was implemented over a decade later when Jacob et al. (2009) conducted research in a flower shop. During prime shopping times, love songs, pop music, or no music was played at various times. When love songs were played, the average amount of money spent was significantly higher as compared to when pop or no music was played. While perception was at play, love songs also provided reasoning for the purchase of flowers, likely reminding consumers of loving relationships and specific significant others. That reminder, in combination with elicited feelings of happiness, drove consumers to respond and purchase more product.

The results of the field experiments within the wine store and floral shop offer another concept worth considering when implementing experiential marketing. MacInnis and Park (1991) suggest that music is more influential when it "fits" situational context. When the music within a store makes sense to a consumer, when it is strategically selected as an element of the brand, psychological structure is more easily attained.

While often forgotten in the marketing process, music is a part of brand identity. It can be argued that music is so powerful that it can make or break a brand. "Retail store guide: Why science says you should play music in your business" (2021) asserts that music is a brand's

voice, that it is much more than entertainment, that it is a means of telling customers who you and your brand are. Jasmine Moradi, CEO and founder of SpaceSonology, was quoted within "Retail store guide: Why science says you should play music in your business" (2021) as saying, "The worst music is often the music you notice because that's music that doesn't fit the brand and the store atmosphere." The importance of musical fit cannot be emphasized enough. It's not just about type; it comes down to the definition of a brand's sounds and how consistently those sounds are replicated, becoming embedded in the comprehensive experience and identity of a brand. Moradi explains that big retailers with multiple locations have a difficult time controlling what music is played within all of their stores; musical consistency isn't typically maintained. Because of this, music hasn't been solidified as a viable marketing channel in many large retail stores. Visuals are much easier to understand, rinse and repeat; however, music that defines a brand is much more subjective and difficult to monitor.

North, Sheridan, et al. (2016) took the concept of musical fit one step further and would likely argue with Moradi ("Retail store guide: Why science says you should play music in your business", 2021) that noticing in-store music isn't always a bad thing if it positively taps into consumers' memories. Their research showed "that atmospheric or background music influences product choice via its ability to prime related concepts in memory. Once primed, these concepts influence product perception and guide choice to be congruent with the activated semantic network" (North, Sheridan, et al., 2016, pp. 90-91). This, again, speaks to the power of music. Music elicits emotion that may stem from various memories. Those memories may cause consumers to be interested in certain products over others and may directly influence purchase choice. While something to consider, it is impossible for a marketer to understand the memories of every consumer that walks through the door; however, a more generalized approach to an

audience's collective memories, based on location, era, pop culture, and current news, may bode well when selecting the music to be embedded into a brand.

The definition of *sonic branding* varies in research and literature. At its core, sonic branding is representative of the sounds and music associated with or even integral to a brand (Gustafsson, 2015). Simple examples of sonic branding are Apple's default ringtone or Ring's unmistakable chimes. Consumers come to recognize brands not just by visuals, but by sounds. In some definitions of sonic branding, in-store music—type, tempo, volume—is included as an experiential component of a brand. However, practitioners of marketing are not in agreement as to what sonic branding entails as well as its strategic relevance. For the purposes of this research, in-store music is included as a viable piece of strategic sonic branding, something to be researched and implemented with intent. Reason being, “when sonic branding initiatives fail to be strategic, and fail to connect to authentic consumer practices around music, its critics will remain strong” (Gustafsson, 2015, p. 35). In other words, additional research is needed to better reflect the effects of sounds and songs in a variety of consumer environments. As consumer effects are reported more abundantly and cohesively, room is given to better define sonic branding and implement its features within marketing strategy.

Given the current decade and the number of screens we're in front of on a daily basis, we are immersed in visuals. Brands are competing for attention via witty memes, brighter and more creative advertising, and shocking imagery. Now more than ever, brands need other ways of communicating with their audiences. Brands that are already doing it well utilize multiple platforms and mediums, creating consistency in every facet. Fulberg (2003) used the term *invisible communication*, describing it as “the holy grail of branding” (p. 198). Music is an incredibly influential mode of invisible communication. “The ability of music not only to create

consistency but also diversity means that it is well positioned to provide brand owners with a means of communication that is remarkably flexible” (Fulberg, 2003, p. 198). Unfortunately, the lack of definition of sonic or audio branding amongst academics and marketers alike has left a significant piece of brand identity on the table. In-store music is rarely seen as strategic or influential enough to have impact on the industry as a whole or even to be included within marketing plans. The following research seeks to move beyond visual elements and add credence to one of the invisible means of branding—in-store music. Research lacks perspective from chain American apparel stores, stores that are frequented by a range of ages and for a range of reasons. In this instance, consumer behavior driven by background music will be examined within Old Navy, a large American apparel and accessories retailing company.

