



Jesper Bjørn Petersen

web design in production music

a qualitative study into the relationship between web design and brand

information

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Preface

Abstract

The Internet as a commercial channel is well established while ever-evolving technologies provide businesses with many opportunities to offer products and services online. Websites are an important tool for businesses and can affect how users see the brand behind the website. Web design should be considered carefully when offering a product or service online to ensure competitiveness, commercial success, and brand recognition.

The aim of this study is to investigate how different aspects of web design can affect brand in a real industry context. Therefore, the research question is as follows: *How does web design influence brand in the production music industry?* The research question led to a literature review of web design, visual identity, and online brand experience, which revealed that web design can support brand through an online brand experience. The literature review showed that visual aesthetics and usability are two primary characteristics of a website, that individually and jointly can influence users' attitude and perception of a website and in turn the brand behind. Furthermore, visual aesthetics and usability are important in supporting the user experience of a website. The literature suggests, that visual aesthetics, usability, and the user experience, together can support the five dimensions of an online brand experience and influence how users perceive brand.

Based on the findings revealed by the literature review, a framework to structure and guide the further research process was developed. The research used an ethnography strategy to obtain a level of immersion and employed observations on six typical production music websites. The study found that inconsistent visual aesthetics can reflect negatively onto the brand in production music. Moreover, the study found that websites with improved usability, allowed for easy, efficient, and organised music searches, by presenting accurate information to the users continuously throughout the music search process.

The study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between web design and brand, by providing qualitative insights from the production music industry, that can encourage further research into the area. The study further encourages managers of smaller online businesses to consider web design as an important channel for improving brand.

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Introduction

Standing Out in a Digital Crowd

The Internet is continuously developing and its capacity as a commercial channel is evolving alongside. Businesses of any size benefit from the opportunities provided by new and evolving technologies. Especially smaller businesses have a lot to gain from establishing a digital presence to offer their products or services to consumers regardless of where they are in the world. Creating a website has never been easier, many companies provide off-the-shelf templates and CMS, along with e-commerce and marketing tools for small businesses to establish themselves in the global market. However, simply having a website does not guarantee success or even visitors. Attracting visitors in a market with a high competition, low switching costs for the users, and an abundance of competitors offering the same or similar products and services, can be problematic.

Technology may have allowed people with no particular coding skills to set up shop on the Internet, but with no real knowledge of how web design affects the people visiting the websites, the websites may suffer greatly in depth. Web design have the capabilities to capture the interest of the users and guide them through complicated or complex features on a website. Web design plays a key role in creating a distinct brand that allows the users to distinguish between online businesses. For the businesses themselves, being able to stand out is critical to their survival. Web design can improve the competitiveness of online businesses (Flavian, Gurrea, & Orús, 2009) and it should therefore be considered an important aspect when creating a website with a commercial purpose.

It is a rarity nowadays that a business exists in the real world without a digital counterpart, in many cases new and developing businesses only exist online due to the low costs of maintaining a digital business versus a physical one. A website is a versatile tool and perhaps one of the most important tools that can be managed utilised and managed so efficiently. Businesses use websites for a wide range of activities from sales, to marketing and promotions, branding and identity, internal and external communication, and the list goes on. Sometimes, the website itself is the very product or service a business offer. The most notable of those examples are perhaps Google and Facebook, but many smaller companies also take advantages of the Internet to start and grow their businesses.

The evolution of the Internet has allowed both small and large companies to develop new business models that harness the potential of the constant interconnectivity. This also means that competition on the Internet is especially high, with virtually no boundaries between the

opportunities available to the consumers, combined with very low switching costs, which makes attracting and retaining users is a big challenge. If a user does not like the what they are presented with, they simply hit the back-button in their browser and visit a new website.

The Importance of Web Design

At first thought, one might think that content is what matters on websites, and it certainly is. Content is the main reason for visits and re-visits on a website, but bad web design can influence users perception of high quality content websites and rate them lower or even reject them (Sillence, Briggs, Harris, et al., 2007). Besides content, the two most important aspects of human perception of web design is usability and aesthetics. Usability is essential as it allows the users to quickly and effortlessly find the content they are looking for. But content and usability is not enough on their own, websites often rely on aesthetics to provide a pleasing experience to the users during their visit. Due to the importance of the three aspects, they are often related and prone to interplay to enhance or diminish the experience on a website.

Web design have the capacity and the obligation to curate content through consciously crafted websites with information intuitively organised in seamlessly designed pages, that facilitates effortless navigation in a trustworthy and pleasing environment.

Introduction

Web 2.0 - The New Standard

Understanding what the term Web 2.0 embodies gives an idea of what it takes for a business to compete in a global digital market. The term was coined by Darcy DiNucci in her article *Fragmented Future* in 1999 (DiNucci, 1999) and was later popularised by Tim O'Reilly (founder of O'Reilly Media Inc. - a leading publication company within the field of computers and technology) and Dale Dougherty at the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in 2004 as a reaction to the burst of the dot-com bubble in 2001. Initially the term gathered quite the attention and was widely used as a marketing buzzword for companies to inappropriately brand themselves, but the term has since then gradually evolved alongside the internet (O'Reilly, 2005). Essentially, Web 2.0 websites are platforms that allows users to connect and interact in communities where users can post content themselves or even create the content of the web page themselves (most popular is social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube). Furthermore, Web 2.0 websites tend to offer a service, rather than a bundled software package (e.g. Google's services such Google Search, Gmail, Google Docs, Google Drive, and so on). Web 2.0 websites provides rich experiences for end users across platforms and system with lightweight and flexible user interfaces with emphasis on usability (O'Reilly, 2005). This type of websites and content is more or less the new standard by now, but the idea behind Web 2.0 has allowed many new ideas, technologies, and business models to be developed on the Internet and the opportunities are ever growing. Web 2.0 is important because it refers to the way the Internet changes and especially how websites are *designed* and *used*.

The way the internet has changed since Web 2.0 became a concept has lead to many advances especially in technologies and business models. The change from passive websites to interactive platforms has provided businesses with a unique new way of reaching and connecting with their customers, especially smaller companies has a lot to gain from the new opportunities (Barlow, McCann, & Smith, 2011). Larger businesses will have an easier time adopting new technologies and adapting to new ways of conducting business due to more resources, skills, and level of specialisation being available (Bughin, 2008). Markets shifted from local to global and the new digital avenues and increased competition. The Web 2.0 approach has a fundamentally different view of how businesses interact with customers, thus opening up for new business opportunities, new ways to deliver value, and new way for business to organise themselves. According to Bernoff and Li (2008) the supply chain activities affected by the Internet is usually R&D, sales, customer support, operations, and marketing. Especially marketing has become more affordable operation. Smaller businesses no longer need large advertisement budgets and huge billboards to be seen, all they need are a website and the right meta tags to show up in search engines.

Problem

The Production Music Industry

This study will focus on web design in the production music industry and a brief account on the industry and its challenges is presented.

The production music industry is a lesser known side of the music industry, often overshadowed by the consumer-centric commercial music industry. Production music is sometimes referred to as stock music; and like stock photos production music can be licensed for use in tv, advertisement, promotion, and many other types of media. This type of music is often produced specifically for use in various productions and is therefore often featured in several versions, cut-downs, and mixes. The music spans from simple sound effects to original composed vintage film scores and everything in between. In production music, there is barely being produced any physical products and no live performances are being held, which makes the industry more or less a digital industry. Unlike the commercial music industry, the production music very rarely license their music to consumers, but their sales is business-to-business.

The music is written by composers and artists, released by publishers or labels, and in many cases represented through various agents around the world. The composers or publishers still holds the copyright. The agents represent large repertoires of sometimes up to one million tracks, which they license to production companies or advertisement agencies for use in the television, commercials, branded content, or other types of productions. The music license is often granted along with the synchronisation rights, which allows a piece of music to be synchronised with a visual productions.

Some platforms and companies offer *royalty-free* music, which is free to use in productions without any license at all. This means that the composers and artists represented on these platforms have signed away their copyright in order for the music to be free. This is not to be confused with the production music companies who honour both sides of the copyright and pay the musicians and the publishers by collecting mechanical rights, performing rights, and royalties. Some agents also clear rights for commercially released music rights with their respective owners so a hit song can be used in television, advertisement, or another type of productions.

The companies that represent large repertoires on their website can receive up to 200-300 new albums every month from various publishers, which makes for an ever growing music library that users have to filter through online in order to find suitable tracks for their productions. The

websites are a big part of the service the many agents provide and it has to be well designed and good looking to attract and keep users on the sites. There are many companies offering the same service and some platforms offer it for free by letting users upload songs directly to the websites with very few requirements. Needless to say competition is tough and on the Internet the switching costs are very low for the users. This further stresses the need for well designed website within the industry.

Navigating through an online production music library with anywhere between 10.000 and +1.000.000 music tracks to choose from it can be a daunting task and quite a challenge to find the right one. In order to narrow down their options, users can often perform a search, browse different genres, or look through various mood based playlists to find a suitable match. The tracks are free to listen to and sometimes free to download as well. But getting the users to download and use the tracks is a challenge, especially if they cannot find a decent match for their criteria.

Web design can play an important role in improving this scenario. First of all, an attractive web site can provide an enjoyable experience for the users and help establishing a distinct brand. Second, having a high level of usability can let the users easily and quickly find the tracks they are looking for. Finally, succeeding with the two can improve the chance of re-visits to the website. The importance of web design in this industry is paramount and should be heavily emphasised by the companies operating within it.

Problem

Problem and Research Question

This study takes its departure from an interest in web design with a focus on how it relates to and affects visual identity, brand, and reputation. Visual identity has been found to support reputation (van den Bosch, de Jong, & Elving, 2005) and is also closely connected to brand (Phillips, McQuarrie, & Griffin, 2014), it can therefore be seen as an opportunity for businesses to manage reputation and brand through visual means. Further, websites are a tangible and manageable asset for businesses shape their visual identity through high quality web design and reach a large amount of consumers in the process. For online companies, management of brand through web design may prove to be of significant importance when trying to build a distinct visual brand and a trustworthy reputation (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013).

In production music, websites are of utmost importance as the websites are the very service they offer to their customers. Being a digital industry the websites greatly influences how the customers perceive the brand as well as the products and services being provided. In an online context it is important to provide a strong experience to create a distinct brand. This leads to the following research question.

how does web design influence brand in the production music industry?

To answer the research question, it is necessary to understand what characteristics of web design are likely to influence users perception of websites and if these perceptions are likely to reflect back onto the company and brand. Therefore an initial literature review on websites will be conducted. Furthermore, it is also important to review the literature that can connect brand with web design, to asses which web design factors can affect brand perception. The goal of this study is to provide objective details of web design practices used in production music, that can contribute a discussion of website utilisation in the industry. Also, the study hopes to argue for the relevance of web design and brand within the industry and provide some insights into possible managerial applications of web design to improve brand perception. The practices of web design are frequently discussed and this study hopes to contribute to that discussion with insights from production music. It is important to note that the study will not focus on content as an aspect of web design as the scope of the study is within a single industry where the content can considered to be homogeneous. The study will therefore focus on web designs ability to deliver the content to the users. Furthermore, the study excludes social media and will not focus on mobile browsing, despite the significant rise in mobile browsing habits in recent years¹.

¹ The Telegraph - Mobile web usage overtakes desktop for the first time: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2016/11/01/mobile-web-usage-overtakes-desktop-for-first-time/>

Literature Review

Components of Web Design

Websites are an important way of connecting with users and constitutes an important field within information system and human-computer-interaction (HCI) literature. Web design plays an important role in curating the interaction between businesses and consumers. Websites have been researched extensively with many different perspectives from the importance of colour (Bonnardel, Piolat, Le Bigot, 2011), visual complexity (e.g. Tuch, Bargas-Avila, Opwis et al., 2009), aesthetics and usability (e.g. Tractinsky, Cokhavi, Kirschenbaum et al., 2006; Tuch, Roth, Hornbæk et al., 2012), trustworthiness (e.g. Ou, Sia, 2010; Seckler, Heinz, Forde et al., 2015a), to websites on mobile devices (e.g. Lu, Wang, Ma, 2013; Kim, Thomas, Sankaranarayana, 2016), and the literature goes on. Web design is a diverse topic of academic interest and this section highlights important aspects of the field.

"A good design is relevant for companies to survive in the extremely competitive World Wide Web." (Flavian, Gurrea, & Orús, 2009, p. 168)

But what is good web design? Designing a website requires knowledge and understanding of many distinct disciplines from aesthetics to usability and much more. Each discipline brings something different to the table, that if implemented correctly can have a significant impact on the perception of a website. However, each discipline calls different aspects of web design to attention and implementing the *optimal* way of every discipline can be too much. Often a trade-off between the different aspects is necessary to achieve a great result. It cannot be argued that there is an optimal solution to the web design, websites have to be designed in accordance with their goals. If a website is selling clothes the design might focus on aesthetics, branding, and conversion rates (users that goes beyond casual viewing to purchasing a product). However, if a website offers an online service platform, it might focus on compatibility, usability, and the user-experience.

Flavian, Gurrea, and Orús (2009) carried out an extensive literature review and research into the key factors leading to successful e-commerce websites. Their review and research identified that quality web design is a crucial factor in positively influencing online users and consumers' perceptions, and purchasing intention. They pointed out that web design play an important role in generating trust and satisfaction towards the websites. Furthermore, they concluded that there is an important connection between web design and usability. Allowing users to navigate a website with ease gives them a sense of freedom, which avails positively towards the website. Most importantly they identified that the users' perspective is a key factor and should be

considered in every aspect of the website. They additionally listed a series of aspect that could improve the overall success of an e-commerce website.

First, they emphasised the importance of aesthetic appearance of the website and the importance of first impressions to establish a good impression of the firm. Second, they suggested navigation as an important factor, highlighting ease of use and simplicity for the users to navigate the website with a sense of freedom. Third, they underlined the importance of carefully managed information and content. Information and content should be presented with clarity and should be of quality to ensure that users find and are satisfied by what they are looking for. Fourth, they draw attention to purchases on e-commerce websites and that designers should provide an efficient and easy shopping process with sufficient information about products and services while emphasising security and privacy throughout. Even though this aspect may be most relevant to e-commerce websites, the principles of process, privacy, and security has broad appeal and extends beyond merely e-commerce. They end by pointing out that many web designers may have been obsessed on pushing technological boundaries, rather than focussing on what their users want. However, more recent literature along with practitioners in the field have been pushing the agenda of *user-centered design*, which may be a sign that times have changed regarding approach to web design.

Among the key factors listed by Flavian, Gurrea, and Orús (2009), two areas in particular stand out in the HCI and website literature; aesthetics and usability. The importance of these two factors are pronounced in the literature and for that reason a review of the significant literature will be presented below. Another popular topic among practitioners and in recent HCI-literature is *user experience*. Aesthetics and usability plays an important role in affecting the user experience on websites as well as being two of the most tangible aspects that a company can control and improve. However user experience is a comprehensive concept and will be discussed later.

The Significance of Visual Aesthetics

Interface-aesthetics, aesthetic appearance, visual aesthetics, and the other monikers of website aesthetics have obtained a significant interest in the HCI-literature in the recent years. There has since been developed and discovered many connections between website aesthetics and other factors such as credibility and trust (e.g. Robins & Holmes, 2007; Skulmowski, Augustin, Pradel et al., 2016), gender (e.g. Tuch, Bargas-Avila, Opwis, 2010; Lin and Hseih, 2016), usability (Tuch, Roth, Hornbæk et al., 2012), first impressions and perception (e.g. Lindgaard et al., 2006; Tractinsky et al., 2006), perceptions (Schaik & Ling, 2008), and many more. The subject has been

researched considerably, but due to the often subjective nature of the aesthetics, trying to determine what *good* website aesthetics is, can be difficult.

Nevertheless, aesthetics may be one of the most influential elements regarding users' perception of websites. Lindgaard et al. (2006) found that users shape their first impression of a website within the first 50 ms of viewing. The first impressions are predominantly consistent over time and the authors emphasised the importance of this initial exchange between the users and website. In addition, Tractinsky et al. (2006) replicated the initial findings of Lindgaard et al. (2006), stressing the importance of visual aesthetics as well as suggesting that visual aesthetics significantly affects the users' attitude towards the system before any interaction takes place. Dion et al. (1972) showed how physical appearance of a person can influence future social interactions and the same may be true for websites.

Visual complexity and symmetry

The study of interface aesthetics in HCI-literature has grown from inspiration from beauty and aesthetics studies, where elements such as symmetry and complexity plays an important role in forming perceptions of beauty and aesthetics. We humans are positively affected by aesthetics in nature and the beauty in objects (Norman, 1988), it therefore seems obvious that the aesthetics of an interface can provide similar pleasure.

Visual complexity influence several aspects of website perception and has a significant impact on aesthetic perception. Websites with low visual complexity are perceived to more aesthetic, than websites with high visual complexity (Tuch, Bargas-Avila, & Opwis, 2009; Tuch, Presslaber, Stöcklin et al., 2012; Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b; Jiang et al., 2016). Visual complexity has been identified as a critical factor in establishing a good first impression of a website (Jiang et al., 2016) and been linked to user preference and buying intentions on e-commerce websites (Deng & Poole, 2012). Furthermore, visual complexity has been shown to affect users cognitive processes and impact visual search performance, memorisation, and usability of a website (Tuch, Bargas-Avila, & Opwis, 2009; Pennington et al., 2016).

The influence of symmetry on aesthetic perception is well documented in scientific psychology literature and it also plays a part in web design. Tuch, Bargas-Avila, and Opwis (2010) showed that vertical symmetry is important in web design aesthetics, where asymmetrical websites scored lower in their experiment. However, only males reacted negatively towards asymmetrical websites, whereas women were unaffected. This indicates that websites with a large male audience could benefit from having a symmetrical design, hereby urging web designers to take gender into considerations when designing for a specific target audience. Symmetry has been

shown to have an aesthetically pleasing effect that promote structure and meaningfulness on websites (Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b). Symmetry can makes websites easy to process and create a more fluent perception of the website and increasing users preference for the website (Yoo & Kim, 2014).

When it comes to gender, some aspects of web design affects men and women different. Coursaris, Swierenga, and Watrall, (2008) investigated the relationship between colour temperature and its impact on perceived aesthetics and the difference between gender. They were able to determine that cooler colour temperatures were perceived more favourably, but were not able to determine any difference between men and women, indicating no immediate impact of colour temperature on gender. However, as mentioned earlier Tuch, Bargas-Avila, and Opwis (2010) were able to determine a gender effect on symmetry, where men found asymmetrical websites less aesthetically pleasing than women. Suggesting that men and women can be prone to experience websites differently.

Colour and graphics

Colours and graphics have a tremendous impact on websites, particularly on how users perceive and navigate them. Colours can evoke certain moods (Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b) and graphics can help users navigate and find what they are looking for (Lin, Yeh, Wei, 2013). Colour has several times been found to be the most noticeable trait at initial exposure to a website and has frequently been found to affect aesthetic appraisal, both in digital and real-world settings (Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b). Most studies have investigated which primary colours are generally found most aesthetically pleasing by users and found that yellow are the least favourable, while blue and grey were found to be the most aesthetically pleasing (Cyr, Head, Larios, 2009; Bonnardel, Piolat, Le Bigot, 2011; Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b). Another study have found that found that cooler colour temperatures were often preferred over warmer colours (Coursaris, Swierenga, Watrall, 2008) which supports the general preference for blue. Beyond primary the colour on websites, Lindgaard et al. (2011) found that websites with a bright background were found most aesthetically pleasing.

Colours have also been found to influence trustworthiness, e.g., high colour saturation can negatively affect users' perception of trustworthiness depending on content (Skulmowski et al., 2016). Colours are a primary characteristic of a websites overall visual design, poorly implemented colours can have a negative effect on users and make them feel the website looks cheap and hereby lower perceived trustworthiness (Seckler et al., 2015a).

Colours also have a distinct effect how users navigate a website. Bonnardel, Piolat, and Le Bigot (2011) found that users generally spend more time navigating a website with a warm colour (orange) as opposed to website with a cool colour (blue). Pelet and Papadopoulou (2012) demonstrated that colours furthermore have an influence on memorisation of websites and purchase intentions, where warmer colour had a positive effect in encouraging user interaction. Colours are frequently used along with important elements on websites to set them apart and encourage user interaction, these elements are called *call-to-action* (Pennington et al., 2016). These elements are often used on e-commerce websites in the form of buy-buttons and on community websites as sign-up buttons.

In addition to colour, graphics are another elements that provides websites with life, vigour, and greatly impacts visual aesthetics. Beyond its impact on aesthetics, graphics plays an important role in highlighting functionality and navigational elements on website by guiding users towards these. Lin, Yeh, and Wei (2013) investigated the use of graphics and its influence on aesthetics, they found that a graphics to text ratio of 3:1 will have the most attractive appearance, while a 1:1 ratio will look the most sensible. However in their study, graphics comprise a larger group of design elements, such as white space, layout, text, symbols, and also colours. Hereby tying colours into a larger interface design discipline beyond the mere choice of which colours to use on a website.

Approaches to measuring aesthetics

When trying to measure website aesthetics, researchers often distinguish between two main approaches; an objective approach measuring screen-design-factors and a subjective approach measuring the users' aesthetic perception of the website.

The objective approach treats design elements on screen as triggers for the users' aesthetic perceptions. Measuring with this method uses numerical counts of visual elements such as images, amount of text, colours, structure, etc., or intricate mathematical formulas to calculate symmetry or complexity level (Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b).

The subjective approach measures users' perception of visual aesthetics through questionnaires to capture the interrelated complexity of multiple design elements from a subjects point of view (Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b). Two generally accepted methods of measurement within the subjective approach are Lavie and Tractinsky's (2004) scales of classical and expressive aesthetics and the visual aesthetics of websites inventory (VisAWI) by Moshagen and Thielsch (2010).

The terms classical and expressive aesthetics was formed through multiple studies and represent the users' subjective evaluation of a website. "Classical aesthetics refers to the

orderliness and clarity of the design. Expressive aesthetics refers to the originality, creativity and the richness of the design" (Tractinsky et al., 2006, p. 1074). Adjectives such as colourful and creative would be connected to expressive aesthetics while adjectives such as orderly and clear would be connected to classical aesthetics.

Moshagen and Thielsch (2010) intentions were to create a precise and operational method of measuring perceived visual aesthetics of websites. They used a broad definition to capture the diverse interest in the field and identified four facets of visual aesthetics; Simplicity, Diversity, Colourfulness, and Craftmanship. The four facets offers a more diverse method of measurement, however Simplicity are strongly related to classical aesthetics and Diversity to expressive aesthetics. Colourfulness describes the selection, combination, and utilisation of colours on a website, while Craftmanship describes the integration of technologies, the harmony of the design, and the balance between the implemented elements, which also could be related to the expressive aesthetics.

