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Shopping Online: The Interaction Effect of the Task at Hand and Crossmodally Congruent Background Music

The adoption of the internet as a retail channel has risen significantly in the past years, resulting in e-commerce becoming an established value in modern day Western societies (Beckers *et al.*, 2018). In contrast to the physical store, however, the online channel can only present visual and auditory stimuli. An online retailer can thus choose to optimally engage *both* senses, but in reality the focus lies on visual cues (Nadanyiova *et al.*, 2018). While the positive effect of pleasant background music is well known for the physical setting (e.g., Krishna, 2012), the transfer of this knowledge to the online setting is still needed. Research into this topic specifically executed in online settings might be a facilitator. For example, Adams & Doucé (2019) studied whether pleasant music can indeed enhance consumer reactions in an online webshop, especially when this music is crossmodally congruent or incongruent with the webshop. The concept of crossmodal congruency/incongruency was defined as the degree in which two stimuli are alike/different in 19 crossmodal correspondences. The results indicated that the music conditions did not outperform the no music condition. For certain consumer reactions (i.e., pleasure, arousal, store environment evaluation) a less favourable effect was found for the incongruent music compared to the congruent music. This study aims at refining these results by investigating if crossmodal (in)congruency effects might differ between shopping tasks. First, by means of a pretest, ten popular songs (with average 120 bpm) and a well-known fashion webshop were evaluated (by 34 participants, $M_{age} = 25.26$, 14 male) on their elicitation of 19 crossmodal correspondences used by Adams & Doucé (2019). Two songs were chosen: one crossmodally congruent with the webshop and one crossmodally incongruent. Both songs were also rated as pleasant and neutral in thematic fit with the webshop. In the main study 245 participants ($M_{age} = 25.40$, 75 male) were randomly assigned to a condition (i.e., no music, crossmodally incongruent music, crossmodal congruent music) and asked to perform one of the two shopping tasks. After completing the task, they filled in a survey measuring their consumer reactions (i.e., perceived pleasure, perceived arousal, store environment evaluation, store evaluation, approach behaviour). A two-way between-groups ANOVA was consequently executed with “music condition” and “shopping task” as independent variables. A significant interaction effect was found for all dependent variables ($p < .001$), indicating the crossmodal congruency effect is dependent upon the type of shopping task. In particular, when executing the more utilitarian oriented task) consumer reactions were significantly less positive in the incongruent music condition when compared to the no music condition and the congruent music condition. For the hedonic shopping task on the other hand, consumer reactions were significantly higher for the crossmodal congruent music when compared to the no music condition and the incongruent music condition. To conclude, the results of this study indicate that - depending on the task at hand - crossmodally congruent music may enhance consumer reactions or will not insert any added positive effect when compared to no music. Further, retailers can be advised that introducing crossmodally incongruent music should be avoided.