In 2011, Old Navy partnered with the mobile app Shazam for an in-store marketing campaign. Utilizing Shazam, shoppers held their phones toward in-store speakers to identify songs, unlock style tips, watch music videos, and more ("Music and Magic in Old Navy Mobile Campaign", 2011). This campaign opened up the conversation of sonic branding within a large retail store. Ideally, additional campaigns are developed out of the following research; however, this research first seeks to identify general consumer perception and anticipated behaviors based on in-store music that is considered a fit and music that would be deemed off-brand within Old Navy. Data derived from surveys as well as field research aims to provide a generalized overview of background music as a marketing technique in the apparel retail space. Most Americans can easily visualize Old Navy's colors, fonts, and logos, but what is Old Navy's voice and what are shoppers actually hearing?

### **Hypotheses**



H1: Women will rate the importance of in-store music playing while they shop higher than men. Many articles have been written stating that women shop more frequently and are more engaged in the shopping experience than men; however, little is known about the importance of in-store music within the experience itself and whether or not gender makes a difference in that preference.

H2: Those who typically shop alone will rate the importance of in-store music playing while they shop higher than those who typically shop with other people. It's assumed that those who shop alone and are not distracted by the company of others are more likely to notice elements of the shopping atmosphere, in particular the music playing, than those who may be more engaged with immediate company. However, more definitive research is required to support or refute that assumption.

H3: There will be a significant positive correlation between amount of money spent (on average) on purchases in one shopping experience at Old Navy and the importance of in-store music playing during the shopping experience, such that the more money someone spends, the more important it will be that in-store music is playing while they shop. Someone who is spending more money at Old Navy is likely purchasing more items and spending more time in the store. Because of this, they likely care more about the overall shopping experience, inclusive of in-store music.

H4: There will be a significant negative correlation between age and how much in-store pop music is liked while shopping at Old Navy, such that the younger a person is, the more they will like to hear pop music while shopping. In general, pop music appeals more to a younger demographic. However, while younger individuals may prefer to listen to pop music in other

facets of life, more research is required to determine whether or not pop music is liked while shopping.

H5: There will be a significant positive correlation between age and how much in-store classical music is liked while shopping at Old Navy, such that the older a person is, the more they will like to hear classical music while shopping. Classical music generally appeals more to an older audience. It is assumed that an older individual will appreciate classical music more than a younger individual while shopping, perhaps finding it relaxing. Research has shown that in-store classical music has led to higher sales; however, additional studies are required to determine if age is a factor in the higher spend.

H6: Those who typically shop with others will prefer quieter in-store music than those who typically shop alone. If a group of individuals are shopping together, they may prefer less noise, in this case quieter music, so they're able to easily engage in conversation. That being said, very little research has been done involving the volume of in-store music. Further examination is required to begin to understand overall preferences, inclusive of in-store music volume.

H7: Women will care more about in-store music fitting the overall brand of Old Navy than men will. Women are typically more engaged in the shopping experience than men, meaning they may be more aware of branding structure and consistency. If something is "off," it may disrupt the experience they expect to have while shopping at Old Navy. Research surrounding this topic area does not typically examine consumers' perceptions of brand "fit" by asking them directly. Survey results will provide initial insight into the way consumer's make sense of a brand like Old Navy's.

### **Survey**

*This survey was completed in Qualtrics. Please refer to your email for a collaboration invitation. For your convenience, an exported Word version of the survey is included at the end of this document.*

### **Analysis Plan**

H1: Women will rate the importance of in-store music playing while they shop higher than men.

H1 will be investigated with a t-test. The grouping factor will be gender, determined by Question 4 (1= Female, 2=Male). The dependent variable will be the rating of “the importance of in-store music playing while they shop,” determined in Question 11 (Answers will range: 0 –10).

H2: Those who typically shop alone will rate the importance of in-store music playing while they shop higher than those who typically shop with other people.

H2 will be investigated with a t-test. The grouping factors will be “typically shops alone” (1) and “typically shops with other people” (2), determined in Question 6. The dependent variable will be the rating of “the importance of in-store music playing while they shop,” determined in Question 11 (Answers will range: 0 –10).