Website Usability

Usability is another highly researched topic and is often considered an attribute that describes the quality of an interface. Usability has been shown to be a key factor for companies who offer their services online and website with high perceived usability has been shown to positively influence trust, satisfaction, and website loyalty (Flavián, Guinalú, & Gurrea, 2006). The official ISO defines it as “the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use” (ISO 9241-11, 2010). Usability contains five quality attributes; learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction; and in short these describe how easy a design is to learn and re-learn, how quickly a user can accomplish tasks, the amount of errors incurred during use, and the pleasure of use (Nielsen, 1993; Simon, Brexendorf, Fassnacht, 2013).

When defining usability many researchers reference the ISO 9241 because of the effort to provide a concise a definition of usability along with the work of Nielsen (1993) due to the pivotal importance of his work on usability (e.g. Lin, Choong, & Salvendy; 1997; Flavián, Guinalú, & Gurrea, 2006; Lee & Koubek, 2010; Lee & Kozar, 2012; Lin & Hsieh, 2016). Several themes of usability appears in most definitions and delimitations of usability, many researches and practitioners tend to highlight the *efficiency of use*, *ease of navigation*, *transparency and control*, and *satisfaction* as important elements of usability (e.g. Nielsen, 1993; Flavián, Guinalú, & Gurrea, 2006; Lee & Koubek, 2010; Lin & Hsieh, 2016). Some researchers devise more elaborate constructs (e.g. Lee & Kozar, 2012) for a deeper understanding of the relationship between various usability factors. However, for this study the more general themes will suffice as they provide an understanding of usability as a key concept and further provide a notion as to which usability aspects of web design are likely to influence users perception of websites.

Interplay between usability and aesthetics

According to Tuch, Roth, and Hornbæk et al. (2012) aesthetics and usability has a strong connection with each other. A key study by Tractinsky, Katz, and Ikar (2000), found a strong correlation between interface aesthetics and perceived usability on an ATM, arguing for the presence of a *halo-effect* where aesthetics of an interface outshines other features and affecting the overall experience of the product. This correlation has been researched extensively (e.g. Lavie and Tractinsky, 2004; Hartmann et al., 2008; van Schaik and Ling, 2009; Jiang et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2016), and the majority of researchers have been able to affirm the correlation, however some researchers was not. Tuch et al. (2012) investigated the ‘*what is beautiful is usable*’ notion proposed by Tractinsky, Katz, and Ikar (2000) and found reverse effect, where usability affected perceived aesthetics. The evidence of the literature shows that there is indeed

a close connection between usability and aesthetics; and that they have the potential to inversely affect each other and enhance the overall experience of interacting with a website.

Usability and user cognition

Websites built with usability principles in mind encourage interaction (Lin & Hsieh, 2016) and this is important for web designers to remember as website functions gradually becomes more advanced and elaborate. Complex tasks needs to be simplified for users to understand what they are doing in order to lessen their cognitive workload, so by emphasising usability fundamentals in web design users can more enjoyably navigate a website (Lin and Hsieh, 2016). Websites with strong usability tend to be more competitive and have a better chance of survival (Flavian, Gurrea, & Orús, 2009), especially within e-commerce where competition is high and switching costs is low.

Usability literature often focus on reducing the cognitive processes of the user and simplifying interaction through behavioural design properties that can contribute to usability of a system (Bonnardel, Piolat, Le Bigot, 2011). How information is presented is important to the users cognitive processes and Gestalt psychology plays significant role in explaining why. A part of Gestalt theory proposes that the mind will strive to make sense of things and in case of cognitive overload look for patterns even though none exists (Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015; Pennington et al., 2016). Cognitive overload can be a result of overuse of visual elements (such as colours, graphics, images, and videos) which can confuse the users and impair the functionality of the website (Lin, Yeh, & Wei, 2013). The cognitive processes can be reduced by organising related content, highlighting important elements, or simplifying choices presented to the user (Pennington et al., 2016).

The discussion of cognition is connected to visual complexity and aesthetics. Simplicity is an effective way of reducing the cognitive processes and allowing users to focus on finding the right content (Rosen & Purinton, 2004; Tuch, Bargas-Avila, Opwis et al., 2009; Lin, Yeh, & Wei, 2013).

An approach to measuring usability

To assure high usability on websites, interfaces can be checked against usability measurements. An example of measuring usability is with the Purdue Usability Testing Questionnaire proposed by Lin et al. (1997). There has since been developed more ways of measuring usability, however the criteria listed in the PUTQ provides a general notion as what influences usability and how it is measured. Lin and Hsieh (2016) lists these criteria to be; compatibility, consistency, flexibility, learnability, minimal action, minimal memory load, perceptual limitation, and user guidance.

Compatibility refers to the mental model compatibility and measures if the system is designed in a way that resembles regular activities for the user. *Consistency* refers to familiarisation of an interface across a website, e.g., if menus look and are positioned consistently across a websites users will know how to navigate the site. *Flexibility* refers to the varying needs of the user, e.g., a website fitted for both desktop and mobile browsing will most likely receive a higher flexibility rating. *Learnability* refers to the degree of which new and returning users can familiarise themselves with the interface. *Minimal action* refers to potential unnecessary actions a user encounter while trying to complete a task. *Minimal memory load* refers to the cognitive workload placed on users during use. *Perceptual limitation* refers to whether the interface design corresponds with human perception, e.g., use of colours coding. Lastly, *user guidance* refers to whether or not help and guidance is available if/when needed. Lin and Hsieh (2016) investigated gender preferences of website interfaces and which usability criteria had most impact. They found that the three most important criteria for females compatibility, learnability, and user guidance; for men the three most important were compatibility, minimal action, and flexibility. Both genders preferred compatibility as an essential criteria for website interfaces to function with user conventions and align with user expectations. Beyond this criteria men preferred freedom and efficiency, speaking to an expert-level usage and comfort with technology, where women preferred learnability and guidance for assurance throughout navigation.

Other constructs of measuring website usability focus on less parameters (Nielsen, 1993) and others on more (Lee & Kozar, 2012), but the PUTQ provides an overview of commonly used parameters when measuring usability.

The User Experience

User experience has received a great deal of interest in recent HCI-literature. However, the term is often used as professional buzzword to elicit sentiments of high-end modern web design. Authors and experts like Don Norman and Jakob Nielsen (principals in the field of UX) contends that the term is commonly used to describe too narrow an interaction, such as a single interaction with an app or a website, but this is not the case². The term user experience describes a much larger experience than a simple interaction with a website. User experience is not reserved for web design, but can be applied to any product, however since a vast majority of businesses rely on a website to sell or facilitate the sale of their products or services, its implication to web design is highly relevant. ISO 9241-210, Ergonomics of human system interaction, describes user experience as a person's perceptions and responses caused by the use, or anticipated use, of a product, service, or system (ISO 9241-210, 2010). Given this description, it is not surprising that many may misunderstand the concept, due to the open depiction. Don Norman and Jakob Nielsen defines user experience as "all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products"³. Their definition also embraces the company as a factor in the user experience, which is an important notation as products and services naturally reflects back onto the company behind.

Academically, user experience have also been of increasing interest, partly due to the professional buzz around the concept. Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006) investigated different perspectives on user experience and found that regarding technology, the user experience is a notion that goes beyond the mere instrumental fulfilment of a system. They describe user experience as; *"a consequence of a user's internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.), the characteristics of the designed system (e.g. complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.) and the context (or the environment) within which the interaction occurs (e.g. organisational/social setting, meaningfulness of the activity, voluntariness of use, etc.)"* - (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006, p. 95). They identified three overlapping aspects that contribute to the user experience; beyond instrumental, emotional, and experience. Thus, tying emotional needs together with the system that is experienced in the context it is experienced within.

Approaches to user experience

Besides the various definitions of user experience from experts and international standards, authors have also called for a clear definition of the term. Battarbee and Koskinen (2005)

² NNGroup - Don Norman on the term UX: <https://www.nngroup.com/videos/don-norman-term-ux/>

³ NNGroup - The Definition of User Experience (UX): <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/definition-user-experience/>

provides an account of three different approaches to user experience; the *measuring approach*, the *empathic approach*, and a *pragmatist approach*. All three approaches revolve around the emotional experiences, however they treat the emotions in a different way.

The measuring approach assumes that experiences can be documented, measured, and then improved upon. This approach is predominant in development and testing, where user experience are refined before a product is finished. This approach has a narrow definition of user experience as it only includes aspects that can be measured. The empathic approach also states that experience is emotional, but the experiences derived from products and services should be linked to the needs of the user. Therefore, when designing an experience or a product it should appeal directly to the desired emotional responses of the consumers. It is important that designers understand the emotions of their consumers and for that reason qualitative methods are favoured within this approach. Lastly, as the name suggests, the pragmatic approach shares perspective with the pragmatist philosophy and it focuses on user experience in interaction. It assumes that experiences are ongoing, but varies in cognitive significance, some experiences may be subconscious while others are very rich and demands more cognitive attention. This approach seeks to extract meaning from interaction, therefore experiences are momentary constructs that arise from interaction between people and environment.

The empathic approach offers a popular user-centered perspective that has grown popular in educational and professional circles recently. Methodologies such as Design Thinking and Service Design emphasise users throughout the process and many companies use these when developing, testing, and refining products and services (Polaine, Løvlie, & Reason, 2013). Previously, the measuring approach had been used greatly within software development where methods such as eye-tracking have been used to measure how users interact with a system.

The user experience and users

Pennington et al. (2016) describes user experience as understanding users needs and behaviours in order to design “useful, usable, and aesthetically pleasing systems and services” (Pennington, Chapman, & Fry et al., 2016, p. 47). This description of user experience comprises three important components; usefulness, usability, and aesthetics. First is usefulness, the system or service should serve to a need of a user. Second is usability, the system or service should be easy and efficient to interact with. Third is aesthetics, a system or service should be joyful and fun to use as well as providing a sense of pleasure and satisfaction. Pennington et al. (2016) also notes how website complexity increases the cognitive load of the user and makes it increasingly more difficult to complete a task, which in turn may hurt the user experience.

An example of a recent trend in web design is called *parallax scrolling*, which is a way of creating depth by having background images moving slower relative to the images and/or text in the foreground. This effect have been widely implemented and has been claimed to enhance the user experience by supporters of the effect. Frederick, Mohler, Vorvoreanu, et al. (2015) investigated the effect by examining five determinants of user experience; usability, satisfaction, enjoyment, fun, and visual appeal, and found that parallax scrolling can improve the user experience by making the website appear more fun. However, they also found that the effect had a negative impact on usability and also made some users feel seasick. This illustrates a potential risk for web designers when implementing new trends on websites in order to blindly improve the user experience.

Another important element that can be linked to the user experience of websites is Gestalt theory; it affects both aesthetic perception and usability, as well as the user experience. Gestalt theory proposes that symmetrical objects are generally preferred over asymmetrical objects because they contains less information to process (Tuch, Bargas-Avila, & Opwis, 2010), they are also more prone to positive aesthetic judgements (Seckler, Opwis, & Tuch, 2015b). Gestalt psychology also influences the way users experience websites, it dictates that users always will try to make sense of visual chaos (Pennington et al., 2016) and attempt to process visual elements as a whole before the individual parts (Jiang et al., 2016). Complex websites therefore poses the risk of cognitively overloading the users which can hurt the user experience. Applying a design principle known as chunking can help this. Gestalt theory explains how objects close together are viewed as being more related than objects that are far apart (Pennington et al., 2016). Presenting related information in chunks helps structuring the content of the websites and makes it easier for the users to process (Pennington et al., 2016). In relation to this, Lidwell, Holden, and Butler (2010) describes a 80/20 rule, often used as a rule-of-thumb for practitioners, which states that around 80% of a products usage involve 20% of its features. This indicates that 80% of what is presented to the user may be adding to the cognitive load on the users. To help this issue, design principles such as choice simplification and choice reduction are applied to reduce cognitive load and allow for faster decision making (Pennington et al., 2016).

Pennington et al. (2016) focuses a great deal on cognitive aspects and include both usability and aesthetic considerations into the factors that affects the user experience. It illustrates the importance of the usability and aesthetics as concepts and by improving the, two websites can in turn improve the user experience. However, Pennington et al. (2016) also notes that usability and aesthetics does not generate a great user experience on their own, but that the overall experience surrounding a product and service also plays an important role in influencing the user experience.

Literature Review

Visual Identity and Brand

Visual identity and corporate visual identity (CVI) has been researched extensively throughout the last decades and researchers are generally in agreement when it comes to defining the terms of visual identity. An organisations visual identity is the external signs of internal promises (Jefkins, 1990). Baker and Balmer (1997) describes corporate visual identity as the visible components of corporate identity, thus coupling the visual elements to corporate identity. An important distinction that illustrates that the CVI comes from the identity within the organisation. According to van den Bosch, de Jong, & Elving (2005, p. 108) "a corporate visual identity consists of a name, a symbol and/or logo, typography, colour, a slogan and - very often - additional graphical elements". This is in some ways a quite open definition of a corporate visual identity, but it does distill the CVI down to some essential visual elements. Van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving also note that; "CVI elements are used in communication and on a variety of applications, such as buildings, vehicles and corporate clothing" (2005, p. 108), thus relating visual identity to concrete examples. Many definitions tend to lean towards the same open depiction of CVI (Baker and Balmer, 1997; Melewar and Saunders, 1998; van den Bosch, de Jong, & Elving, 2005; Wrona, 2015), but the term is hardly seen in a more modern perspective.

The terms *visual identity* and *corporate visual identity* are sometimes used interchangeably because of their close relation. However, some researchers make a distinction between the two and use the term corporate visual identity to describe a broader array of components such as buildings and architecture, vehicles, dress code, etc., where visual identity is used to describe the visual elements that can convey meaning (Baker and Balmer, 1997; van den Bosch, de Jong, & Elving, 2005; Wrona, 2015). An important note to make is the distinction between corporate visual identity and corporate identity. Corporate identity embodies more elements than corporate visual identity, corporate identity can also be organisational behaviour, communications, interaction with the environment, and attitude (Van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Wrona, 2015). CVI communicates corporate identity to the organisations surroundings and that is why a CVI needs to be a carefully planned and executed strategy in order to benefit from the competitive advantage from strong CVI (Baker and Balmer, 1997; Van Riel and Balmer, 1997; van den Bosch, de Jong, & Elving, 2005; Z.L.Hamzah et al., 2014; Wrona, 2015). For online brands, corporate visual identity is expressed mainly through their websites, which is designed with company logo, name, colours, and more.

In an online context, the elements of visual identity comprise the visual elements of a brand and becomes a unique design that users associate with a company, its products, and its services.

Over time, the associations with the brand becomes an indicator of quality, satisfaction, credibility, and much more for the users (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013). For companies that only operate online, the website is an integral part of the visual identity and the unique design of the website becomes a part of visual elements users associate with the company and the brand.

Literature Review

Web Design and Online Brand

In the past 20 years, the advances in technology and communication has allowed companies to build their business solely from digital means and create globally recognisable brands. According to Forbes 2017 ranking of *The World's Most Valuable Brands* (Forbes, 2017) the top four brands are all in the technology industry; with Apple at #1, followed by Google at #2, with Microsoft at #3, and Facebook at #4. Not surprisingly, is Apple and Microsoft's position, they have been around since the mid 70's and leading the industry for decades. However, Google and Facebook are in comparison younger brands (from 1998 and 2004 respectively) both with pure digital roots; starting, growing, and maintaining their business on the Internet. The growth and popularity of the Internet plays a key role in allowing the major brands to develop as rapidly as they have, but regardless the size brands the Internet is a fertile breeding ground for businesses to grow their brands.

Websites provides a compelling nexus between marketing, IT, and HCI, that allows users to interact with companies and brands directly. The traffic between the websites are users constantly interacting with a magnitude of brands and due to this dynamic the notion of *online brand experience* has become of interest in recent literature. The different fields of literature provide contrasting views on the topic, the IT and HCI literature tends to view an online brand in terms of usability and user experience as functional outcome of an interaction with a website, where the marketing literature sees online brands as augmented products and services that meets the needs of the consumer (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2004) argues that the offline principles of brand remains the same online, a brand is still a name, symbol, and/or design, that consumers associate with a certain company, product, or service. However, in an online context there is an emphasis on interaction, engagement, and the experience facilitated by the website which reflects back onto the brand (Simon, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2013). The website as brand touch point is rich and dynamic, often providing excessive information and stimuli to the user. High complexity websites with an excess of information and stimuli can impact visual search performance, strain navigation, and lower perceived pleasure with the users (Tuch, Bargas-Avila, Opwis, et al., 2009), which in turn can reflect negatively onto the brand behind. However, a positive online brand experience can lead to emotional ties, satisfaction, and even behavioural intentions with the brand (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). Overall an online brand experience consist of an individuals subjective response to an online brand exposure and the brand related stimuli, such as rational, emotional, and functional stimuli, present on the website (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013).

Hamzah, Syed Alwi, and Othman (2014) investigated corporate brand experience in an online context and found five dimensions that affects online brand experience. First, *corporate visual identity* was found to be a significant dimension of online brand experience. Corporate name, logo, colour, and website design are the main components of online corporate visual identity and they are important in creating a distinctive expression that consumers associate with the company. Furthermore, they note that visual identity is important in order to communicate and develop corporate brand and build corporate brand reputation (van den Bosch, de Jong, & Elving, 2005; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). Also, corporate logo plays an important role in building brand reputation and perception based bonds with an organisation (Foroudi, Melewar, & Gupta, 2014).

The other four dimensions identified by Hamzah, Syed Alwi, and Othman (2014) that influence online brand experience includes an *emotional experience* dimension (positive and negative feelings) related to browsing a company website, a *functionality dimension* related to the usability of the websites, a consumer *lifestyle* dimension regarding when and how the website are used in the daily life of the consumers, and lastly a *corporate/self-identity* dimension related to the consumers self-image reflected onto the brand and vice versa.

The five dimensions of online brand experience identified by Hamzah, Syed Alwi, and Othman (2014) share several similarities with the aesthetics, usability, and user experience concepts from the HCI literature. The visual identity dimension has a close connection to aesthetics, the functionality dimension are closely related to usability, and the emotional dimension are related to the feelings generated by both the aesthetics and usability of the website which in turn is connected to the user experience. In a larger sense, the lifestyle and corporate/self-identity can be related to the user experience as well.

Jiang et al. (2016) found that users aesthetic perceptions affect their attitude towards the website, which in turn affected their attitude towards the corporate brand of the website. They furthermore showed that users first interaction with a website along with perceived aesthetics has a considerable impact on their attitude towards the website. This suggests that users are prone to reflecting their experience of a website onto the brand behind the website, hereby creating an important connection between the experience of a website and the influence on brand.

Literature Review

Summary and Overview

This section provides an overview of the key points identified in the HCI literature and the marketing literature. The review of the HCI literature focussed on web design, specifically aesthetics, usability, and user experience. The review of the marketing literature focused on visual identity and brand in an online context. The key points are presented in two grids below; one for HCI and one for marketing. The reason why highlights are presented in two grids, is that there is very little overlap between the two bodies of literature, however there was discerned to be a connection between the two bodies. The implications of this will be discussed in this and later sections.

AESTHETICS, USABILITY, AND USER EXPERIENCE (UX)

Author(s)	Aesthetics: Colour	Aesthetics: Complexity and symmetry	Usability	User Experience (UX)
Tractinsky, Katz, and Ikar (2000)			'What is beautiful is usable'-effect. Interface aesthetics can positively influence perceived usability.	
Lavie & Tractinsky (2004)	Dimensions of perceived visual aesthetics. Scales of <i>classical</i> and <i>expressive</i> aesthetics			
Battarbee & Koskinen (2005)				Three approaches to UX; measuring, empathic, and pragmatic.
Hasenzahl & Tractinsky (2006)				UX is "a consequence of a user's internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.), the characteristics of the designed system (e.g. complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.) and the context (or the environment) within which the interaction occurs (e.g. organisational/social setting, meaningfulness of the activity, voluntariness of use, etc.)" - Hasenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006, p. 95

Author(s)	Aesthetics: Colour	Aesthetics: Complexity and symmetry	Usability	User Experience (UX)
Lindgaard et al. (2006) and Tractinsky et al. (2006)			A negative first impression can influence attitude towards a system before interaction and affect performance.	First impressions of websites are created within the first 50 ms and are generally consistent over time.
Coursaris et al. (2008)	Cooler colours are generally preferred over warmer colours.			
Cyr et al. (2009)	Yellow are globally disliked, while blue and grey are generally preferred.			
Flavian, Gurrea, and Orús (2009)	Aesthetics and strong first impressions are important in creating successful e-commerce websites.		Navigation, simple checkout process, and general ease-of-use are important in e-commerce success.	
Tuch et al. (2009)		Low complexity websites are perceived to be more aesthetic as well as being better remembered and recognised by users.	High complexity leads to poorer visual search performance.	
Moshagen & Thielsch, 2010	Visual aesthetics of websites inventory (VisAWI) Four facets of aesthetics; Simplicity, Diversity, Colourfulness, and Craftsmanship.			
Tuch et al. (2010)		Vertical symmetry enhances aesthetic perception; or lack thereof negatively affects perception with men.		
Bonnardel et al. (2011)	Blue is a highly appreciated colour on websites.		Users spend more time navigating websites with warm colours. Suggesting that cooler colours may improve navigation.	
Lindgaard et al. (2011)	Bright backgrounds were found to be most aesthetically pleasing.			
Tuch et al. (2012)	Complexity are influenced by colours. However, calls for further studies on colour and complexity.	Users prefer websites with low visual complexity and high prototypicality (expected location of objects, e.g. menus).		