H3: There will be a significant positive correlation between amount of money spent (on average) on purchases in one shopping experience at Old Navy and the importance of in-store music playing during the shopping experience, such that the more money someone spends, the more important it will be that in-store music is playing while they shop.

H3 will be investigated with a correlation analysis (linear correlation) in an attempt to determine if there is a correlation between “amount of money spent (on average) on purchases in one shopping experience at Old Navy,” measured in a dollar amount in Question 9, and “the importance of in-store music playing during the shopping experience,” determined in Question 11 (Answers will range: 0 –10).

H4: There will be a significant negative correlation between age and how much in-store pop music is liked while shopping at Old Navy, such that the younger a person is, the more they will like to hear pop music while shopping.

H4 will be investigated with a correlation analysis (linear correlation) in an attempt to determine if there is a correlation between age, provided in a numerical value in Question 2, and “how much in-store pop music is liked while shopping at Old Navy,” measured by a sliding scale in Question 13—the top scale labeled “Pop” (Answers will range: 0-10).

H5: There will be a significant positive correlation between age and how much in-store classical music is liked while shopping at Old Navy, such that the older a person is, the more they will like to hear classical music while shopping.

H5 will be investigated with a correlation analysis (linear correlation) in an attempt to determine if there is a correlation between age, provided in a numerical value in Question 2, and “how much in-store classical music is liked while shopping at Old Navy,” measured by a sliding scale in Question 13—the bottom scale labeled “Classical” (Answers will range: 0-10).

H6: Those who typically shop with others will prefer quieter in-store music than those who typically shop alone.

H6 will be investigated with a t-test. The grouping factors will be “typically shops alone” (1) and “typically shops with other people” (2), determined in Question 6. The dependent variable will be the “liked volume of in-store music while shopping at Old Navy,” determined in Question 12 by a sliding scale (Answers will range 0-10).

H7: Women will care more about in-store music fitting the overall brand of Old Navy than men will.

H7 will be investigated with a t-test. The grouping factor will be gender, determined by Question 4 (1= Female, 2=Male). The dependent variable will be the rating of “how important it is for the in-store music played while shopping to align with Old Navy’s brand,” determined by Question 14 (Answers range: 0-10).

### **Recruitment Plan**

In-store music, as has been shown in the past, could have an affect on consumers’ shopping behaviors; however, this research will be conducted in an effort to determine if there are statistically significant effects at play. Utilizing this data, Old Navy can more effectively determine sonic branding strategies.

Old Navy was chosen as the brand and location because it is a large American apparel and accessories retailing store with a diverse group of consumers and several locations nationwide. While these research results will be specific to Old Navy, they will provide another lens through which researchers can view sonic branding. In-store music has not been scientifically investigated on such a large scale nor has it been looked at within multiple brand locations with consumers nationwide.

With the help of Old Navy’s corporate marketing team, the survey created for this investigation will be emailed to Old Navy’s entire United States email subscriber list, minus those who have unsubscribed from this type of communication. Several thousand emails will initially be sent (an exact number has yet to be provided by Old Navy), and open and click rates will be monitored. Follow-up emails encouraging completion will be written with intention and directed towards those who are most likely to take the survey. This will be determined by total opens, unique opens, total clicks, unique clicks, bounces and unsubscribes. In addition, anyone who completes the survey will be removed from all future survey communication.

Old Navy's corporate marketing team has given permission to offer an incentive for completing the survey—a 10% discount coupon to be provided via QR code at the completion of the survey. This incentive will be heavily marketed in email communication and potentially modified as emails are monitored over a 4-week period of time. April 2022 is the projected timeframe for survey distribution, as April does not have any major events within it or surrounding it that may skew consumer behavior.

Security measures will be put in place to diminish the number of bots and fraudulent surveys. Datasets will be cleaned weekly throughout the course of survey distribution. It is projected that at least 2,000 surveys will be completed, allowing for a large dataset. However, prior to running statistical analysis, frequency counts will be completed to determine if groupings are approximately equal in number. If there is extreme variation, select groups may be sent the survey again with additional incentive. The goal is to collect a large dataset with approximately equal groupings, allowing for statistically relevant results.

This survey research will be followed by a field study. Old Navy has requested in-store, observational research during which in-store music will be manipulated by type and volume and consumer demographic and purchase information will be collected. Consumers will voluntarily opt to provide their age, gender and total amount purchased. Field research will take place in one Old Navy store within each region of the United States. Each location will be chosen based on surrounding demographics, total sales and adherence to brand standards. Specific logistics of this additional study will be determined and reported following the collection, analysis and reporting of results of the distributed surveys. Ultimately, Old Navy seeks to obtain incredibly thorough insight regarding in-store music in particular. In-depth data will support and drive their sonic branding efforts and provide a comprehensive overview of the collective Old Navy audience.