Author(s)	Aesthetics: Colour	Aesthetics: Complexity and symmetry	Usability	User Experience (UX)
Tuch, Roth, Hornbæk, et al. (2012)			Reverse 'What is beautiful is usable'-effect. No interface aesthetics effect on perceived usability. However, over time experienced usability can affect aesthetic perception.	Aesthetics and usability have a strong correlation with UX.
Moshagen & Thielsch (2013)	VisAWI-S; shortened four item version of the full VisAWI. Useful for quick assessment of perceived aesthetics.			
Pelet & Papadopoulou (2012)	Warm colours influence interaction and purchase intentions on e-commerce websites.			
Lin, Ye, and Wei (2013)	Colours and graphics can improve navigation.	A graphics to text ratio of 3:1 will have the most aesthetic appearance.	A graphics to text ratio of 1:1 will look rational and help users navigate to the right content quicker.	
Frederick, Mohler, Vorvoreanu, et al. (2015)			The web design trends parallax scrolling was showed to positively influence perceived fun on websites, but negatively impact usability.	
Seckler et al. (2015a)	Colours can affect perceived trustworthiness.			Poorly implemented colours negatively affect perceived trustworthiness.
Seckler et al. (2015b)	Blue colours are generally preferred over yellow.	Symmetry has an aesthetically pleasing effect and helps promote structure and meaningfulness. High complexity websites are perceived less aesthetics.		
Lin & Hsieh (2016)			Websites with strong usability encourages user interaction. Complex usability can strain the cognitive workload of the user.	Websites that are enjoyable to navigate suggests a good UX.
Jiang et al. (2016)	Visual aesthetic stimuli are more immediate than other indicators and as such users are more prone to form judgements based on aesthetic stimuli rather than usability and task-related stimuli. Perceived aesthetics are as a result more likely to influence users rather than perceived usability.			

Author(s)	Aesthetics: Colour	Aesthetics: Complexity and symmetry	Usability	User Experience (UX)
Pennington et al. (2016)	Colours highlight elements of importance and encourage interaction.	Website complexity increases the cognitive load on the users, thus making it more difficult for users to accomplish tasks.	<p>Call-to-action buttons can draw attention to important elements on the website and enhance usability.</p> <p>Misuse of this principle can hurt usability - "don't make something look clickable when it isn't" p. 49.</p> <p>Choice simplification and choice reduction.</p>	<p>In UX it is important to understand users behaviours and needs in order to design usable, useful, and aesthetically pleasing systems and services. Tying UX together with both usability and aesthetics.</p> <p>UX is larger than just aesthetics and usability.</p>

A few themes became clear from the literature, both regarding the individual topics, but also how they relate to each other, these will be briefly highlighted.

Aesthetics

The most researched topics within aesthetics is colour, complexity, and symmetry. Colours have several uses in web design, but most researchers have found that cooler colours, most notably blue and grey, with a medium saturation and brightness are preferred and perceived to be most aesthetics. Regarding complexity and symmetry, there is a consensus among researchers that high symmetry and low complexity are perceived to be most aesthetic on websites, which also improves how users interact with the website. These findings could be interpreted as a recipe for the most aesthetically pleasing website, however this would be folly. Other factors like visual identity and brand would influence which colours to use, and content would influence how symmetry and complexity can be managed.

Usability and aesthetics

An important discovery was the inverse relationship between interface aesthetics and usability. During initial exposure to a website aesthetics will have the most influence on perception and a negative first impression can even influence the users attitude towards the system. First impressions are formed within the first 50 ms of exposure and are generally consistent over time. However, prolonged exposure can cause perceived usability to over time influence perceived aesthetics on websites. This suggests that interface aesthetics may the more immediate influence on website perceptions, but over time perceived usability may also form important perceptions of a website.

Usability and tasks

Usability was also revealed to have a strong influence on competitiveness. Websites designed with usability principles in mind simplifies tasks to perform and encourages users to interact with

the website, this is especially evident in e-commerce. It was discovered that visual complexity also plays an important role in usability. Websites with high visual complexity impaired users visual search and strained the users cognitive processes. Furthermore, high website symmetry positively influenced how users process and navigate websites.

User experience

An important part of creating a user experience is to understand users behaviour and needs. Pennington et al. (2016) describe how a service or product should be both useful, useable, and aesthetically pleasing. This revealed important connections to aesthetics and usability, which on websites are two major determinants of the user experience. Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006) notes how the context in which a system is experienced in, is significant to the user experience. User experience is a comprehensive topic and it is difficult to reduce it down to a simple experience of a website.

VISUAL IDENTITY AND ONLINE BRAND EXPERIENCE

Author(s)	Visual Identity	Online Brand Experience
Jefkins (1990)	External signs of internal promises.	
Baker & Balmer (1997)	Visible components of corporate identity.	
van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving (2005)	"A corporate visual identity consists of a name, a symbol and/or logo, typography, colour, a slogan and - very often - additional graphical elements" (p. 108)	
Christodoulides & de Chernatony (2004)	'Offline' principles of branding still applies online. The brand still holds the same promises to the consumers.	
Tuch et al. (2009)		Very high complexity on websites can cause stimuli overload which in turn can lead to negative perceptions of the website.
Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou (2013)	The visual components of a brand becomes a unique design that user associate with quality, satisfaction, and credibility over time.	Online brand experience is an individuals subjective response to functional, emotional, and rational stimuli present on a website.
Simon, Brexendorf, and Fassnacht (2013)		In an online branding context, there is a special focus on interaction, engagement, and experience.
Hamzah, Syed Alwi, and Othman (2014)	Corporate name, logo, colour, and website design are important elements of visual identity and has a significant impact on online brand experience.	Five dimensions of online brand experience: 1. Corporate visual identity, 2. Emotional experience, 3. Functionality, 4. Lifestyle, and 5. Corporate/self-identity.

Visual identity and online brand experience

There is a general agreement among researchers when it comes to defining visual identity. However, the concept is hardly treated in a digital context due to the open definition of the concept. In an online context, visual identity and brand are closely related as the visual elements of website comprise a unique design that users associate with the brand. A concept that has gathered recent attention is online brand experience and for online businesses this is crucial to their success. The corporate name, logo, colour, and web design become the primary visual elements to communicate their identity through. An online brand experience also focusses on an emotional, functional, and personal experience. Web design is therefore of vital importance in order to create a distinct brand and deliver a competitive service in a digital marketplace.

Examining two fields of literature

The literature review highlighted several key aspects from the two fields of literature. The versatility of websites are well documented, their role in businesses is essential, and technology is always pushing new opportunities. The literature review showed that aesthetics and usability are two of the most researched subjects of web design and for good reason. Both facets significantly impact the users perception of a website and they are both the primary determinants of website user experience. Aesthetics, usability, and website user experience can influence how a user feels towards the website and in turn towards the brand behind the website.

The literature review suggests that there is a connection between the HCI literature on aesthetics, usability, and the user experience; and the marketing literature on visual identity and online brand. This overlap may be expressed as online brand experience, however the concept is still loosely defined and under explored, because of the lack of proper integration of the HCI and marketing concepts. Even though there appears to be a connection it is for now treated as a peripheral connection. The literature reviewed revealed that the two bodies of literature can indeed support each other, but for now the two areas remain under explored in relation to each other. The connection between the two fields may be particularly relevant as technology continues to provide new opportunities to develop new digital business models. This study hopes to provide insights that contribute to further understanding the relationship of the two bodies of literature.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

There is an overlap in interest between the HCI and marketing literature, where online brands are prone to being influenced by web design factors such as visual aesthetics, usability, and website user experience. The findings from the literature review supports this link and will therefore be used as a basis for developing a theoretical framework to guide and support data analysis. Selected highlights from the literature will be applied in the analysis of the web design practices in the production music industry. The framework will be based on categories that are deemed especially influential to web design and brand; visual aesthetics, usability, and online brand experience. Focussing on these three themes will also allow the data collection and analysis to be connected to the literature.

Aesthetics and usability are both highly tangible aspects of web design that has been shown to individually and jointly influence users perception of websites. Furthermore, they are inherently linked to the user experience on a website and correspondingly the online brand experience. Thus, using visual aesthetics and usability to develop a theoretical framework will provide structure and approach to the data collection and data analysis. The framework will guide the initial approach to the data analysis and also aid the later analysis process. How the framework is integrated and used in the data analysis will be described in a later section. The

Assessing aesthetics

As guidelines for assessing aesthetics the Visual Aesthetics of Website Inventory (VisAWI) and its shortened version (VisAWI-S) by Moshagen and Thielsch (2010 & 2013) will be used. Moshagen and Thielsch (2010) devised an 18-item questionnaire for assessing visual aesthetics comprising four facets: Simplicity, Diversity, Colourfulness, and Craftsmanship. The VisAWI typically uses a Likert-type scale to quantitatively calculate an assessment of a websites perceived aesthetics. As briefly touched upon in the literature review, the four facets represent subjective evaluations of a website characteristics and are used to examine the degree of aesthetic perception with the users. The four facet will be outlined below; they represent emerging themes from the literature and refer to a websites objective properties.

Simplicity: The Simplicity facet is heavily connected with Gestalt concepts such as clarity, orderliness, and balance. It further relates to the users cognitive processing of a website, emphasising that simple websites are processed more effortlessly, thus received higher aesthetic appraisal.

Diversity: The Diversity facet refers to the creativity and originality of a website. This is connected with the visual complexity and simplicity of a website, because of the stimuli it causes with the user. A simple website may suffer from being perceived as boring, due to it causing low stimuli and arousal consequently leading to negative appraisal. The diversity of a site can be seen as a way of capturing and retaining the interest of the user.

Colourfulness: This facet simply relates to colour and how colours can elicit positive aesthetic appraisals. The focus is on the choice of colour(s) and how they are used throughout a website.

Craftsmanship: The facet of Craftsmanship relates to how a website is designed. The word *designed* is used in a broader sense here as it refers to both visual, structural, and technological design. The facet focusses on a coherent and expertly implemented website, this can be shown through artistic and modern visual design trends, the use of the latest and best technologies, or other aspects representing a mastery of the craft. Web design is a fast moving practice and showcasing a grasp of modern practices can prevent a website from being perceived as outdated.

Moshagen and Thielsch (2013) later revisited and condensed their method (VisAWI-S) into a four item questionnaire with one item representing each facet. The facets and items representing them are listed below.

- **Simplicity**: 'Everything goes together on this site'
- **Diversity**: 'The layout is pleasantly varied'
- **Colourfulness**: 'The colour composition is attractive'
- **Craftsmanship**: 'The layout appears professionally designed'

The VisAWI and VisAWI-S is somewhat broad in its method of assessing perceived aesthetics, but for the purpose of this study it is an advantage. This study applies the VisAWI in a qualitative setting, allowing the four facets to structure the categorising of the data collected. The four facets provide a simple structure for categorising data pertaining to aesthetic perception.

Narrowing down themes of usability

As described in the literature review, usability is a complex subject and as a result researchers tend to confine usability within a set of general terms, rather than with a firm definition. Therefore, this study will use a set of general themes to limit the scope of the topic. The themes are based on the findings of the literature review (ISO-9241; Nielsen, 1993; Lin, Choong, & Salvendy, 1997; Flavián, Guinalíu, & Gurrea, 2006; Lee & Koubek, 2010; Lindgaard, Dudek, &

Sen, 2011; Lee & Kozar, 2012; Tuch, Roth, & Hornbæk, 2015; Frederick, Mohler, & Vorvoreanu, et al., 2015; Lin & Hsieh, 2016) and the scope of this study. The themes of usability are;

- **Ease;** the ease of understanding and learning the system, both regarding its functions, structure, and content.
- **Efficiency;** the speed and ease with which users can find the content they seek.
- **Navigation;** both in relation to time and number of actions required.
- **Transparency and control;** regarding users being aware of where they are and what their options at all time.

Similar to the VisAWI(-S), these themes will serve as starting point for data analysis. The four themes identified will be used to create categories for initial data collection and processing.

Link between web design and online brand experience

Giving the findings of the literature review, the argument that the user experience and online brand experience share many compatibilities can be made. The scope of user experience makes it inherently difficult to define and the many perspectives on the topic makes for a continuous discussion. However, its importance is widely acknowledged (e.g. Battarbee & Koskinen, 2005; Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006; Frederick, Mohler, & Vorvoreanu, 2015; Pennington et al., 2015). From a product and service perspective, Pennington et al., (2016) offers valuable description of user experience: *“User Experience (UX) is a set of strategies for understanding users’ needs and behaviors and then applying that understanding to designing useful, usable, and aesthetically pleasing systems and services”* (Pennington et al., 2016, p. 47). They point to the significance of usability and visual aesthetics when designing products or services. From a bigger perspective, Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006) note the importance of a subjective emotional experience, the characteristics of the designed system, and the context in which the system is experienced, thus emphasising that the user experience is formed by more than the mere interaction with a product or service.

Comparing these notions of user experience with the five dimensions of online brand experience identified by Hamzah, Alwi, and Othman (2014) reveal many overlaps and interplays. First is a corporate visual identity dimension, which describes the visual elements that a consumer will come to identify with a brand in an online context, most importantly is corporate name, logo, colour, and web design. This connects to visual aesthetics of web design. Second is an emotional experience dimension, which describes the positive and negative feelings incurred and associated with using a website. This connects with the subjective emotional experience of the user experience. Third is a functional dimension, which relates to the functionality and use of a website. This connects with usability of web design. Fourth is a lifestyle

dimension, which refers to the lifestyle implications of a website and when in the users daily life they use the website. This relates to the context of the user experience. Lastly is a corporate/self-identity dimension, which relates to values shared between consumer and brand. This is the only dimension that does not immediately connect with an aspect of web design, but may very well be connected with the emotional aspect of the user experience on a more personal level.

These similarities between user experience and online brand experience support the argument that the experience of a website can project back onto the brand behind the website and affect how users perceive the brand. This notion of web design affecting online brand experience will be used in the data analysis for examining the data once it has been processed.

Methodology

Research Design

The scope of this study is to examine how web design can affect brand within the production music industry. In relationship between web design and online brand experience was revealed and a framework focussing on two manageable and important aspects of web design was developed. The research design is shaped in order to facilitate collection of data pertaining to the two themes and help answer the research question. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, there will be an emphasis on qualitative data that may help to understand whether the connection between web design and brand are worth pursuing further. The research design developed based on the work of Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) to guide the research.

This study follows a pragmatic research philosophy which holds the research question as the most important determinant of the research designs structure. As previously explained, a literature review was needed to ascertain which aspects of web design are probable to influence user perceptions websites and corporate brand. This deductive approach provided an overview of the most prominent aspects that influence user perception of websites, which will be investigated in a real industry context. The study aims to provide a cross-sectional perspective of web design in production music with a qualitative description of the practices used and how they may affect and influence brand.

In order to pursue this, an ethnographic research strategy has been chosen. Even though ethnography may be associated with an inductive approach, it may yield appropriate insights from the perspective of the users. The purpose of the research is to understand how user may project perceptions of a website onto a brand and for that reason it is important to understand the context from which the users form their perceptions. In order to learn how website can be affecting brand it is necessary to use the websites as the primary data and the perspective of the user as context. It is essential to experience what the users do to understand potential frustrations and successes. To this the ethnography is well suited to adopt the position of the users. For that reason, the study relies on qualitative data to provide detailed descriptions of the websites included in the study and will chose a mono method for qualitative data collection and analysis.

As mentioned, it is important to see and feel what the users experience and for that reason the primary data collection method will be participant observations. Participant observation requires immersion in the setting in which the phenomenon occurs (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009), and as such the websites should be the setting for that immersion. Ethnography and participant

observations often require immersion over an extensive time period, however during this study the immersion will be relatively brief. This is to simulate a real-life context, where the duration of a visit to one of the website would also be limited.

Research textbooks often refer to gaining access to the research setting and the openness about researchers purpose, however as the websites in question is globally accessible and everyone can view the websites without special permission this is of no importance. Therefore, the researchers role and degree of disclosure that Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) refer to regarding participant observation is redundant to distinguish between in this case. However, if one role were to be applied the complete participant might be the most appropriate because the researcher is taking part in the activities with no emphasis on disclosure of role and no requirement of access. Additionally, access such as organisational access and ethical access is of no concern as the websites are available to the public and no access needs to be negotiated.

Primary observations, secondary observations, and experiential data are all collected during the sessions, with a main focus on primary observations and experiential data as they are likely to provide the most relevant data for analysis. The primary observations along with the experiential data may prove to be most insightful in examining the relationship between web design and brand, because the experiential data focus on emotive aspects of the data. The primary data may prove useful in describing the context and the cause for the experiential data.

Methodology

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection in this study is participant observations as explained partly in the research design. In order to create some structure for the observations and to set a starting point for each session of data collection, a user scenario is defined. The purpose of the user scenario is to describe a typical use of the websites, what users are looking for, how they might interact with the website, and what drives them. User scenarios are often used in conjunction with usability testing as the user scenario might highlight important areas of a design.

User scenario - Video editor

Anders, 29, works at Bacon as a video editor. Bacon is a production company that makes commercials and advertisement for clients. Bacon is not a full-service company, hence they do not produce any music themselves, so they license the music from another company. As a part of Anders's job he is responsible for choosing the music for the commercials. Anders cares about music and what it brings to the production, so he wants to find a quality track which may lead him to listen to several tracks on the websites. Anders knows that he can search through music libraries online with by various production music companies or agents to find the track he needs. Currently, he is editing a new whiskey commercial and for that he needs a relaxed instrumental jazz track that is cool and features a piano to accompany visuals of a smokey jazz club around closing time. Anders is a busy man he wants to make the commercial great, but his focus is on video editing, therefore the music search should not be a hassle for him. He needs to be able to find a track, download it, and test it out in his edit, preferably as quick as possible. He works out of the office from time to time and he often uses his laptop when working remotely. Anders is relatively comfortable with technology and attempts to work intuitively when presented with an unfamiliar interface.

When arriving on a website Anders will like most users on his level, attempt to use a search function as primary mean of navigation. If this is to no avail, he will attempt other means of navigation. Once he has found a quality track, he needs to be able to download it and test it out in his edit. This suggests that he will be listening through several tracks on the website before settling on a track for his edit. Once a track is downloaded his stay on the website is complete and he moves into Adobe Premiere Pro to try the track out in the edit.

Assumptions and conditions

The user scenario has a few assumption that help create coherence and structure during the data collection. The user scenarios assumes the following:

- The websites are visited for the first time.
- The users start on the homepage of every website.
- The user has a defined task before visiting the website. The user needs to find a track of the same genre (jazz), mood (cool), and instrument (piano) on every website.
- The user will use a search function (if available) in order to find a track.
- When using a search functions the input (keywords, genres, etc.) will be the same across websites, these words are 'jazz', 'cool', and 'piano', used as one search phrase, entered in one string with a space between each word.
- If no suitable track can be found via the search function, the user will browse the website for the options present to either narrow down the search or look for other means of finding a track within the website.

Technical conditions/specifications

All screenshots are taken on a 13,3-inch display with a 1280 x 800 screen resolution in Google Chrome to assure equal representation of all websites. Choice of screen and browser is based on global web stats provided by w3counter.com, which provides an overview of the most popular browsers and platforms. As of November 2017, the most popular browser was Google Chrome with a market share of 59.2%. Screen resolution is chosen partly due to availability and partly due to resemblance. As of November 2017, the most popular screen resolution is 640 x 360, however this is a typical size of a display on a mobile device and since this study excludes mobile devices, this screen size is omitted. The second most popular screen resolution was 1366 x 768, which is usually found in 13-14-inch displays (depending on the manufacturer) and given available displays was a 13,3-inch (1280 x 800) and a 23,5-inch (1920 x 1080), the smaller display was chosen. The rationale behind choosing these specifications is to assert whether or not the websites are fitted to the majority of the users and how they view and experience the websites within these conditions. This is also reflected in the user scenario to assure consistency and context. Furthermore, the websites were visited with no previous cookies or saved data to imitate a first-time visit.

Significance of mobile browsing

It is worth mentioning that mobile browsing overtook desktop browsing in October 2016, thus becoming the most popular way to browse the Internet. In addition, Google Search has since 2015 been favouring mobile-friendly websites in their search results. This underlines the importance of responsive web design and mobile-optimisation of websites.

Websites and sampling

This study examines how web design is applied in a real life context, namely the production music industry. This study uses a typical case sampling, which is a subjective non-probability purposive sampling technique. The purpose of the sampling is to illustrate a typical use and to show how a user might encounter one of the websites in the sample, it is therefore not definitive. Prior to sampling, a few production music websites were already known, due to personal referral. These websites are included in the samples as a personal reference to a website which is a common practice within the production music industry. The remaining websites included were chosen based on their search-engine optimisation (SEO) and digital presence. This is to simulate a typical way of encountering these companies online. A first-time user would most likely resort to using a search engine to find the companies' websites, and the sampled websites have been chosen based on this approach. The websites are listed below along with the search phrases used to find them.

Google Search - Criteria and results

Google Search is the most popular search engine with a market share of 92,06%⁴ and was therefore used to sample the websites. The Google search was conducted on 11. November 2017 (the date is included as search results may change over time) and the following phrase was used for the first search query 'production music'. The search yielded a comprehensive list of results and two websites were chosen on page 1 of the search results. In the very top of the results was a Google Ad for *Premium Beat*, indicating that the company is spending money and effort in order to appear frequently in search results and they were therefore chosen. Below the Wikipedia entry on production music was *APM Music* and they were chosen as the second website. Afterwards, the search was altered to 'royalty free music' and the same approach was used as with the first search. The company chosen from this results was *Epidemic Sound*. The last search was for 'production music for tv' and this found *Audio Network* and *Universal Production Music*. *Upright Music* was the last company chosen and was based on a referral. The initial six companies were now chosen.

Tool: Google Search

Date: 11 November 2017

Search phrases: 'production music', 'production music for tv', and 'royalty free music'.

Websites

- Upright Music - <https://www.upright-music.com>

⁴ Search Engine Market Share Worldwide: <http://gs.statcounter.com/search-engine-market-share>

- Audio Network - <https://www.audionetwork.com/>
- Premium Beat - <https://www.premiumbeat.com/>
- Epidemic Sound - <http://www.epidemicsound.com/>
- APM Music - <https://www.apmmusic.com/>
- Universal Production Music - <https://www.universalproductionmusic.com/>

Observation sessions

This section will provide a brief account of how the observation sessions were performed. The observations were carried out in individual sessions focussing on one website at the time. The sessions followed the narrative of the user scenario; starting with the homepage and ending when downloading or attempting to download a track. Some websites required mandatory waiting periods or approval after a profile was created, before a track could be downloaded.

The full home page of every website was explored before searching for a track, this was done for several reasons. First, the design of the homepage is usually the most expressive, because most users land there, so it has to attract attention and capture the interest of the users. Second, important information is often featured on the homepage which may be important to later use.

In most cases it was necessary to create an account before being able to download a track, this was attempted, however on some of the website there was a waiting period before being approved to download from the sites. Unfortunately, the observation sessions was conducted during the holidays and the waiting period was therefore unusually long and in some cases not reviewed. Therefore, creating a profile is not included in the sessions, but is taken into consideration during the discussion. Other websites required a purchase before a track could be download and the observations came to a conclusion before purchase and download.

One benefit of conducting observations on a website is the opportunity to 'pause' the process and write down the observations and the reflections as they occur. In a social setting, a session will most likely be a continuous experience and the observer has to constantly observe and record activities as they are happening, even while new activities are happening that also needs to be recorded. This dynamic was more or less absent from the observation sessions, which allowed for both the descriptive observations and narrative accounts to be recorded simultaneously. This opened up for the opportunity to record rich descriptions of the websites with an attention to detail that otherwise might not have been possible. It also made it possible to record experiential data; the feelings and reflections as they were experienced in the moment, which made the data more present and immediate. Furthermore, the thought process

during the sessions became a great deal more conscious due to the stop-and-go process which allowed unconscious thoughts to surface.

The time of each sessions was between 2-4 hours, depending on the amount of steps in the music search process, the number of visual elements to describe, and reflections on the experience. A part of the data collection also includes screenshots of from the websites. A screen shots was taken on the homepage at the start of each sessions and every time a new page or view was displayed or other significant interface changes. The screenshots can be found in the appendix along with the observation notes. The observations notes also include when the screenshot are taken. The observation notes are colour coded as a part of the data processing, but they colour coding have not altered or added any data.

Methodology

Approach to Data Analysis

This section describes the approach, process, and procedure applied in the data analysis in the subsequent section. This study follows a pragmatic philosophy introduced in the research design and will therefore be inclined to apply both inductive and deductive techniques depending on the scope of the research. The pragmatic view allows for flexibility regarding the data processing and data analysis. At first, the data processing will follow a deductive approach and apply the theoretical framework devised previously. A drawback to deductively applying a framework is the risk of presenting conclusions too early in the process based on literary findings. The reason for using framework is to provide a starting point for data processing and analysis, thus tying the study into existing literature, which are the main strengths of applying a theoretical framework.

Initialising the data analysis with a deductive approach does not restrict subsequent data analysis to follow similar deductive procedures. Considering the data collected from the various sessions is qualitative data, in the form of detailed observation notes, continuing with a deductive approach is not suitable for data analysis. The pragmatic view allows the study flexibility to adopt the techniques best suited to answer the research question.

Processing qualitative data with a deductive approach will lean towards a structured process defined by the framework. This study uses categorisation for data processing and the themes set by the framework will form the categories. The usual two-parted activity of categorising data is shortened by using a theoretical framework, which reduces the time spent deriving categories. The overall themes are aesthetics and usability, along with a number of subcategories pertaining to the themes, the categories will be specified in the analysis-section. Online brand experience is not included as a theme for categorising, as the goal is to investigate how usability and visual aesthetics can potentially influence brand through an online brand experience. The data will therefore be categorised deductively, but analysed inductively to allow themes or relationships to emerge from the data.

Initially the sessions will be processed individually, and units of data identified and coded. From here, the data will be grouped into categories for the individual sessions, afterwards the categories will be assessed across all the sessions. Once done, the data can be examined for relationships and patterns among the various categories, which in turn can be investigated to form potential propositions for inductive testing. This analysis process is likely to take place interactively with the data processing, and not in a strict linear form as suggested here. This

study relies on data display and analysis, which combines both an inductive and deductive approach. The flexibility of the pragmatic view allows the analysis to adopt the approach that best suit the scope of the research. The procedure combines data reduction, which will display highlighted data in tables. The analysis may employ different ways of displaying the data if the data supports this. This is followed by an exploration of themes and relationships.

Analysis

Processing Data

As described in previous section, the data analysis is based on the theoretical framework devised earlier. The framework provides two overall themes of web design; aesthetics and usability, which further will be divided into four categories related to different aspects of the two themes. The two themes and the affiliated sub-themes are described below.

Theme 1 - Visual aesthetics

When devising categories for analysing visual aesthetics, the VisAWI(-S) are used as a foundation to provide structure to the analysis. Moshagen and Thielsch (2010) found four facets of perceived visual aesthetics on websites. The four facets will serve as four categories for codifying data related to visual aesthetics. The four facets; simplicity, diversity, colourfulness, and craftsmanship, will be the title of the categories along with the four items from the VisAWI-S that will serve as a type of benchmark description for the data belonging within the respective categories. The four categories are moderately broad, but the characteristics of visual aesthetics derived from the literature review and the description of the four facets will allow the data to be rationally grouped.

CATEGORIES FOR VISUAL AESTHETICS

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
Sample data	Sample data	Sample data	Sample data

Theme 2 - Usability

The categories for usability are devised using a similar approach as with visual aesthetics, however instead of relying on a method of measurement, the categories are devised based on the usability themes uncovered in the literature review and specified in the framework. The four pronounced themes identified within usability are listed below along with a brief description of the category.

CATEGORIES FOR USABILITY

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
Sample data	Sample data	Sample data	Sample data

Iterations of data processing

The first step of the data processing entails colour coding. The observation notes was read through in individual sessions and data pertaining to one of the two themes were colour coded, red was used for visual aesthetics and blue for usability. The second iteration of data processing involved assessing and categorising the colour coded data. The colour coded data was further categories into one of the four categories, depending on which theme the data belonged to. Not all data that was colour coded was categorised in a grid, if the data did not fit properly in one of the four categories it was left out. This allowed for a further reduction and clarity of the data while indexing the data in the correct categories. This opened up for the data to be examined in categories across all sessions, as well as individually. Examining data across all sessions may reveal concurring themes or overall relationships, that the individual sessions may not reveal by themselves. An example with a few highlights from the categorisation is displayed below in two separate grids containing data from all sessions, the full categorisations of the individual sessions can be found in the appendix.

VISUAL AESTHETICS - HIGHLIGHTS FROM ALL SESSIONS

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
At first glance, the homepage looks very minimal, clean, and stylish. <i>Session 1 - Upright Music</i>	At first glance it seemed modern but when scrolling down it just seems to employ a lot of modern design choices without any real idea or content behind it. <i>Session 2 - Audio Network</i>	The home page is colourful (and at times too colourful) and dynamic, my mind was barely at rest when I was browsing the homepage. <i>Session 5 - APM Music</i>	The new tab shows a significantly different site that shares no traits with the homepage that send me here. <i>Session 1 - Upright Music</i>

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
The site appears vast, but has very little information on it ... <i>Session 2 - Audio Network</i>	The design choices is well balanced, so the website looks thought through and stylish. <i>Session 3 - Epidemic Sound</i>	The colours scheme is very diverse and uses many unnatural colours and some colours are only occurring once which makes their inclusion a bit strange. <i>Session 2 - Audio Network</i>	The website looked very recently designed as it employs many modern design choices, such as gradients, flat colours, parallax scrolling, shadows and depth, choice of modern sans serif fonts <i>Session 6 - Universal PM</i>

USABILITY - HIGHLIGHTS FROM ALL SESSIONS

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
At first glance, the hero header and tagline attracts a lot of attention and guides the attention towards the search bar, making it very easy to get started. <i>Session 4 - Premium Beat</i>	I decide to search for a track directly from the homepage. <i>Session 2 - Audio Network</i>	I click the back button trying to go back, but nothing happens. <i>Session 1 - Upright Music</i>	... the feature was too hidden and too unpractical to use efficiently, because the mouse-over required a few seconds to be displayed. <i>Session 3 - Epidemic Sound</i>
There is no real indicator of what kind of music they have available or the service they provide, nor is there any options to search for music present. This is a bit annoying. <i>Session 1 - Upright Music</i>	The lack of information or description of the tracks is a bit of a nuisance. It makes it difficult to assert whether the track might be useful or not, ... <i>Session 1 - Upright Music</i>	The primary navigation on the header is located in the left side next to the logo. <i>Session 6 - Universal PM</i>	I later realised that the 'arrow down'-icon, I mistook for a download icon was a 'show more info'-icon. It turns out I had more available information the whole time, I just didn't know. <i>Session 5 - APM Music</i>

Analysis

Analysing the Data

This section will describe the analysis of the data, the development of propositions, testing of propositions, and potential explanations for the propositions. The data will be analysed inductively which may reveal insights or relationships, but also in relation to findings from the literature which may aid the understanding of the data in a context that cannot be provided inductively.

Defining a context

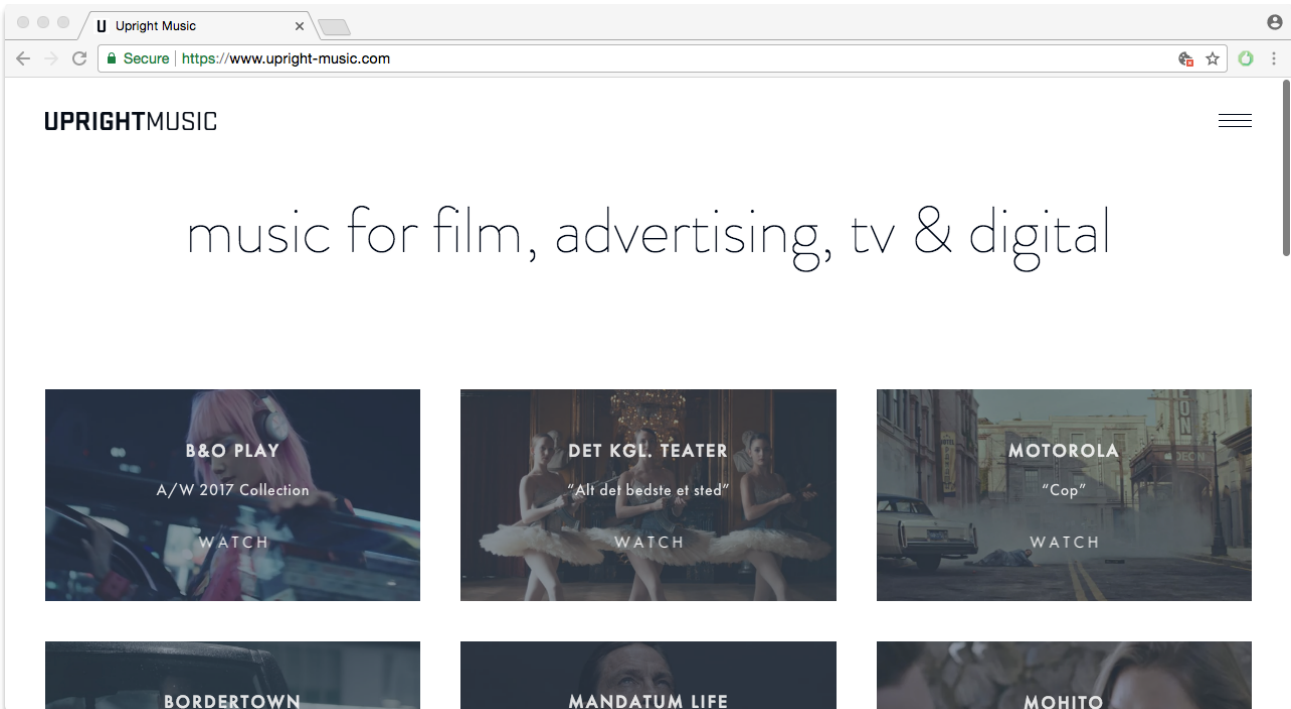
Before diving into the analysis, it is important to describe the context in which the data should be viewed. The problem and the user scenario defined previously provides the context and they highlight a few key aspects in which the data should be examined.

First, it is important to take the problem situation into considerations when going over the data. The description of the production music industry and user scenario tells us the context in which the users are most likely to visit and use the websites. As previously described, context is an important factor in the user experience and it is therefore also considered here. Most users are working for visual production companies, advertising agencies, schools, or other companies, which means that the users are most likely working when using the websites. This may put a certain weight on efficiency, as the websites are a tool in other companies' daily work. Having this context in mind when analysing the data will provide insight into when the different aspects of web design matters in a typical scenario, and hopefully view the data in a more realistic light.

Second, is the importance of content, which is a significant factor in generating re-visits to a website (Rosen & Purinton, 2004). The quality and amount of music available on the websites, will inevitably play an important role in shaping the users' attitude towards the website and in turn the brand. However, content is not treated as a factor in this analysis, but the aspects of web design that falls under usability or visual aesthetics will be of interest. The analysis will focus on the *service* of providing music, not the music content as a product.

Consistency of interface design

Examining how the interface design was carried out across the websites revealed one significant aspect. Each company and website has its own style with their own colours, fonts, images, etc., and most websites keep a high degree of consistency in visual design throughout their sites. However, one website stood out in particular, which is Upright Music from Session 1. This was the only website to demonstrate major changes in their visual design.



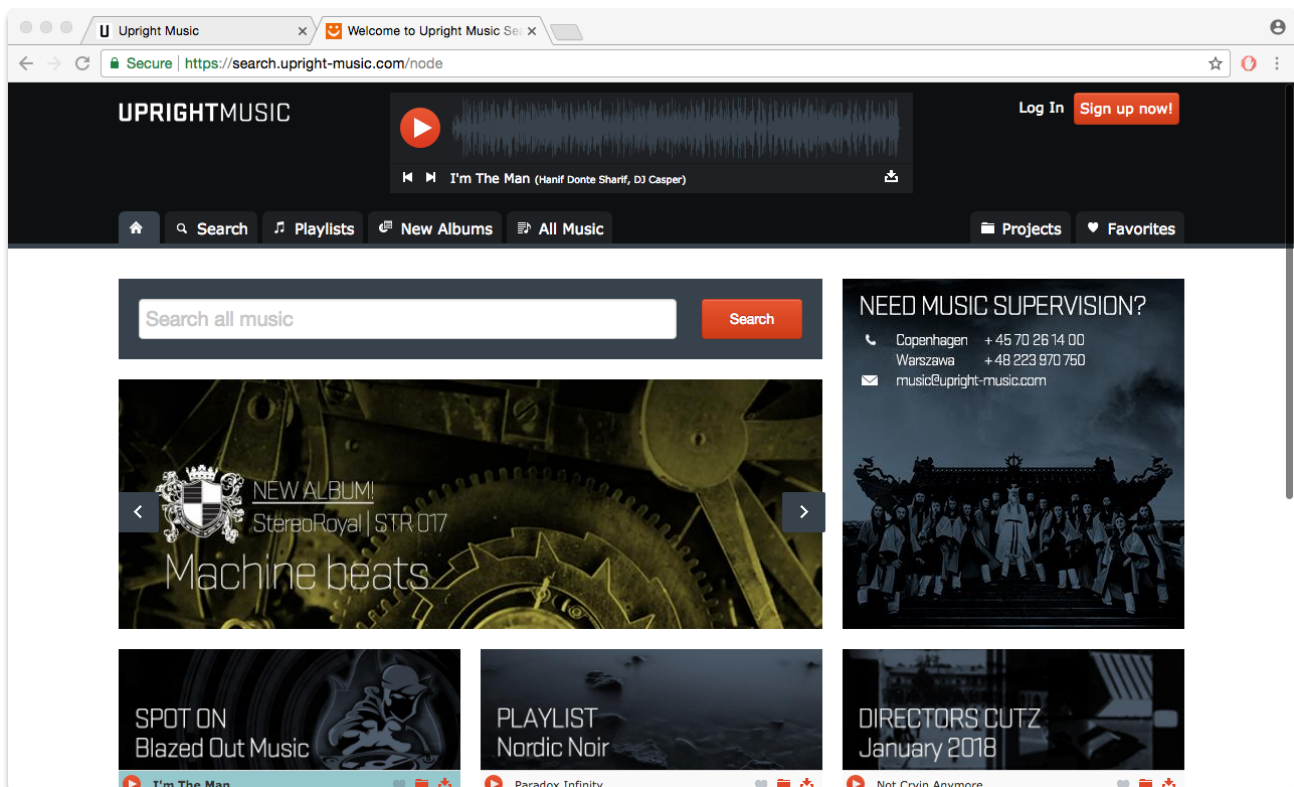
Upright Music Home Page on a 13,3-inch display

When arriving on Upright Music's home page the users are presented with the page above. The page looks simple both in terms of colour, complexity, and structure. It has a modern and stylish feel to it with the use of whitespace, the thin sans serif font, and the lowercase tagline. It is understated in its expression and communicates very little information to the users. At first thought it might seem that the company wants to appear high-end, which further is accentuated by the brands such as B&O Play and The Royal Danish Theater prominently showcased on the page. However, when navigating to Upright Music's search page, where it is possible to search through their repertoire, a completely different page is displayed.

The search page looks completely different and it shares very few characteristics with the home page that re-directs the users here. The page does not exhibit the same level of simplicity. The colours have changed and now features an orange, dark grey, and a yellowish image. The fonts

have changed, there is now two different fonts at play and none of them match the ones used on the home page. There is a thin font used on the images and a bulkier less modern looking font used in the remaining elements such as menus, music, player, buttons, etc. The changes might be many small alterations, but the overall impression of inconsistency is very evident. Overall the search page has a less modern feel, especially when contrasted with the stylish-looking home page. The digression from a modern looking home page to a less up-to-date version of the website, invoked a sense of confusion and appeared unprofessional.

—
"The inconsistency between the pages seems very unprofessional and could appear like the page isn't being managed." - Session 1: Upright Music



Upright Music Search Page

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 Interface design consistency is important for several reasons. From a usability perspective, consistency provides comfort to the users as they navigate between different pages on a website and allows them to perform tasks better (Lin, Yeh, & Wei, 2013; Lin & Hsieh, 2016). From an online brand perspective, consistent visual aesthetic on web pages (colours, fonts, logos, etc.) affects the overall impression of the website and the brand (Chernatony, Christodoulides, 2004; Chang, Chih, Liou, et al., 2014). In inconsistent appearance can also hurt credibility and trust on a website (Flavian, Gurrea, & Orús, 2009; Lindgaard, Dudek, Sen, et al., 2011).

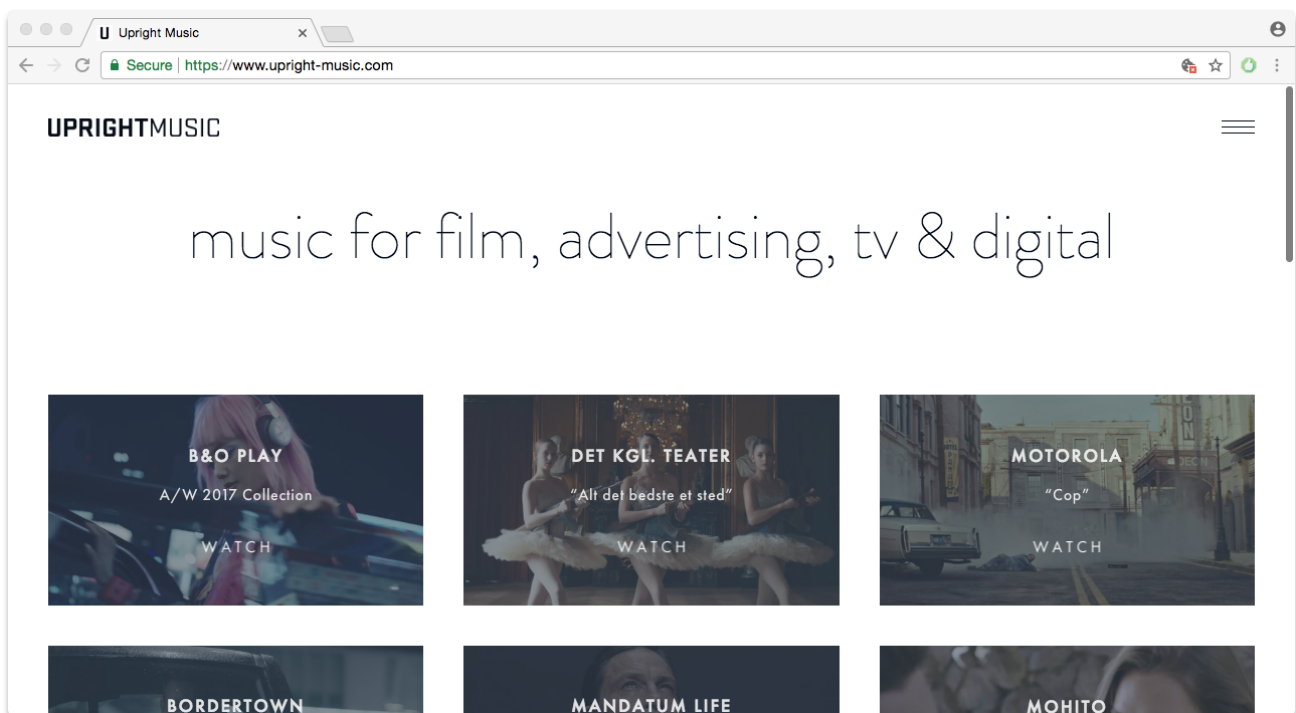
Therefore, notable inconsistency on a website is likely to affect the impression of the brand and in this case transitioning from a modern looking home page to a less up-to-date looking search page, is likely to reflect poorly onto Upright Music's brand. It appeared that Upright Music was trying hard to communicate their visual identity and brand on the home page, which is odd considering that their users are likely to spend more time on the search page. If that is the case, then the visual elements on the search page are more likely to be associated with Upright Music's brand, instead of the visual elements of the home page, which users will be less exposed to.

Initialising the music search

Another aspect that revealed to have an influence on the attitude towards the websites was the start to the music search. Most of the websites did a great job of guiding or initialising the search activity. On most of the websites it was possible to search for music directly from the home pages. Only two sites did not feature a search bar on the home page and of those two, only one provided clear alternative means of getting to the music repertoire.

Upright Music from Session 1 was the only website that did not provide a discoverable way of searching for music. Several elements from Session 1 made it stand out and not in a positive way. First, was the fact that all navigation was hidden away on the home page and there was no way to notice a search option when first arriving on the website.

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"[...] it was too difficult to find the music and to get the search started." - Session 1: Upright Music Home Page

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Second, when the user eventually finds their way to the search page, they are presented with an entirely different page in terms of visual design and aesthetics. The search page used new colours, new fonts, new layout, etc., and the inconsistency triggered some negative emotions towards the website. It looked unprofessional and outdated. It appeared that Upright Music was trying very hard to communicate their brand on the home page, but the lack of consistency shattered that impression.

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"The transition from the home page to the search page was just awful. It looked like two completely different websites and the search page looked outdated. The major aesthetics changes was both out of place and it seemed very unprofessional." - Session 1: Upright Music

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Looking at how the music search was highlighted or initialised on the other websites elicited a different set of observations, emotions, and reactions.