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# Consumer Survey: In-Store Music at Old Navy

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

Welcome Thank you for participating in this approximately 4-min survey regarding the shopping experience at Old Navy. While many elements are included in the store's overall experience, this survey will primarily focus on in-store music. "In-store music" refers to the music played over the internal speaker system throughout all areas of an Old Navy store.

Please know that this survey is completely anonymous. If you're completing this survey on a mobile device, you may have to turn your device horizontal for optimal viewing.

Comprehensive results of this survey will guide marketing strategy and inform Old Navy of ways to improve the shopping experience. Click the arrow to begin.

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Page Break

Q1 Do you ever shop at Old Navy?

- ☐ Yes, often (1)
- ☐ Yes, sometimes (2)
- ☐ No, never (3)

*Skip To: NR If Q1 = No, never*

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Page Break



Q2 What is your age? Please enter a number.

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Q3 In what region of the United States do you live?

- ☐ Northeast (1)
- ☐ Southeast (2)
- ☐ Midwest (3)
- ☐ Southwest (4)
- ☐ West (5)

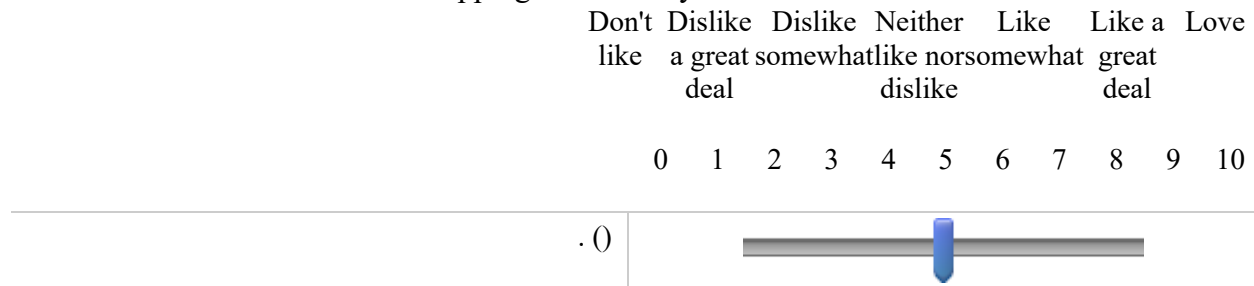
Q4 What is your gender?

- ☐ Female (1)
- ☐ Male (2)
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (4)

Page Break

Q5 How much do you like shopping at Old Navy?

0 = Don't like at all. 10 = Love shopping at Old Navy.



Q6 Do you typically shop alone or with other people?

- ☐ I typically shop alone. (1)
- ☐ I typically shop with other people. (2)

*Skip To: Q8 If Q6 = I typically shop alone.*

Q7 Who are you typically shopping with? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Friends (1)
- ☐ Adult family members (2)
- ☐ Kids (3)
- ☐ Coworkers (4)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q8 What are you typically shopping for? Please select all that apply.

☐

Women's clothing (1)

☐

Men's clothing (2)

☐

Kid's clothing (3)

☐

Activewear (4)

☐

Shoes (5)

☐

Accessories (6)

☐

Items for the home (7)

☐

Items for pets (8)

☐

Beauty & wellness items (9)

☐

Other (10) \_\_\_\_\_



Q9 On average, how much money do you spend on purchases in one shopping experience at Old Navy? Please answer in a dollar amount. Do not use a dollar sign.

\_\_\_\_\_

Q10 While you shop at Old Navy, do you like to hear in-store music?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

*Skip To: END If Q10 = No*

Q11 How important is it to you that in-store music is playing while you shop at Old Navy?

0 = Not at all important. 10 = Extremely important.

Not at all   Slightly   Moderately   Very   Extremely  
important   important   important   important   important

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

.0



Q12 At what volume would you like the in-store music to be while you shop at Old Navy?

0 = Nearly silent, can hardly hear. 10 = Max volume, as loud as possible.