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"Audio Network did a good job of promoting the search functionality, it was one of the first things I saw and it made it very easy to get to the music." - Session 2: Audio Network

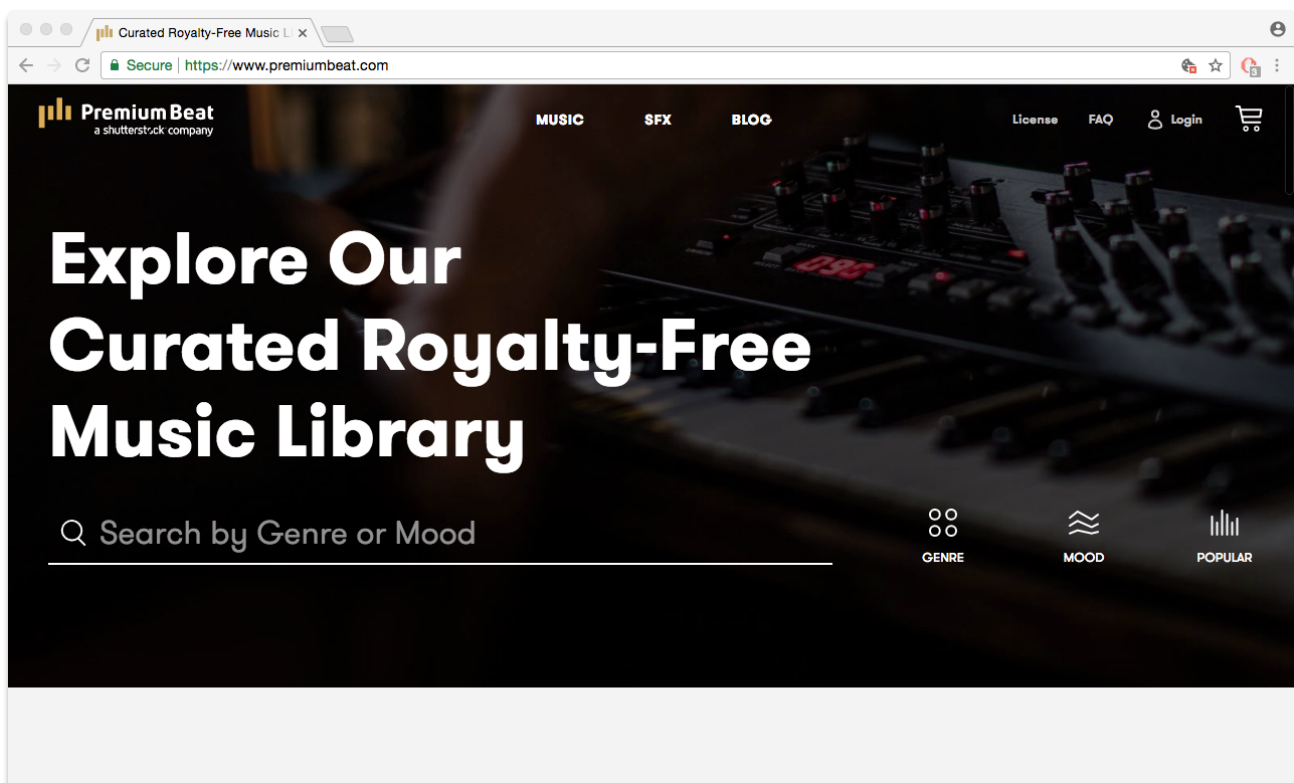
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"To the right of the logo is a big white search bar with text that reads 'APM Search: Enter genres, tags or album IDs to search over 500,000 tracks ...', you cannot really miss it." - Session 5: APM Music

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"On top of the hero header is a title text and a search bar, essentially letting me search for music the minute I arrive at the page." - Session 6: Universal Production Music

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"At first glance, the hero header and tagline attracts a lot of attention and guides the attention towards the search bar, making it very easy to get started." - Session 4: Premium Beat Home Page

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On the other websites, there was either a positive reaction or an acknowledgement of the searching opportunity right away. Either way, there was no doubt about its presence, which meant that initialising the music search was a positive or neutral experience. Because the music search is a very significant action, it should be very easy to perform. Those websites that featured an easily spotted search bar involved fewer steps in getting the music search started and not risking losing any users before they actually start the music search and listen to the music.

In the context of a B2B scenario, a conveniently placed search bar may most likely be a preferable option that allows users to get their work done more efficiently. If it is difficult to initialise the search options, the users may resort to seeking out alternatives or just picking the next website from a Google search. Websites that offer a search based experience live in the shadow of Google Search (accounting for over 90% of searches worldwide), that have defined the way we search for information online. Therefore not having search options readily available to the users may be detrimental to their usability. Furthermore, when competitors offer an easier approach to searching music, it may reflect poorly onto the brands that does not. It can give the impression that the website is behind the standard of the industry (Lee & Kozar, 2012). The lack of available navigation towards the music repertoire also had another negative effect.

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“An initial thought, the website does not look like it is an online production music library, [...]” - Session 1: Upright Music

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The lack of navigation and search options also induced doubt about the purpose of the website, which can cause the user to simply click the back-button and go to another website. Websites that provide several means of navigation such as menus, search features, and back and forward-buttons, have a higher chance of letting users find their desired information (Lee & Kozar, 2012) and if the back-button is the most attractive options available, users will not hesitate to use it. Upright Music was the only website, that did not facilitate an easy music search from their homepage, which negatively influenced the use of the website and suggests that it can hold some significance to guide the users towards navigation and important functionality, like a search feature.

Impact of track information and musical assessment

An aspect that revealed itself once the music search was eventually initiated was the absence or presence of track information. When conducting a music search on either of the websites the user is presented with a list of tracks to choose from. On websites with large repertoires the search results often contained over a thousand and most of the websites fitted around 3-10 tracks in the view at a time. This means that there is a lot of information to process at any given moment in the music search. Music as a product and its value is assessed differently than other products online, e.g., the attributes of a piece of clothing can be assessed visually via an image and determined whether or not it matches a specific criteria. Music cannot be assessed as through visual means, but has to be experienced through listening. This is a far more time consuming activity, especially if a piece of music is developing throughout its duration. When a user is looking for a track that matches a certain criteria, irrelevant results cannot be filtered out before listening.

The individual websites

The music search is one of the most important processes on the websites and every website provided more or less the same approach, however with a number of small, but significant differences. In the case of Session 4, the search results provided 3611 tracks that matched the initial search criteria 'jazz cool piano', which elicited the following observations.

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"The search results leaves no visual way of assessing what type of tracks is being presented, no genre, keyword/tag, or description is provided, so all the tracks have to be played individually." - Session 4: Premium Beat

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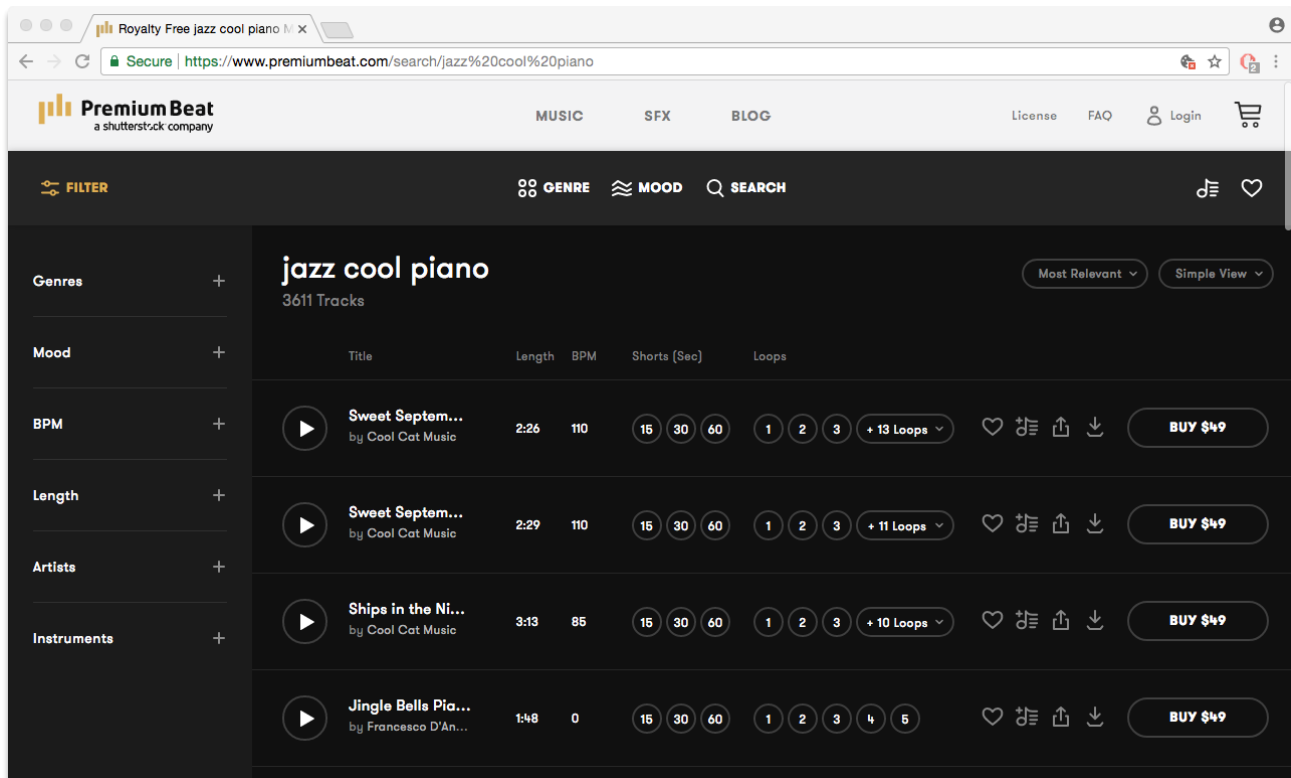
"The search results contains many different tracks and some of them are not matching the criteria searched for, which potentially means listening through a bunch of tracks not anywhere near being useful." - Session 4: Premium Beat

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The search results contained tracks of different genres and Premium Beat offered no overview or indicators of the tracks' style. The argument might be made that this encourages the user to experience the music and not sort out tracks based on a genre, however after listening through a number of tracks with no relevance at all, doubt arose about the company's ability to deliver the desired music. This issue was worsened by another aspect that was encountered in Session 4.

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"When playing a track a particular annoying feature becomes apparent; the tracks are watermarked. Every 13 second a soft male voice speaks "Premium Beat dot com" over the playing track. This is a very off-putting feature" - Session 4: Premium Beat



"Listening to the music on the site is no longer a fun or pleasuring part of finding a track, it is a necessity." - Session 4: Premium Beat

Premium Beat was the only company that used watermarking on their tracks and it disrupted the immersive experience of listening to the music. They provided no useful information or overview of the tracks in their repertoire and furthermore combined it with an unappealing and off-putting experience when listening to the music. This complicated the music search severely.

Other websites however did a good job of providing information and an overview of their search results, which improved both the efficiency and the experience of navigating through the tracks.

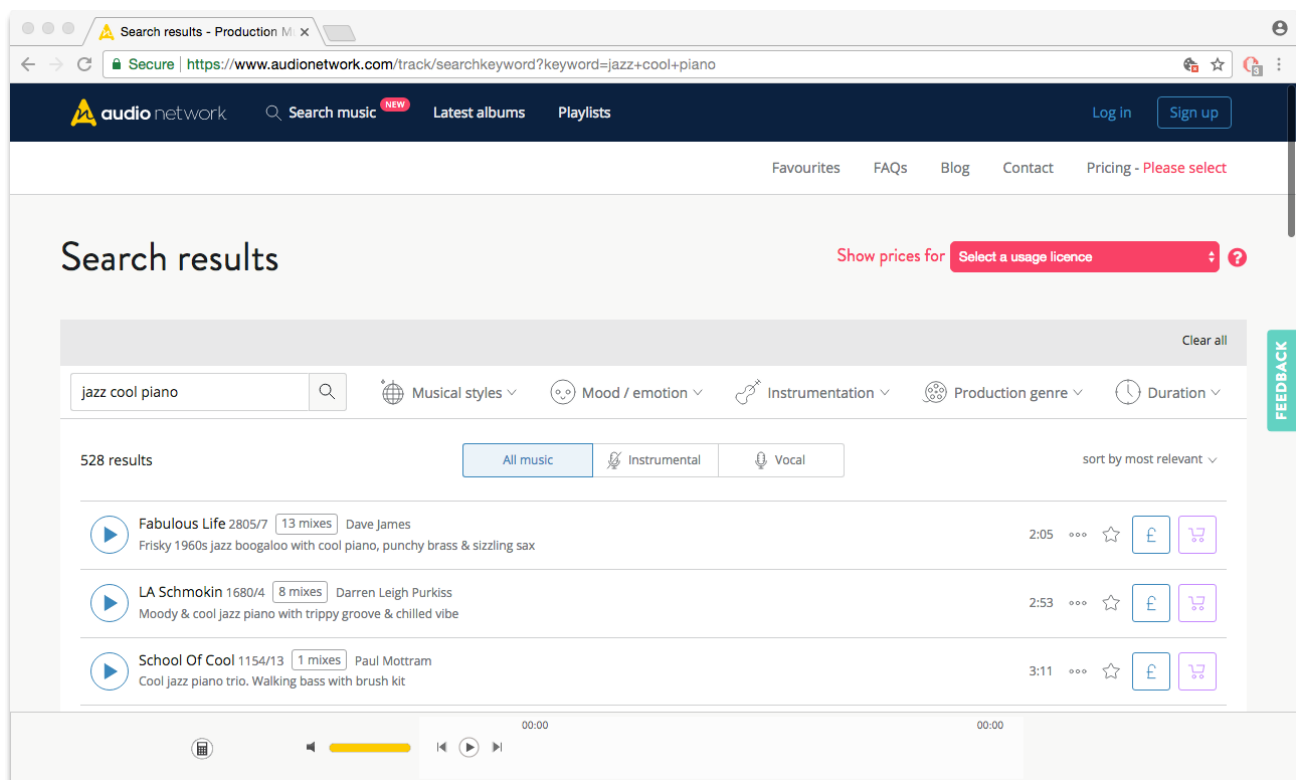
"The short description of the tracks allow for a quick assessment of which tracks to listen to." - Session 2: Audio Network.

"The results provide a good overview with plenty information to visually process while listening to a track." [...] "The descriptions are short and accurate, making it easy to decide which tracks to take into consideration." - Session 6: Universal Production Music

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The two websites that used track descriptions allowed for easier processing of their content and also allowed for more tracks to be assessed within a shorter amount of time. It is important to provide information to the user and help them complete their tasks with as little effort as possible (Hasan, 2016).

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"The description of the track is very useful and I don't have to play every single track, but I have another way of figuring out which tracks might be the most useful to me. It is almost like digging for treasure and the track descriptions are clues as to where the treasure might be buried." - Session 2: Audio Network

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Even if the users know what they are looking for, it can still be difficult to guide them towards what they want. This of course means that the track descriptions should be as accurate and descriptive as possible. Otherwise they might become an element of confusion instead of a helpful indicator. In Session 5 on APM Music's website, this came to mind. APM also provided a description of the tracks to some degree.

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"The description is helpful in the initial visual search of the results, but it quickly becomes clear that the description may vary in relevance." - Session 5: APM Music

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Their track description varied from single words to full detailed sentences. However, the track description was not always equally relevant. Sometimes the track description was deficient in describing how they track developed or failed to provide insights into the mood or style of the track.

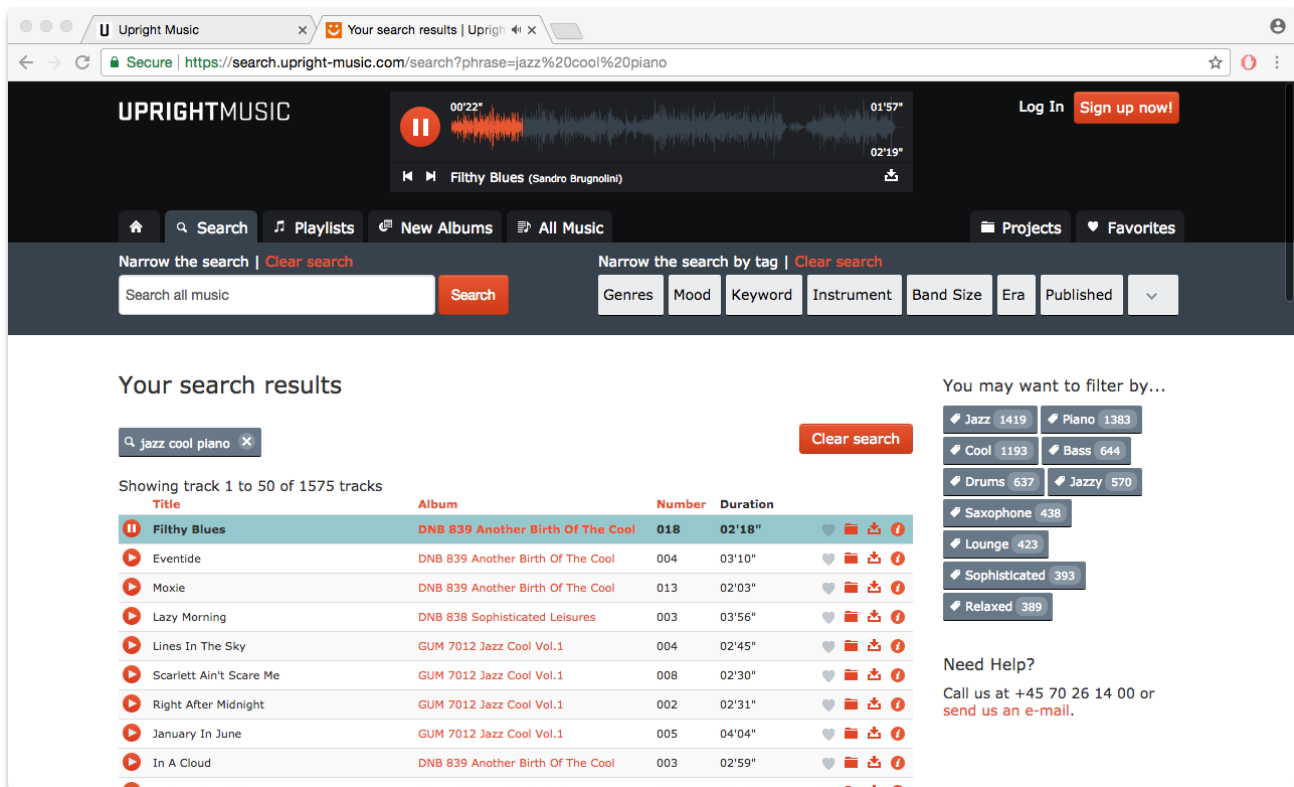
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"I notice that the description is not always doing the track justice and can at times be lacking depth of what is actually going on in the tracks. But still, that is the main way I navigate through the search results for now as it allows me to go through tracks most efficiently." [...] "This seems a bit strange and inconsistent and makes me doubt its usefulness." - Session 5: APM Music

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But since the information was provided, it was being used to some extent. However displaying information that is subpar in quality or inaccurate was not good either, it just induced doubt.

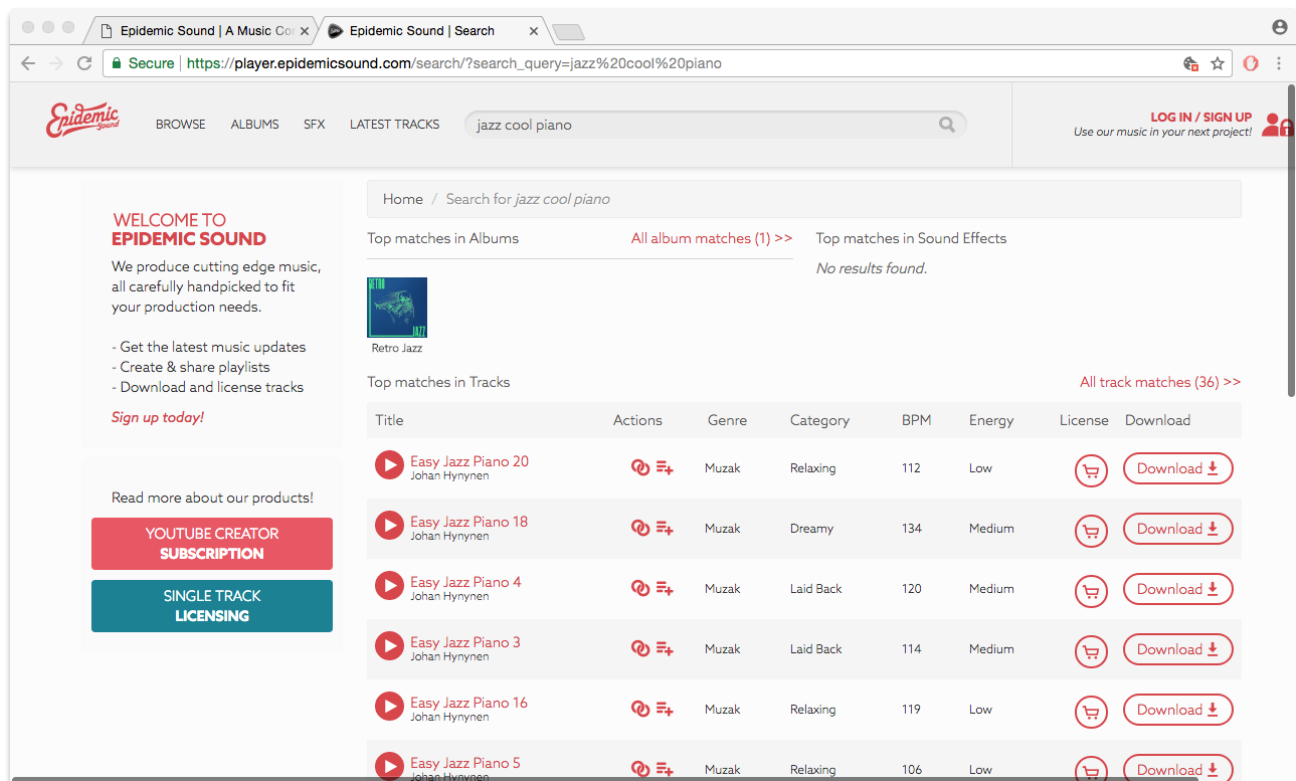
Upright Music from Session 1 did not provide a track description either, but they provided some other clues about the tracks content. Upright Music provided an album title along with the track title, which can give some insights into the track due to the often overly descriptive nature of album titles in production music. This is more information than what was provided on Premium Beat's website, but still not enough. There was not enough information present to make an informed decision about which track to listen to, so choosing a track ultimately became a gamble.



"There is not much information displayed about the tracks beside the track title and album title. Given the lack of information about the tracks that are displayed, I don't really know where to start, so I just play the first track and hope for the best. [...] The lack of information or description of the tracks is a bit of a nuisance. It makes it difficult to assert whether the track might be useful or not, which leads to a lot of listening to different tracks hoping they match what is searched for." - Session 1: Upright Music

Epidemic Sound employs another way of displaying their tracks, instead of using a track description like Audio Network and Universal Production Music, they provide a genre, category, and energy as the indicators of the tracks content.