0 = Nearly silent

10 = Max Volume

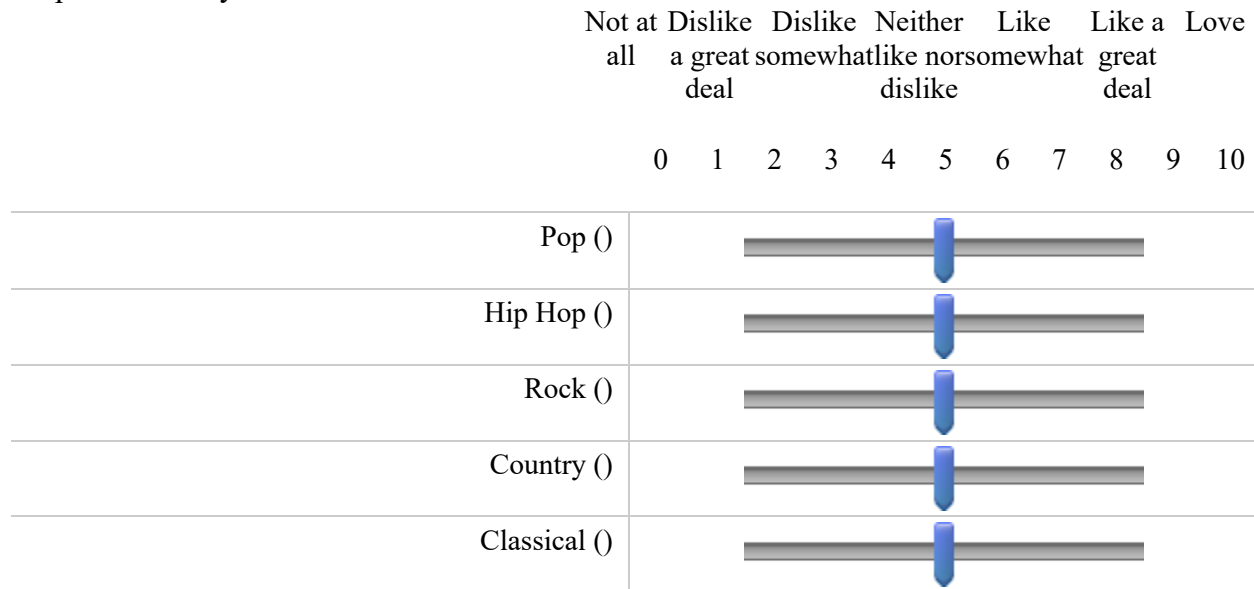
0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

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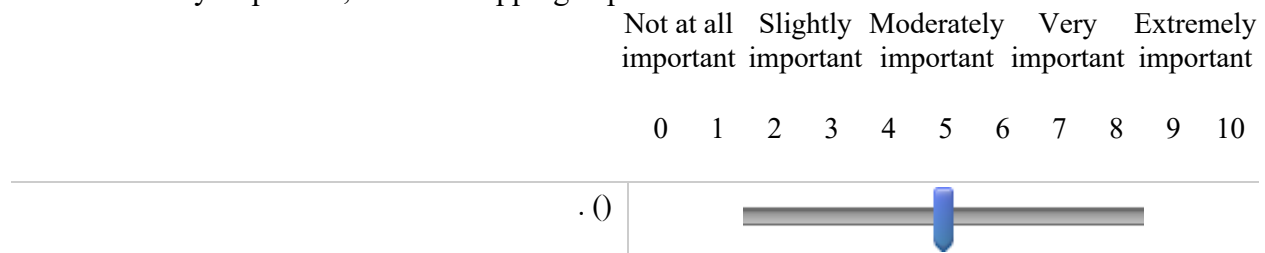
Q13 How much would you like to hear the following types of music playing in-store while you shop at Old Navy? 0 = Would not like at all. 10 = Would love.



Q14 How important is it to you that the in-store music playing while you shop aligns with Old Navy's brand?

0 = Not at all important, does not matter.

10 = Extremely important, affects shopping experience.



*Display This Question:*

*If Q1 = No, never*

NR Thank you for your interest in this survey; however, your responses are not required.

*Display This Question:*

*If Q1 = Yes, often*

*Or Q1 = Yes, sometimes*

END Thank you for your insight. We will continue to work to exceed your expectations and create a comfortable and fun store atmosphere. In appreciation of your time, please scan or tap (if on a phone) the QR code below to receive a 10% discount coupon. To redeem, present this coupon to an Old Navy representative the next time you shop at an Old Navy location. We hope you enjoy all future shopping experiences!

(QR Code)

Click the arrow to submit your survey responses.

End of Block: Default Question Block

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