"There is no description to visually filter through the tracks, but there is a couple of other indicators that helps a little bit. [...] The genres are not particularly useful as they are a bit misleading, [...] they are not all Muzak, but some are more electronic and ambient sounding, while others are towards lounge, easy listening and kitsch. So I decide not to use those, but rely more on the mood and energy that is also displayed, which is a bit more useful." - Session 3: Epidemic Sound



The few indicators were only somewhat helpful, e.g., the genre 'Muzak' was used rather loosely on the website and was not always precise, but there may be a subjective differences between the author and Epidemic Sound in the understanding of the genre. Nonetheless, it was for the most part to confusion rather than help. Fortunately, the other indicators, category and energy keywords, provided some help in the visual search.

Differences across websites

If the description of the tracks (or lack thereof) is examined across all sessions, there is no clear pattern or theme emerging, each company have chosen a different way of displaying their music. However, the differences may still reveal some insights and minor themes.

First, the websites that did feature a full track description provided a place to start. When presented with a list of tracks that all supposedly meet the search criteria, where do you start? The websites with a track description allowed for a visual processing of the available tracks and then making an informed decision on where to start. It provided a sense of control over the music search process and a sense of direction.

On the contrary, the websites without any description of the tracks, e.g., Premium Beat where the effect was most pronounced, felt more like a gamble when selecting a track and offered no sense of control. The observation notes from Session 4 with Premium Beat makes a note of this in the closing reflections on the session; *"The music search felt like a shot in the dark, there was no real indicators of the content of the tracks and it felt like there was no control over the process. The only element I had to base my decision on was the track title and when a track is called 'Sweet September' it is way to ambiguous as to what it might sound like"*.

Second, the websites that did feature a description of the tracks allowed more tracks to be assessed in a shorter amount of time, because it opened up for the possibility of multi-tasking; listening to one track while visually searching for the next track. This provided a sense of efficiency and control over the process. The feeling of control is quite important here, especially because it is uncertain where the process takes you or where it ends. Notes from Session 2 with Audio Network provides an analogy for music search process and the impact of track descriptions; *"It is almost like digging for treasure and the track descriptions are clues as to where the treasure might be buried"*.

Third, the websites which partially or inconsistently displayed track information, such as APM Music and Epidemic Sound, had the negative effect of causing uncertainty regarding the information. Because the information about the tracks often was too sparse or too generic to provide any real insights into the tracks, therefore it is only useful for quick assessment of the track, but with a caution. When conducting a music search with partial or inconsistent description of tracks, it provided a vague sense of control, but not efficiency. The user is able to control the process based on some information, but has no expectation as to the correctness of the information.

Results

Findings

This section will briefly describe overall findings from the literature review and the data analysis. The findings of the literature review is highlighted because they provided significant insight into the connection between web design and brand, as well as serving as a guide and structure for the research.

Literary findings

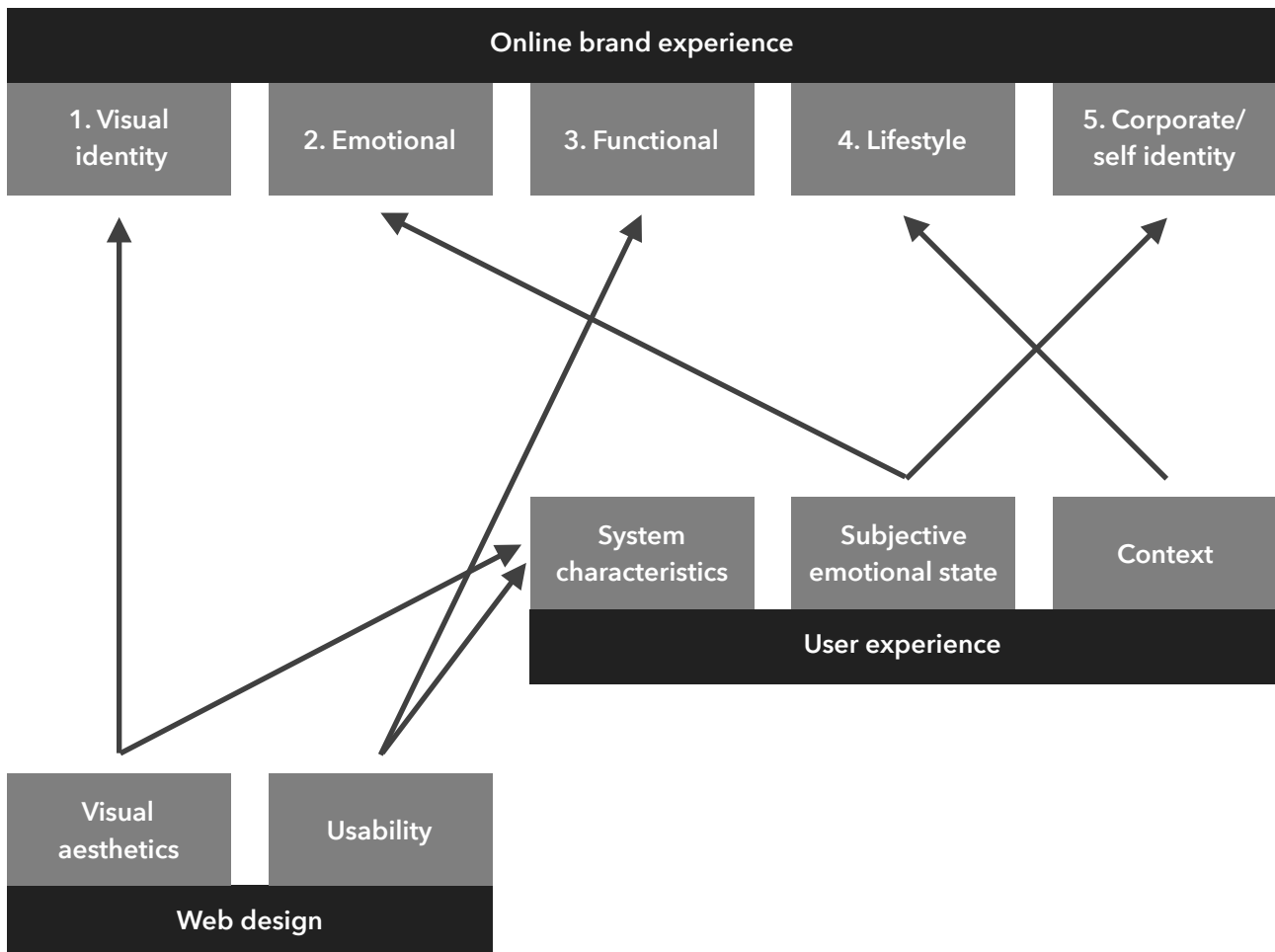
The process towards the literary findings started when considering the research question, which focussed on the link and relationship between web design and brand. This started a deductive approach to the research and theory, as both the human-computer interaction and marketing literature, which the web design and brand respectively falls under, are well established fields of literature. However, they are not often treated together in research scopes, but rather treated as peripheral connections. The marketing literature tends to focus on brand relationships and views the online context as an augmentation of brand, product, or service. When considering brand, the information system literature tends to focus on more usable aspects of online brands, rather than emotive relationships.

A review of web design literature revealed several significant aspects within the HCI literature. Web design has long been of interest to researchers and research have primarily been focussed on website usability and visual aesthetics. However, in recent literature there has been an increasing interest in the user experience. The term user experience have been around for a long time, but recent professional buzz around the concept has attracted practitioners and researchers alike. Usability and visual aesthetics have been shown to have a strong relationship to the user experience on websites. A review of user experience literature reveal key aspects of user experience to be the characteristics of the system (e.g., a website), the subjective emotional state of the user, as well as the context in which the system and interaction is experience. Web design can thus support one of the aspects of the user experience.

This lead to a review of brands in an online context. Initially, this revealed that visual identity can support online brands through the visual aesthetics of web design. Web design and visual aesthetics on a website becomes the very elements that consumers identify with an online brand.

Further reviewing the literature led to a concept called online brand experience, that through five dimensions (visual identity, functionality, emotional, lifestyle, and corporate/self-identity) can

support the experience of an online brand (Hamzah, Syed Alwi, & Othman, 2014). The five dimensions can be linked to different aspects of web design, which in turns leads to the argument that web design can support brand. An overview of how the findings related is outline below.



The model shows a simple overview of how web design can support brand through an online brand experience. The model displays how the different aspects of web design, user experience, and online brand experience relate to and support each other, both the individual aspects and the overall concepts.

Research findings

Based on the discoveries of the literature review, the research design was structured accordingly, but still operated under the same research question. The goal was to provide qualitative insights into how web design is likely to influence brand in the production music industry. The data indicates some points across the sessions on the websites, that turned out to be of significance.

First point to be identified was the consistency of the interface aesthetics throughout the website. Most of the websites, provided a consistent process, both visually and functionally, however one website stood out with a severe lack of visual consistency. The major changes in the interface design elicited a sense of confusion around the relevance of the website. The inconsistency made the older looking page appear unmanaged and made the brand behind the website look unprofessional. Thus identifying a potential aspects of visual aesthetics within web design that can affect brand.

A second point that was identified was the initialisation of the music search. The majority of the websites that was examined featured a clearly defined path or way of initialising a music search. This is especially relevant when considering the context in which the music searches are performed. The B2B context can pose a certain emphasis on efficiency on the websites, therefore websites that are underperforming in that area can potentially be prioritised lower than other websites. Therefore, allowing users to quickly initialise the music searching process could be an advantages feature. Furthermore, having immediate access to a music search feature simplifies the process for first-time users and allows them to engage with the website more easily.

A third aspect identified was the overview of track information provided during the music search process. Providing the users with detailed and accurate information about the tracks displayed during the music search allows a for more efficient processing of the displayed search results. It furthermore provided a sense of control during the process. Hence, allowing the users to decide where to go next, based on rational processing of the information displayed. When no information about the tracks was available, the sense control over the process disappeared and picking which track to play next became an arbitrary decision.

Discussion

Discussion

This section discusses the overall process and what influenced the direction of the research. Furthermore, it will discuss the findings in relation to the research design and what may have influenced the analysis.

Impact of the literature review

The literature review had large impact on the study and how it was undertaken. Working from the research question opened up for a wide review of different areas of literature. In the beginning of the study there was a main focus on visual identity. The literature review started with reviewing literature about visual identity, which revealed an open-ended definition of the concept. The broad definition of visual identity did not consider modern means of communication such as websites, but focussed more on traditional means of expressing visual identity. This realisation led to thinking about visual identity and brand from a more modern perspective that included information systems as a way of communicating visual identity and creating a distinct brand. This extended the scope of the literature review into two different fields of literature; marketing and information systems.

A specific branch within the information systems literature was identified to be of particular importance to the scope of this study, which was the human-computer interaction literature. This branch of literature focussed on more concrete aspects of the interactions with website and what these meant to the people experiencing the interaction with the websites. Two of the most researched topics within this branch was visual aesthetics and usability. These two aspects were incorporated into the study as their relevance to field is clearly defined. In addition, they are also two highly manageable aspects of a website, which could help identify managerial implications of this study. The user experience was focussed on partly due to a recent increase in the topic within professional web design and partly due to the strong connection to usability and visual aesthetics. Reviewing the literature revealed that usability and visual aesthetics have great capabilities of affecting the user experience and therefore the user experience had to be included within the literature review.

Reviewing web design literature opened up to considering brand in an online context, which helped narrowing down the review of the marketing literature. Reviewing Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) revealed that brand in an online context shared many similarities and a strong connection with brands in an 'offline' context. Discovering this connection guided the research towards how brands can be experienced online, which led to a review of Hamzah, Syad

Alwi, and Othman (2014) that identified five dimensions of online brand experience. That particular study showed several compatibilities and connections with the elements within the previously reviewed web design literature and thus helped tying the two bodies of literature together.

Realising the connection between the two areas of literature was a pivotal moment. It helped tying this study into, in this case two, existing bodies of literature and guide the further direction of the research. The insights helped develop a theoretical framework, which strongly influenced how the research design was formed. The theoretical framework was rooted in the reviewed literature and was able to provide a firm structure for the data collection and subsequent data processing.

The literature review also allowed for an evaluation of similar studies on web design conducted in other industries. This provided inspiration and information about how to shape the research design and what data to expect from applying similar or different research designs and methodologies. Many studies have employed a quantitative approach to investigate hypotheses and prove a connection or relationship between factors, but few studies used a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach may yield different insights into how the different aspects of web design are likely to influence brand, rather than confirming or disproving a relationship.

The literature review was a fuzzy process, despite the linear presentation in this section, that revealed new insights gradually through the process. The review was initialised with a broad search through academic online libraries, provided by CBS among others. This provided a preliminary set of articles, which was studied and review. Some articles provided promising references to additional literature and these were looked up and the process was repeated. When no more useful references presented themselves, a search through academic online libraries was again conducted which yielded new results, and so on.

Using a theoretical framework

Employing a deductive approach and developing a theoretical framework provided several benefits over the course of this study. However, relying on a framework holds the risk of relying too much on theory, when analysis data or drawing conclusions. This particular risk was always clear and for that reason the data analysis relied on inductively analysing the data rather than applying theory to analyse the data. If theory was used more in the data analysis the findings would most likely have conformed to the theory instead of letting new insights surface.

The appropriateness of the framework can be discussed. Developing a framework around prevalent themes in the literature and hereby not relying on a single theoretical foundation provided structure to the data collection and analysis approach, without risking the conclusions being heavily influenced by a single theory. The framework also helped make sense of the data that was collected. Applying alternative theories for the framework may have produced different findings by influencing the data processing.

Research design and data collection

The research design has been built around a pragmatic research philosophy and has therefore held the research question as the most important determinant of the research's progress and direction. This allowed for an initial deductive approach to theory and literature to be combined with later inductive approaches to data analysis. The pragmatic approach permitted more methods and techniques to be considered when deciding on the most relevant direction for the research.

Using an ethnography strategy opened up for the opportunity to adopt the position as user of the websites and obtain some degree of immersion. This immersion was further aided by developing a user scenario that served as a narrative for the data collection process. However, the immersion was rather short, by extending the immersion and carrying out repeated observations may yield new and more insights as well as more precise data. As a part of the ethnography strategy the research used participant observations as the primary method of data collection. The sampled websites were chosen based on a typical case sampling to illustrate a generic use case. The sampling technique provided a typical scenario that strongly resembled a real-life context of encountering any of the websites. However, using a search engine can provide different results, depending on a wide range of factors such as, previous search history, current paid advertisement promotions, and the SEO of the individual websites at any given time. The samples are therefore not definitive, but merely chosen based on a likely real-life approach.

The main data collection posed several challenges. Using participant observations fitted well with the exploratory nature of research. However, performing the observation sessions and recording the data, revealed itself to be one of the biggest challenges. Looking back, the observation notes from the first sessions was rather sparse, compared to the ones from later sessions. It became clear that the inexperience with the data collection method may have affected the richness of the observations. Also, collecting data over an extended period of time also affected the level of detail in the observation notes. This became clear after several hours of

continuous observations, as the attention of the observer gradually got more weary, causing the level of detail in the observation notes to decrease.

One big challenge during the observation sessions was to record thoughts that was not immediately conscious and how certain interactions or visual stimuli affected emotions during the sessions. Putting feelings to words also induced the risk of observation bias, which in this case may be particular high. Adopting a detached stance to the research while expressing positive or negative emotions towards a website during observations may indeed colour the data and in turn the findings.

Alternative approaches to data analysis

When using a theoretical framework it may seem obvious to use a deductive approach to analyse data. The study could also have used a deductive approach for data analysis procedure, however the inductive approach was chosen deliberately to avoid inducing premature closures to the data. Working with a theoretical framework for data collection allowed the data to be connected to the literature and categorised based on established areas of literature. However, using a theoretical framework for data analysis could risk suiting data to theory, rather than theory to data. The inductive approach was applied so the findings would emerge from the data and not conform to a predefined theoretical foundation.

Review of findings

The findings of this study are by no means definitive, due to the high risk of observation bias and subjectiveness in the data. The findings provide insights that can guide further research into web design within the production music industry. The effect of inconsistent interface design may be interesting to pursue and may even apply to other areas outside production music. Other findings may be specific to the industry. With the data available, the findings cannot be generalised or even translated to other industries that employ similar web design. E.g. academic libraries, where it is also possible to search through a large databases with keywords across different areas of literature. Even though the characteristics of web design and the search for relevant content may be very similar in the two industries, there is still a notable difference in the way users asses the results that are displayed, due to how users experience musical content. The findings may not even translate to the commercial music where the content is similar, because commercial music predominantly is a B2C industry and production music is a B2B industry, therefore web design may be experienced differently depending on the contexts in which the music is experienced.

Another important aspect of web design that is not considered in this study is content. Content plays an important role in attracting and retaining users on websites. Investigating content may require another industry specific study, but can help provide insights into how web design most efficiently can curate musical content on production music websites.

However, by considering the connection between web design and online brand experience, the findings may still be of some relevance. In an online context the experience of a brand is important and the findings suggest, that certain aspects of web design can elicit certain emotions towards the website, and in turn the brand behind. The qualitative approach provided some insights into when the emotions occur and what type of emotions are likely to be triggered by web design.

Implications and further research

Based on the findings on the literature review, this study can contribute to a more complete understanding of the relationship between web design and brand. The research combines findings from HCI and marketing literature to establish a connection between web design characteristics and online brand experience. It demonstrates web design's capability to elicit emotive reactions during use of a website. It may be interesting to investigate these emotive responses to web design in a brand relationship context to see if the emotions and prolonged exposure to certain web design aspects are consistent over time. Furthermore, it would be interesting to extend research into the web design and brand construct to learn more about

Overall the study yielded very few concrete findings, however considering the nature and the scope of the research it is to be expected. However, the study provided some insights into the relationship between web design and perception of brand, which can be extended upon or further pursued. This study demonstrated that web design can elicit emotions that can extend towards the brand. This may be of relevance to businesses trying to establish a brand through online means.

The study focussed on a single industry may prevent the findings from applying to other industries, however they may prove fruitful for further studies in the production music industry. However, the findings regarding consistency of interface design may apply more widely. Given that the emotional stimuli caused by the interface inconsistency was not a result of any industry specific feature, but rather a reaction towards the inconsistent visual communication of the brand. This could indicate that the emotions arising from the inconsistency have the potential to yield similar notions of unprofessionalism towards the website and brand across multiple industries, but this connection would need to be investigated further.

The study may encourage managers of smaller online businesses to consider web design as an important channel for establishing brand, by communicating a consistent visual identity through carefully implemented web design.

Conclusion

Conclusion

The study investigated the relationship between web design and brand in the production music industry and found that web design can influence brand to an extent. The focus was whether or not certain aspects of web design could influence brand in the production music industry as an online setting. The problem posed, provided a two part answer.

The literature suggests that web design, as a part of an online brand experience, can affect how users perceive brand. Visual aesthetics and usability are two tangible aspects of web design, that can affect attitude and perception of a website. Furthermore, visual aesthetics and usability can as the main characteristics of a website, contribute to the user experience, which in turn affects the perception of website. Visual aesthetics, usability, and the user experience together, can support the five dimensions of an online brand experience and influence how users perceive brand. The literature further suggests, that the users' perceptions of a website is likely to reflect onto the brand behind. These findings provide a general notion as to how web design can influence brand and provides insights to a more complete understanding of the relationship between web design and brand.

This study illustrates individual moments where web design is likely to influence brand in the production music industry. The two main aspects of web design, visual aesthetics and usability, are prominent to influence the users' perceptions at different moments during their stay on a website. Visual aesthetics play an important role in supporting brand through visual web design, as the visual identity on a website become the very elements the users' associate with the brand. The study found visual aesthetics to be an influence on brand perception and indicates that inconsistent visual identity can influence brand negatively in production music. These findings may translate to other industries and be of general application, but will require further research to ascertain. Specific to the production music industry, usability revealed to be of significant influence during music searching on the websites. The websites with improved usability, allowed for easy, efficient, and organised music searches, by presenting accurate information to the users continuously throughout the music search process.

The qualitative approach of the study, provides notions into when web design related stimuli is probable to yield emotive responses from the users, which in turn can reflect onto the website and brand. The study encourages extended research into the relationship between web design and brand, which may provide further insights into the dynamics and interplay of web design and brand related stimuli on websites.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Observations Notes

Session #1 | Upright Music

18. December 2017

[Screenshot 1 - 4]

At first glance, the homepage looks very minimal, clean, and stylish. The use of whitespace is pronounced, the white background is contrasted by a dark blue as the only colour. The use of whitespace is evident and visible elements on the screen is the corporate logo in the top left, a burger menu in the top right, a title in the top centre, and a grid of images/films with a blue opaque overlay. The corporate logo is equally minimal, indicating a deliberate style of minimalism in its design. The logo merely reads 'Upright Music' with 'Upright' in bold and 'music' in a thinner weight. The logo is not very distinct, it contains no colours or shapes, which are the most distinctive aspects of a logo.

The title in the centre is big, but somewhat understated by the width of font. The tagline reads 'music for film, advertising, tv & digital' all in lower case indicating a deliberate design choice leaning towards the modern look. The website features two distinct fonts; one is used for the corporate logo in the top right corner and the other is used for the remaining text on the site in various weights.

The main navigation is most likely hidden behind the burger menu, which is a trend seen on recent web design. It looks minimal and stylish, but some practitioners (NNGroup) argue that it hurts usability due to the fact that options are being kept away from the user.

The grid is showcasing what appears to be commercials for several brands the first visible three being B&O Play, The Royal Danish Theater, and Motorola. Scrolling down the site reveals that these promotional videos populate the majority of the interface and there is a fair amount of these videos continuing all the way to the bottom of the website. The videos have an opaque dark blue overlay downplaying the colours of the thumbnails. The colour scheme is equally minimal, essentially only using dark blue and white (if you do not count the logo, which for some reason is in black).

The footer contains four social media links (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram) along with general contact info for the company.

On the homepage there is only a few options available; viewing a video, opening the burger menu, or going back to the site I came from (and also scrolling to the bottom and contact Upright via e-mail or social media). However, from an initial point of view there is only one option that is clear to the users, which is viewing a video, which is not what I am looking for. But even viewing a video is not too simple, as the mouse hovers over a thumbnail the dark blue overlay gradually becomes more opaque revealing the more natural colours of the video underneath. However, clicking the video thumbnails does not do elicit any action (which usually is a common standard worldwide, popularised by video platforms, such as YouTube, Vimeo, and etc.) but clicking the small text reading 'Watch' opens a video player overlay that allows you to play the video. This is a bit unusual and makes it very difficult to view a video if I want to.

An initial thought, the website does not look like it is an online production music library, but rather a promotional or branding site for Upright Music and the productions that features their music. There is no

real indicator of what kind of music they have available or the service they provide, nor is there any options to search for music present. This is a bit annoying. In hope of finding some music the first action I choose is to open the burger menu in the top right corner, in hope of uncovering hidden navigation.

[Screenshot 5]

Clicking the burger icon opens a sidebar menu or side navigation that slides in from the right. The menu is the same white as the background with the same thin blue font. **The menu follows the same minimal design of the homepage with a thin dark blue font listing available navigation.** Opening the menu reveals new navigation, the menu shows the following options; 'About', 'Work', 'Search Music', 'Report Music', 'Contact', and 'Home'.

Upon discovering the hidden navigation I decide that the most likely action to lead towards finding a track would be 'Search Music' and this options is subsequently clicked. This opens a new tab directing to the following sub-site, <https://search.upright-music.com>.

[Screenshot 6]

Prompt: The new tab shows a *significantly* different site that shares no traits with the homepage that send me here. There is now a black opaque overlay (instead of the previous dark blue) covering a barely visible site, a new (less modern looking) font is used (compared to the homepage), the primary dark blue colour is switched out with a rich orange. The prompt overlay features a select list of flags related to the prompt that reads 'Good evening! Where are you from?'. The overlay is prompting the user to choose a location before any other actions become available, the options are 'Denmark', 'Sweden', 'Norway', 'Finland', 'Iceland', 'Poland', 'Estonia', 'Latvia', and 'Lithuania'. After choosing an option the site now becomes fully visible.

[Screenshot 7]

Search: The site features a black fixed header with the corporate logo in the top left, a music player in the top centre, a log in and sign up feature in the top right. Below these are the sites navigation featuring 'home icon', 'Search', 'Playlists', 'New Albums', and 'All Music', along with 'Projects' and 'Favorites' (the last two are most likely features that require being logged into a profile). Below the header is a prominent search bar, right below is a rotating banner with playlists, new albums, and new labels. Next to the rotating banner is a (somewhat strange) image with contact information, followed by a grid of three featured playlists, 'Christmas Songs', 'Nordic Noir', and 'Directors Cutz'. **Most images have a reminiscent opaque dark blue overlay** as was seen on the homepage, however all elements that elicit a primary action, such as search, play buttons, and sign up, now have a **rich orange colour**. The fonts have change from a sleek and minimal on the homepage, to a bulky and plain looking font (source code revealed it to be Verdana). The text on the images/playlists is another type of font, which from the looks of it is the same used in the corporate logo, which incidentally is the only reoccurring and consistent design element on the two pages. The background has also changed to a bright light grey instead of a true white.

Even the favicon in the tab, is different from the homepage and now features a weird orange smiley. The homepage and the search page looks like two completely different pages and could easily be confused to be two different companies, the only thing linking the two is the logo and the URL.

The many changing design elements provides inconsistent aesthetics and a confusing experience when transitioning from the homepage to the search page. The homepage appeared very deliberate and modern, but the search site appears old, unmanaged, and even a bit out of date in comparison. The inconsistency between the pages seems very unprofessional and could appear like the page isn't being managed.

The search bar is located prominently and is easy to find, which is great when looking to search for a specific type of track. The predefined keywords (from the user scenario - genre, mood, and instrument) is typed in the search field. The search bar suggests words when typing, thus allowing the user to match with predefined words if necessary. The words 'jazz', 'cool', and 'piano' is entered and searched for.

[Screenshot 8]

The search results are displayed under the still fixed header and shows a comprehensive list of tracks. Below the header has opened a search bar with the opportunity to add another search phrase. There is also featured a handful of options to narrow down the search, by adding a tag to the search criteria, I can choose between; genre, mood, keyword, instrument, band size, era, published, and there is also a dropdown arrow which may contain more options (clicking it reveals geography, durations, and libraries). In the top right below the filters is featured a 'cloud' of suggested tags. The tags feature genre, mood, key, instrument, and more, also shown is the amount of tracks matching the suggested tags. The tags are in a bleak grey colour with white text.

The search results list display contains title, album, number, duration, and four small icons. Just above the list of results is a brief sentence reading 'Showing track 1 to 50 of 1584', which gives a good overview of the amount of music that matched the search. I am also given the option to clear my search with a medium sized orange button.

There is not much information displayed about the tracks beside the track title and album title. Given the lack of information about the tracks that are displayed, I don't really know where to start, so I just play the first track and hope for the best. The first track 'Filthy Blues' is a slow blues jazz track, that changes to a more upbeat and playful track around halfway through. The track does not fully match what I am looking for as it is most notably features saxophone instead of piano. Moving on to next track, which is from the same album.

The next track (Eventide) has a similar feel, however it is more cool and groovy than the previous track. However, the focus is still on saxophone and horns, so it does not match either. Moving on track number four (Lazy Morning) from a different album. It has a slow and laid back feel, however still no piano. The lack of information or description of the tracks is a bit of a nuisance. It makes it difficult to assert whether the track might be useful or not, which leads to a lot of listening to different tracks hoping they match what is searched for. The trend of tracks that does not quite match what is searched for continues down the page of search results. It is not very easy to visually filter through and decide what to listen too or not, so I have to hope for the best. The only clues about the tracks are the (sometimes) misleading title of the track and the album title. On the plus side, the music is of good quality, good recordings, composition, and songwriting, so the listening through the tracks is not all bad, just not very efficient. As I scroll down the site I notice that the filtering bar in the top has disappear (most likely remained in the top of the page), which means that if I want to filter my search I have to scroll back to the top to apply a filter.

[Screenshot 9]

After listening to a large amount of tracks I arrive at a track called 'After Dinner' from an album called 'The Piano Trio', this songs seems promising and a new feature is discovered. At the far right side of every track is a very small 'i'-icon that opens up the description of the track, showing a lot more information such as, keywords, genre, composer, playlists the track is featured on, alternate versions of the track, and even a 'More like this' with suggestions of similar tracks. Among the suggested tracks is a track called 'A Thousand Miles From Home' on an album called 'Cocktails'. The track 'A Thousand Miles From Home' shows some promise so I decide to check out the album it is feature on, so I click the album title written in orange and I am directed to the full album.

[Screenshot 10]

On the album page a new feature/element becomes visible, after the title of the tracks is now included a version in parentheses for the tracks that have multiple versions. This gives some insight to the contents of the track. I look for the track that sent me here, so I scroll down the album page, the track is found and then played. 'A Thousand Miles From Home' is a jazz trio of double bass, drums, and piano playing slow soft tracks that puts you in the closing hours of a smokey whiskey bar and evokes a sense of melancholy. This track is fitting for the commercial, but before downloading the track I just want to listen to 'After Dinner' again, so I click the back button trying to go back, but nothing happens. After trying the back button several times with no response I suddenly end back on the start of search page to my great confusion. I later realised that the URL was updating upon clicking back, but the page was not. I am not sure of this is a permanent feature or a temporary bug. However, since I landed back on the start of the search page, so I decide just to do the search again in order to find the track again. The track 'After Dinner' is eventually found and listened to again. After deliberating between the two tracks 'A Thousand Miles From Home' as it feels most promising.

Clicking the small download icon in the far right of the line of the track re-directs the user to a new page with log-in, create new account, and request new password features. As it happens, I already have a profile on this site and was able to download the track in various formats.

The overall impression was, that it was too difficult to find the music and to get the search started. The navigation to the music search page was hidden inside a burger menu and unnecessarily hidden away. It seemed like they sacrificed some important navigation in order to get a cleaner look on the home page. The home page was more or less pointless, unless you are interested in seeing a bunch of promos and ads.

The transition from the home page to the search page was just awful. It looked like two completely different websites and the search page looked outdated. The major aesthetic changes was both out of place and it seemed very unprofessional.

Session #2 | Audio Network

18. December 2017

[Screenshot 1]

At first glance, the homepage of Audio Network looks modern and colourful. In the top left is the corporate logo (as is an industry standard), the logo is a bold yellow 'A' with a wavy white line symbolising a sound wave, the logo is followed by the corporate name 'audio network' all in lower case with audio in bold and network in thin. The logo is deliberate and modern in its expression. The logo has some similarities with the logo observed in session #1 with the bold and thin weights of the font contrasting each other. However this logo has the distinct yellow 'A', which makes it stand out more. In the top right is 'Log in' and 'Sign up' features in a light blue. The most prominent design element is the hero header featuring the tagline 'Music that tells your story - 140,000+ original tracks, cleared for use on any platform, anywhere in the world, forever'. The hero header is composed of three music themed images mashed together. The photos appear to be stock photos, which makes the site look a bit generic. The colours used on the site is pink and blue in variations. Below the tagline is a noticeable pink button with 'Explore our playlists' followed by a search field. The search field is showcasing a few keywords to inspire for a music search.

[Screenshot 2 - 9]

Scrolling a little down the page reveals wide section with 'Browse music by' followed by four options; musical styles, mood/emotion, instrumentation, and production genre. The text is in a new pale purple (almost neon like) colour on a white background adding to the sites colour scheme. When scrolling the header smoothly transforms into a smaller dark blue header with the logo and sign in still remaining.

Further down the page is a handful of brands showcased, supposedly companies Audio Network has supplied music to, most noticeable are MTV, HBO, and Vice. The background here a dusty sand colour with some light geometric pattern, white text, and light grey logos. The site appears vast, but has very little information on it and scrolling further down shows a line reading 'From London to LA - We work with world-class composers, producers and artists', showing their composers. Audio Network has also implemented parallax scrolling on their site, however it is not done very well, which just ends up looking a bit awkward. Scrolling even further down a short customer testimonial with a TrustPilot rating is shown on a teal background. Even further down is a brief overview of their business models on a bright pink background. Under the headline 'Music for all' is three icons with three short lines showing what the company has to offer. The first is a money bundle icon 'Simple, clear licensing - Our licences are tailored to the project you're working on - pay only for what you need'. The second is device(s) icon 'All platforms covered - From YouTube to traditional broadcast - you can use our music on any platform'. The third is a globe icon with 'Global clearance - Our music is precleared for use anywhere in the world - forever'. Even further down on a light teal background is a 'get started'-section encouraging the users to sign up. And finally is the very large dark blue footer matching the header showing a slightly opaque world map with little Audio Network logos scattered around the map, perhaps showing where they have offices.

The home page is vast, scrolling nightmare, and frankly it is mostly empty. Audio Network uses a lot of space to say really few words and in order to reach the bottom of the site the users need to scroll a lot. The composition of the homepage is very strange. At first glance it seemed modern but when scrolling down it just seems to employ a lot of modern design choices without any real idea or content behind it. It looks modern for the sake of looking modern. The colours scheme is very diverse and uses many unnatural colours and some colours are only occurring once which makes their inclusion a bit strange. The initial blast of the home page is positive, clear tagline, primary navigation such as search and explore is

discoverable and immediately available, but scrolling down the page withers the otherwise good first impression. The homepage made use of parallax scrolling at certain parts of the homepage, which has been a relatively new trend within web design in the recent years.

[Screenshot 10]

From here on I decide to search for a track directly from the homepage with the defined keywords/tags; jazz, cool, piano. When entering the search phrase the search results is displayed on a different site. The dark blue header has be updated with navigation and now displays 'Search music (new)' with a small pink 'new' badge which seems to indicate that the feature is relatively new.

(The badge along with the sites updated and modern layout seems testament to a certain youth within the company. The company appears younger than Upright Music from the Session 1. A search music feature is a basic expectation for this kind of company and it seems strange to highlight that feature as new.)

Furthermore, there is 'Latest albums' and 'Playlists' available for navigation in the header. Below the header is second header with navigation in the right side; 'Favourites', 'FAQs', 'Blog', 'Contact', and 'Pricing - Please Select'.

[Screenshot 11]

Clicking the pricing opens an overlay with two columns with two packages to choose between. The first is called Creator and the price for a track is £6.99 per track, for single use. The package is described as being 'Perfect for editors making personal videos' listing tracks you purchase as cleared for YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, etc., good for student films, and not-for-profit online games and apps. Then there is an option for ticking a box 'Generate revenue from your videos (includes YouTube and Vimeo)', by ticking this box alters the package and I am offered a new package called Creator+. This bumps the price from £6.99 up to £19.99 per track, for single use. This package is describes as allowing the user to generate revenue on YouTube and Vimeo plus everything from the Creator license. It now becomes clear that these are various licensing forms to choose between. At the bottom of the Creator+ license is two points that are greyed out, but still has a checkmark next to them. This is rather confusing as to whether or not this is included in the license package. Clicking one of the two points sends me to two completely new license packages called Television Show and Commercial/Ad. There is clearly a lot of different license to choose between, but the way they are presented is a bit confusing and random. The greyed out point but still with a checkmark makes it really confusing and suggests double meaning, the greyed out part symbolising they are not available, but having a checkmark next to them indicates they could be a part of the license. This makes me decide to leave the license alone for a while and move on the finding the track I need.

[Screenshot 10 & 12]

The search results give a good overview of available navigation. However, they are using a light grey colour for the text on a white background, which at times can be a little difficult to read. At the right hand side, there is a pink dropdown menu that allows me to choose a license and see the prices for the tracks for each type of license. This is a neat feature if you know what type of license you need, but for a first time visitor there is clearly something to learn here.

The search results shows the keywords/tags I have searched for and allows me to narrow down the search results with filters like 'Musical styles', 'Mood/emotion', 'Instrumentation', 'Production genre', and 'Duration'. This is very handy if I need to narrow down my search. Furthermore, the page shows that there is 528 results for the keywords/tags I have used. It further lets me narrow my search with instrumental versions and vocal versions of the tracks that have been found, very useful since I am looking for a track without

vocals. After this the search results are displayed with a title, composer name, and a short description of the track. The description of the track is very useful and I don't have to play every single track, but I have another way of figuring out which tracks might be the most useful to me. It is almost like digging for treasure and the track descriptions are clues as to where the treasure might be buried. The results also show how many different mixes there is of the individual tracks, the track duration, a more features button, the price of the track (given that you have chosen a license), and a 'add to cart' icon. At the bottom of the site is a fixed footer with a music player.

After a few moments on the search page a light blue overlay slides up from the bottom covering a good part of the website, the overlay reads 'Get started with incredible music' and encourages the user to sign up and get 10 trial tracks. After another few moments on the page, a small grey poll opens in the bottom right side of the screen asking the user 'Were you able to find the music you need in your last search?' with the options 'Yes', 'No', and 'I'm still looking'. I can hereby send feedback to the company regarding my search on their site.

The page looks minimalistic and follows much of the same design style set by the homepage, but it is a bit more understated on the search page. The colour palette is more subtle and the colours are used to symbolise navigation and interaction elements. The background is white making for a clean look. Once a track has been played the track turns from white to a light warm shade of grey indicating that you already have listened to the track. This is a nice little visual hint as to which songs I already listened to, allowing me to focus on the songs I already decided is not useful. Furthermore, this is also very helpful when scrolling through the comprehensive list of search results that allows me to keep track of how far down the list I. The track descriptions are really helpful,

Sifting through the results and listening for a potential track to use is quite easy and straight forward. The short description of the tracks allow for a quick assessment of which tracks to listen to. The small music player has a sound wave view of track you are listening to also allowing for visual assessment of the track. It is good if you are looking for e.g. a calm track you can stop your listen early if the sound wave appears to be too compact. However, the music players buttons is very small and looks disproportionated to the rest of the page. The yellow colour from the corporate logo is only used in the music player for volume and sound wave (perhaps deliberate in order to create a subtle link between the logo and the music).

After sifting through a great deal of tracks I noticed that the titles start to repeat themselves. E.g. the track named 'Fabulous Life' is showing up again later as 'Fabulous Life 2' and so is it the case for many tracks, after a while every track ends with 2. So even though I was presented with 528 tracks to begin with it turns out to be a fair bit less than that, given that most tracks have anywhere from 1 to up to 13 different mixes of the same track that shows up in the search.

However, after looking and listening to a lot of tracks I finally found one that is useful. The track is called 'Late Night Mellow' and is a slow and smooth solo jazz piano that has a laid back and cool vibe, perfect for bar or club in the late hours. As opposed to Session 1, there is no download button available on this site, instead Audio Network employ an e-commerce inspired approach and uses add-to-cart and checkout features. In order to get a price I have to choose an option; Creator, Creator+, Professional, Television Show, or Commercial/Ad. The user scenario defines that I am looking for a track for a commercial and therefore the Commercial/Ad option is chosen. This is also the most expensive option of £495 (so I decide not to go through with the purchase this time). This indicates that you have to be very certain of the track you pick, because you have to pay up front to download the track.

EDIT: Later I found out that Audio Network has create a Premiere Pro CC plugin, allowing editors to search for and try out tracks in their edits without having to purchase the tracks up front. However, this was not an easy bit of information to find. There was a link in the footer directing to an Adobe Premiere Pro CC plugin page, but the link was not on the footer on the homepage, nor was it on the footer on the search page. But I did not find it until I reached the Checkout page and scrolled all the way to the bottom and by chance noticed it. This is a very neat feature, a shame they don't promote it more.

Overall the site appeared somewhat modern. Audio Network did a good job of promoting the search functionality, it was one of the first things I saw and it made it very easy to get to the music. Their website allowed for many ways to filter and narrow down search results. However, the search results was in the end very limited and the music was decent, but not of high quality in terms of composition, songwriting, and or production. The homepage was a large wasteland of mostly empty website, populated with very little information, even important information like the Adobe plugin site was not featured on the home page. The footers are not consistent throughout the website, which can be a bit confusing, especially if you are searching for information or using them as navigation on their website.

Audio Network tries to provide a more up-to-date off-the-shelf production music solution, which is a quite new approach to the production music industry, but it has a drawbacks to first-time users and the different license packages can be overwhelming to choose between. However, if the video editors have a strict budget is a good feature for them to get an overview of what they have to spend to use a track in their production. An overall impression was that the website seemed a bit cold and impersonal due to the colours and stock photos, this combined with the off-the-shelf approach which made the experience a little machine-like.

Session #3 | Epidemic Sound

18. December 2017

[Screenshot 1]

At first look the homepage is a bright encounter sporting a flat red colour (from the flat design practice) with white text in the typeface called Source Sans Pro giving a good contrast between text and images. The header is an opaque black bar with a white Rolling Stones Magazine inspired logo in the top left corner. In the right side of the header there is three navigation options; 'License Tracks', 'YouTube Subscription', and 'Browse Library', along with a log option.

The site has a hero header with two music themed images (one is a guitar and the other is an audience member) edited together with a bright red glare. On the header is a tagline reading 'A music company reimagined - soundtracking your story' in a white modern bold font. Below is two options for navigation towards music; 'Browse our tracks' and 'Latest releases' on two bright red buttons. Further down is a bright red separator with companies that have used music provided by Epidemic Sound, most noticeable is Billboard Magazine, The New York Times, and Wired.

After this is a 'Our Story'-section briefly describing when the company started and what they are about as a business. Further down is an 'Our Musicians'-section explaining the relationship with the people they work with and how their both benefit from the collaboration. There is also a link to the latest releases. Moving down the page is a link to their library, followed by a link to their two business plans for licensing tracks and another link to their YouTube subscription plan. At the bottom is a grey footer with white text, providing practical navigation.

The homepage is consistent with its design choices, the colours and fonts look simple, modern, and well curated. They have a distinct corporate logo that is reminiscent of the Rolling Stones Magazine logo creating a subtle connection to another music business. The design choices is well balanced, so the website looks thought through and stylish.

[Screenshot 7 - 8]

Starting the music search I pick the 'Browse our tracks' option in the beginning of the site. This opens a new tab with Epidemic Sounds player site. There is a few design changes from the homepage, but the style is still consistent between the two sites. The logo is still in the top left corner (this time in red), followed by navigation 'Browse', 'Albums', 'SFX', and 'Latest Tracks'. Still in the top right corner is the log in/sign up located. In the centre of the header is a search bar.

The body of the Player site is divided into three columns. In the left side is a small description of the company (most likely to inform users should they come from an external site), and two links to their YouTube and track licensing plans. In the centre of the site is the primary means of filtering through tracks and searches. There is four primary categories to browse between; genres (bright pale red), moods (flat orange), movement (lime green), and places (flat forrest green). Below is a list of tags within the category and as a default setting the available genres are displayed; spanning from Acoustic to World & Countries. All these genres have a dropdown arrow if clicked will reveal a subset of genre tags. The red colours of the tags are less saturated on the red on homepage, it seems like a conscious design choice, however their main flat red colour is very similar to they ones used for genres, which looks a bit off. In the right side of the body, there is an opportunity to filter between energy (light blue), tempo (medium blue), and

length (slightly dark blue). At the very bottom of the page is a small cookies and policy overlay in dark grey.

[Screenshot 9 - 10]

As there is a search bar available in the header I will use that as the first means of finding a track. I enter the three search words from the user scenario. After inputting the search the search results are displayed in the typical list. At the top of the search results is a 'Top matches in albums' suggestion called 'Retro Jazz' and to the right of the album results are 'Top matches in Sound Effects', but nothing is displayed here since there was no results found.

The search results list of tracks is displayed next. The results show the title of the track, actions, genre, category, BPM (beats per minute), energy, license, and download. In the top right of the search results there is also displayed the amount of tracks that match the search, which in this case is 36 tracks. In comparison with the amount of tracks found on the other two websites (Session 1 and Session 2), this seems like very few tracks available despite the relatively open search criteria. The same flat red colour that has been present throughout the website is still present and it is used everywhere there is an action available. The use of colours on the website is very good, it is simple but done in a very efficient way subtly letting the user knows where there is an opportunity to click. There is no description to visually filter through the tracks, but there is a couple of other indicators that helps a little bit. So I start by listening to the first track called 'Easy Jazz Piano 20', which has the 'relaxing' under category and 'low' under energy so I hope it is in the right direction. In fact, all the first displayed results is called 'Easy Jazz Piano X' followed by a number. Giving the impression of multiple version of the same track.

When clicking the play button a flat designed music player slides up from the bottom, including the functions skip track back and forward, pause, sound wave, choice between different mixes, find similar tracks, add to playlist, add to cart, and download (highlighted in red). The first tracks is not what I looking for it lacks the certain mood found in a jazz club around closing time. In fact so does all the tracks called 'Easy Jazz Piano' and it takes around 10-15 minutes to partially and fully listen through the tracks. The genres are not particularly useful as they are a bit misleading, many of the tracks are of the genre Muzak, which is not really what I am looking for. But after listening through some of the tracks with the Muzak genre it becomes apparent that they are not all Muzak, but some are more electronic and ambient sounding, while others are towards lounge, easy listening and kitsch. So I decide not to use those, but rely more on the mood and energy that is also displayed, which is a bit more useful.

In the bottom of the search results is a 'show all tracks' and the list with results opens up. However it does not show many new tracks. The vast majority of the tracks found are versions of the same tracks. Of the total of 36 tracks found, there is around 15 version of 'Easy Jazz Piano' and 10 versions of 'Mellow Jazz Mood' and both of these tracks/versions does not match what I am looking for. The choices from the free search results are limited and other means of finding a track is starting to become a consideration.

After a total of 30-35 minutes of listening through all the search results without any luck I have to look for tracks in a different way. One track in the search results were a little promising called 'Past Closing Time 2', so I decide to use the 'similar tracks'-function as I noticed earlier and also used a similar feature in Session 1. Before finding the track I stumble upon a hidden feature that could have been very useful to have from the beginning. I learned that if I hover the mouse over the track title for a couple of seconds it displays a little box with the track title along with a few tags that describe the track. This would have been very helpful to know from the beginning and could have sped up my search.

[Screenshot 11]

I decide to go back to 'Past Closing Time 2' and play it again and click the 'find similar' button in the music player in the bottom. This sends me to a new page with new suggestions. First I am presented with two more versions of the 'Past Closing Time' track (version 1 and 3) and the opportunity to view all versions of that track. Below is a new list of track suggestions with different tracks, however some tracks to make a reappearance, tracks like 'Easy Jazz Piano' and 'Mellow Jazz Mood' are still displayed in a good amount. However, some of the new track suggestions are showing more promise and might be useful for the commercial I am looking for. Two tracks stand out, 'Got That Feeling 2' and 'Whiskey On The Rocks 3', they are both a jazz piano trio and both have a relaxing vibe that gives a subtle hint of elegance. In the end, I decide to go with 'Whiskey On The Rocks 3' as the title of the track has a nice connection with the commercial I am editing. The track is slow and gives a nice feeling of the last round being served in a jazz club in New York. I click download next to the track and I am shown a reading 'You need to be logged in' and it gives me the opportunity to either log in or creating an account. I then created an account, but had to wait for approval before I was able to download a track. The process was the same in Session 1 after creating a profile, so for now the interaction on the website stops.

The overall impression of the aesthetics on the website was very good. The website employed a flat design which was clean, simple, and modern. The web designers clearly has a grasp of modern web design principles, both regarding aesthetics and usability features. The options for navigating through their music library was good, however the selection of tracks were very limited and offered too many versions of the same tracks and not enough diversity. The mouse-over/hover above title feature on the Player-site was useful for visually sifting through the tracks, but was not discovered until halfway through the session. Furthermore, the feature was too hidden and too impractical to use efficiently, because the mouse-over required a few seconds to be displayed.

The website was memorable because of the efficient and consistent use of design, but was lacking due to their track selection.

Session #4 | Premium Beat

19. December 2018

[Screenshot 1]

First look of Premium Beat is clean, simple, and dark. The site has a large black hero header with an image of a synthesiser (creating associations to modern electronic music). The font is a modern sans serif typeface called GT Walsheim (revealed by the source code) in bold white. On the hero header the tagline reads 'Explore Our Curated Royalty-Free Music Library' followed by a subtle search bar with 'Search by Genre or Mood' written on it in grey. At first glance, the hero header and tagline attracts a lot of attention and guides the attention towards the search bar, making it very easy to get started. Also featured on the hero header is three distinct icons; genre, mood, and popular. The icons also redirect attention towards browsing through their music library.

In the top left is the corporate logo with four gold bars resembling a minimalistic sound wave succeeded by corporate name 'Premium Beat' with a small tagline underneath reading 'a shutterstock company' thus lending themselves up against the mother brand of the websites lending them credibility and recognisability.

The centre of the header offers navigation to 'music', 'sfx', and 'blog' allowing the user to navigation towards the content of the site. In the top right is 'License', 'FAQ', 'Login', and a cart icon suggesting an off-the-shelf production music solution where you buy a track for a single use (similar to Session 2).

[Screenshot 2 - 7]

Scrolling down the website shows a brief overview their offerings with four icons and selling points highlighted in the right side of the screen. The four are; 'Exclusive Music & Sound Effects', 'Pay Once, Use Forever!', '100% Copyright Clear', and 'Safe for YouTube & Vimeo' highlighting the simplicity and ease of their service. In the left side of the screen is a link to their license along with the following text; 'Incredible Music. Simple License' in a large thing weighted font with the description underneath reading 'Our curated library of royalty-free music gives you the polished feel of the big production houses. All our tracks are exclusive and copyright clear'. I especially noted the phrase *gives you the polished feel of the big production houses*, subtly indicating their music may not be supplied by said production houses. The colour use is simple the gold colour from the corporate logo is used throughout the site along with a shaded white and black.

Further down the site shifts to black shaded image of a small keyboard, vinyls, headphones, turntables, and cassette tapes carefully laid out on a wooden desk (a stock photo most likely from the mother company). Over the image is white text reading 'Hear It From Our Music Experts - All our royalty-free tracks are handpicked by music industry experts. Take a listen t some of their favorite tracks' followed by short selection of tracks. The list of tracks shows a title, duration, BPM, amount of loops, four small icons (favourite, add to playlist, share, and download), and a buy button. It is however impossible to discern what type of track is displayed, as the only clue to the content is the track title, making them more or less useless, unless you are just browsing the website casually. Below the list of tracks is a gold 'browse more tracks'-button, that redirects to a search page.

Below the page shifts to a white background with three selling points, which is very similar to the ones previously displayed. Below the site shifts back to a photo with a black overlay and the text reading 'Never Miss a Beat' with the opportunity to sign up for a newsletter with a name and email. The gold is once again

used for the 'sign me up'-button. After this is the website footer, following most website standards offering links to various pages with information. At the very end of the site is four social media buttons and the accepted payment methods; MasterCard, VISA, PayPal, American Express, and a 100% Secure Shopping icon.

After having perused the homepage and getting a feel for what kind of company this is, it is time to start the music search. The predetermined search phrase used on the other sessions are entered into the search field at the top of the site.

[Screenshot 8 - 10]

The search shows a new page with an almost identical header, however now it is white and the text is a light grey. The search results and filtering criteria are displayed below. The page is in the same style as the homepage and the background is a dark grey and black, with white text contrasting. Just below the header is navigation to genre, mood, and search which if clicked opens a sub-menu below allowing me to navigate to a specific genre or similar. In the left side of the page is a menu that allows me to filter my search results and specify the search. I have the opportunity of filtering with genres, mood, BPM, length, artists, and instruments. To the side of each filter is a plus icon that opens a comprehensive list e.g. genres where I can choose one or more criteria.

The rest of the screen is populated by the search results. First is my search phrase 'jazz cool piano' in a medium noticeable white font, just below is the amount of search results and the results are 3611 tracks (which in comparison with Session 3 is decent amount of tracks). Below that is the list of tracks with only four visible. For each track is a title (with composer just below), length, BPM, Shorts (Sec), Loops, four icons (favourite, add to playlist, share, and download), and a buy button. It jumps out that the full track title is not visible, suggesting that the page might be build for a bigger screen. The search results leaves no visual way of assessing what type of tracks is being presented, no genre, keyword/tag, or description is provided, so all the tracks have to be played individually.

Playing one of the tracks opens a small music player displaying the same features as the search result page just above. It is a bit redundant to have the same options offered so many times within a quite small place. This music player, unlike the ones seen on the other websites, does not feature a sound wave to indicate of liveliness or development in the tracks.

When playing a track a particular annoying feature becomes apparent; the tracks are watermarked. Every 13 second a soft male voice speaks "Premium Beat dot com" over the playing track. This is a very off-putting feature, when trying to imagine the track being a part of a production. This leads me to turn the track off more quickly than I otherwise would have. Listening to the music on the site is no longer a fun or pleasuring part of finding a track, it is a necessity. When thinking of who owns Premium Beat it is no wonder that the tracks is watermarked. Shutterstock has always watermarked their photos on the stock photo website to prevent their photos from being used without a license. The same is most likely the rationale behind watermarking their music, but it also has a negative side effect of being a distracting element that makes the search a somewhat drab experience. The search results contains many different tracks and some of them are not matching the criteria searched for, which potentially means listening through a bunch of tracks not anywhere near being useful.

This in turns also put me off from listening to more tracks without narrowing down the odds. I hereby turn my attention to the filters in the left side and start with genre. Next to the various criteria is a number written in grey indicating the amount of tracks that are available after applying a filter. Initially I am looking

for 'jazz' to keep the selection wide. Applying the filter narrows the search down to 373 tracks, but the search results have not appeared to change. *The first 5-10 search results is still the same as before, so I decide to apply another filter - a mood filter.* I need a track that is a bit slow and fits for a jazz club. *None of the criteria really fits what I look for,* so I choose 'romantic/sentimental' which narrows the results down to 66 tracks. *Again some of the results are the initial results still displayed on the top, so I have to scroll down to find some new tracks.* After listening to a handful of tracks I land on a track called 'Jazz Trio Ballade' that is a slow sentimental track with a slight sense of reminiscence to it.

[Screenshot 11]

Not really wanting to listening to more watermarked tracks I decide to go with this track. I click the download icon next to the buy button and white dialogue opens allowing me to download a preview of the track in Mp3 format. On this website I do not need a profile to download a track. It is quite nice and convenient not having to commit with a profile before testing a track. Making it easy to test their music in an external program opposed to the some of other sites, where a profile is necessary. This could potentially make the site eligible for a re-visit, where the other sites may be left out because I did not necessarily wanted to make a profile on the sites. The switching cost is not as high on this website as it is on the others.

I feel I compromised with track because I did not want to listen to the watermarked versions on the websites. *The website is looks very modern and sleek with the dark theme (black and white) site with the gold colour suggesting that the site strives for a bit of elegance in their expression.* However, some of the usability features were severely lacking on the search page. *There was no visual clues as to the type (content) of the track at all.* The only clue lies in the title of the track and even that was not fully visible, the results list only had room for a few short words or one long one. Premium Beat also felt a bit impersonal to navigate.

The lack of overview presented on the search page was one of the most noticeable elements on the site, it complicated the music search considerably and forced me to listen to watermarked music. The music search felt like a shot in the dark, there was no real indicators of the content of the tracks and it felt like there was no control over the process. *The only element I had to base my decision on was the track title and when a track is called 'Sweet September' it is way to ambiguous as to what it might sound like.* On a content level, the tracks were a tad unimpressive, but the most distracting feature was the watermarking, which impaired the overall experience of search through the tracks.

Session #5 | APM Music

19. December 2018

[Screenshot 1 - 4]

First impression: APM's homepage is very dense and packed with colours, images, text, and general many things. The site is dark in the top and bright in the bottom and filled with images, album covers, playlist covers, artist pictures, and much more. At first it is nicely balanced, but with the rotating banner constantly switching between a different images gives a sense of unrest and stress. On the home page is many different fonts and colours because the homepage is showcasing and promoting different production music labels making it difficult to determine where APM ends and another brand begins. It may be a conscious choice that APM puts their own brand in the background and promote their music, however APM still appears in the rotating banner. The home page is colourful (and at times too colourful) and dynamic, my mind was barely at rest when I was browsing the homepage.

In the top left is a very small black bar with navigation in light grey (which on most sites would have been found in the footer) containing 'about', 'custom music', 'credits', 'our team', 'services', and 'blog'. To the far right is more navigation 'log in', 'register', 'help', and 'contract us' in orange. Below the small navigation bar in the top is a dark grey header with APM's corporate logo in the left side, composes of 'apm' in lower case letters with a small red play button and 'MUSIC' written underneath in a smaller font. To the right of the logo is a big white search bar with text that reads 'APM Search: Enter genres, tags or album IDs to search over 500,000 tracks ...', you cannot really miss it. Below the search bar is a few options to select where to search for, these contain; tags, track description, track title, lyric text, library, album description, album title, and composer. Tags and track description is chosen as default. To the right of the search bar is a handful of navigation links to; search, new releases, libraries, history (requires a profile on the site), projects, playlists, and artists & composers. There is a decent amount of navigation visible homepage and it is prominently placed.

Below the fixed header is a large rotating banner taking up a good amount of website real estate switching between 11 different banners every few seconds. Below the rotating banner is two sections, to the left is a grid of featured releases from various different production labels with everything from 'Supernatural Vol. II' (an 80's theme synthwave albums by the looks of it, probably in the wave of recent seasons of Stranger Things) to Family Adventures.

Also noticeable on the home page is the music player, that is already fixed to the bottom of the view and is therefore always visible. The music player is (for now, when no track is playing) minimal and understated with grey controls on a white background, when hovering over a button it turns the same red as the corporate logo. It has music controls to the left and some action icons in the right; a drop down to choose between different mixes of a track, add to playlist, download, and send/share. This will be looked at later when listening to music.

In the section to the right is a smaller grid of featured playlists with artists feature, and various different theme playlists, such as christmas theme playlists and a Stranger Things themed playlist. This is most likely updated to reflect current events. The releases and albums are varied and colourful and further complicates distilling the APM brand from the many others presented on the website. It seems that APM has a wide selection of tracks and categories to choose from.

At the end of the home page, is a recent credits grid featuring productions where APM have supplied music. Here is a selection of movies, TV shows, and even a video game. These are similar to the promotional videos from Session 1 and are a different kind of customer testimony. To the right of these are a few small blog headlines with recent news and with social media icons to the far right. Below is the page footer and four navigation links; legal, support, contact us, and careers, along with the address for the company's different locations in Hollywood, New York, and Toronto.

After browsing the site I go to the top of the site to search for music. I input the search phrase used on the other sites and hit enter.

[Screenshot 5 - 6]

The search results and filters are displayed underneath the header in two main sections; a search filters section to the left and search results on the right. The search filters section is on a very light warm grey background with dark grey text in a thin font that features a handful of quick filters that seems a bit random because of 'indie rock' being one of them for an unknown reason. Below the quick filters are tags that allow me to add tags from genre, mood, character, tempo, instruments, and many other tags.

The search results are displayed on white background with grey text and icons. In the header of the search results I have the opportunity to see the results in a track view or an album view it is as default set to track view. I am also showed the amount of results; there is 1122 songs and 2927 tracks that match my search. The search results contain a small album cover, track title (with a track code underneath), a description, duration, and a 'narrow your search' column which allows me to choose a tag that is attached to one of the tracks in the search results and add it to my current search.

The description is helpful in the initial visual search of the results, but it quickly becomes clear that the description may vary in relevance. One description only contains two words 'cool, jazzy' while others has a full sentences. This seems a bit strange and inconsistent and makes me doubt its usefulness. However, I dive into the first track with a fitting description and promising title called 'Cool Down Martini'. When hovering over a track, the list entry turns a gradient blue to white and the play button turns into the red colour used in the corporate logo.

Clicking the track (list entry) does nothing, even though the colours of the tracks switches when hovering over them, but in order to play the track I had to press a very small play icon. The track title did not play by pressing the track title, album cover or anywhere else. It is very odd that the one of the most important functions on their search page is unnecessarily small. When pressing play, the music player in the bottom comes alive with a sound wave, track title, and album cover. The pause button is now the same red as in the logo.

The first couple of tracks are not very fitting and I notice that the description is not always doing the track justice and can at times be lacking depth of what is actually going on in the tracks. But still, that is the main way I navigate through the search results for now as it allows me to go through tracks most efficiently. A track called 'Night Melancholia' has fitting vibe to it, but the instrumentation is not right. A similar tracks functions would have been helpful here.

After 10 minutes of listening through a bunch of tracks with no luck, it is time to narrow down the search. I decide to add another tag to the search and I choose the mood 'relaxed' in hope that it will give me more useful results. The extra tag did not provide any useful results, there were too many instruments and too much going on in the tracks remaining. I decide to try my luck with another tag, this time I choose 'trio' as I

hope to weed out some the tracks featuring too many instruments. The two extra tags has slimmed the results down to 65 songs and 145 tracks. This time the search results are more promising. Halfway through the new search results I encounter a track called 'The Blue Room', it is soft, relaxing, and features a piano trio.

I choose the download icon in the lower right corner of the music player, however I later realised that a download option also becomes available when hovering over the track in the search results. I later realised that the 'arrow down'-icon, I mistook for a download icon was a 'show more info'-icon. It turns out I had more available information the whole time, I just didn't know.

[Screenshot 7]

The download icon in the music player opens a grey overlay requesting log in, however as the sign up process are very long and the company primarily operates in the US and Canada, I decided not to go on and create a profile.

The overall structure gives the impression that the company is a bit older than some of the other websites visited. The size and the style of the icons is hinting in that direction as well, so is the fonts used some places. The overall design of the website does not seem as carefully thought through, but rather it looks like it has been updated consistently over time to make room for new features as they come along. When navigating the site I became more aware of the colours that belonged to APM, the home page was just very confusing.

Listening through multiple tracks was not a smooth process. There was no autoplay or crossover to the next song in the list and pressing the very small play button was a bit tedious.

Session #6 | Universal Production Music

21. December 2017

[Screenshot 1]

When navigating to Universal Production Music I am presented with a country select page. The page looks very modern, like it has been updated or redesigned within the last couple of years. The colour scheme is selection of flat colours, which has become more and more popular. Another hint that the site has been redesigned recently is the presence of a thin bar with gradient coloured bar starting with a flat pomegranate red in the left side transitioning to a violet, then purple, then blue, then light blue, and ending in a green. This type of gradient colouring is a recent trend in web design which has been widely used through 2016 and 2017.

Below the thin bar, is a midnight blue header with Universal's logo in the centre. In the left side of the page, just below the header, is some geometric graphics made of several parallelograms coloured matching the thin bar in the top. This graphics shape is visually references in the header. In the centre is a dark grey text that reads: 'WELCOME TO UNIVERSAL PRODUCTION MUSIC - *We help bring stories to life with the power of music.* - Search tracks, create playlists, collaborate and share songs for your film and video productions'. The background is a very light grey (close to a white).

[Screenshot 2]

Below the text the page prompts the user to select a country, there is a large list of countries with Europe, Asia, and Rest of the World as top categories. I click Denmark and is redirected to another page.

[Screenshot 3]

I am redirected to a page with a small white box that ask me to confirm my language. The box has two buttons, one of them is light blue and says 'Stay on English (Sweden)' and the other one is the same white as the box only outlined with a thin grey line, the button reads 'Go To English (Denmark)'. The blue button is clearly highlighted and the site wants me to click this, however I click the white button as I want to go to the Danish site. It seems odd that I have to confirm language when both options are showing me English.

[Screenshot 1]

After clicking the un-highlighted button I get send back to the country selection I started on. I once again click Denmark thinking that something might have gone wrong while loading the page, but I get sent through the exact same process again and I once again end up on the country select page. Once again I click Denmark, but this time I choose Sweden (the highlighted button in blue) and get sent to a new welcome page. It would seem that there is some problem with their local Danish site or that Denmark is not a part of their territory. Nonetheless, it is odd that Denmark is presented as an option when the page is clearly not working.

[Screenshot 4]

The welcome page is showing much the same text as the first page encountered. The background has changed to black with Universal Production Music written underneath their logo in white in the middle of the page. Below is a barely legible light grey text that reads: '*We help bring stories to life with the power of music. Search tracks, create playlists, collaborate and share songs for your film and video productions. Discover a selection of music to license for your projects in the quickest and easiest way possible. Follow the green question marks for tips on how to get the most out of our new site.*' First written indication of a

newly designed site. Below the description on the page is a noticeable light blue button that says: 'Go to music'. In the top right corner is a white X, indicating that I can close the overlay and perhaps see a different page below. The odd thing is that both the button and the X sends me to the same homepage.

[Screenshot 5]

The homepage looks equally redesigned and is using the same thin gradient bar in the top. Beneath is a black header with a few navigation options. The renowned Universal logo is present in the top left in white on the black header. The primary navigation on the header is located in the left side next to the logo. There is 'Discover', 'Licensing', 'Tools', and 'Contact' in a thin white sans serif font. In the right side of the header is three icons; a chat icon, profile icon, and a play icon. Clicking the play or profile icon opens a sidebar in right side [Screenshot 6], that allows me to log in to my profile or create one. Most notably are the hero header that populates the centre of the page. It features a colourful image of a woman sitting on the floor, dressed in colourful clothing wearing a concubine-like makeup. On top of the hero header is a title text and a search bar, essentially letting me search for music the minute I arrive at the page. Across the image a white text reads 'Production Music - **Remastered**'. The remastered is in bold obviously hinting towards the process of remastering a recording and enhancing or improving it. They want to make the user aware that they are re-thinking their business, while playing on the word 'remaster' with roots on music production. This could also be an indicator of a recent redesign of their website.

Below the title text is a medium sized black opaque search bar. In the left side of the search bar is a light blue text reading 'Keyword Search' with a dropdown arrow next to it. This dropdown allows me to switch between keyword and lyric search.

[Screenshot 7]

A subtle element is three emerald green circles with a white question mark. When clicked it opens a small text box with a hint inside. The hint is found under 'Discover' in the header and reads: 'Discover - This is where you can find all our themed playlists, labels, composers and discover inspiration for your music choices'. It is also found under the profile icon where it reads: 'Personal working area - Use these icons to access your personal working area: manage your playlists, check your histories or edit your profile'. Finally, it is found under the search bar where it reads: 'Type in your search term, either select a result from the Auto-Suggest drop down bar or select entry for a more generic search. Use the Blue drop down on the left to search either by keyword or lyrics'.

[Screenshot 8-15]

When scrolling down the page the first thing that jumps out is the use of parallax scrolling as the image of the woman glides out and a white angled background slides in accented by purple and blue graphics in the left side of the screen. Over the white background is a black and white image showing an arm with goosebumps, while a text box underneath reads 'Feel Music - A new way to discover - Bring stories to life!' in two fonts and three weights. This text box and image is linking to their about page. The text box is slightly covering the image and looks to be hovering over the background with use of shadows, thus introducing a new element to the visual design - depth. To the right is an image with a link to a playlist 'New Releases - January'. When scrolling further down the page I notice that parallax scrolling also has been used on the two images and the text box, that slightly scrolls over a colourful graphic in the background.

The use of colour is evident throughout the page and further down there is several images with links to various playlists referencing the overall colour scheme. The playlists featured are current-event themed playlists (e.g. christmas), highlighted albums or composers, moods, themes, and more. This is a good way of showing the width of repertoire and let the users visually experience what they can offer.

[Screenshot 16]

Hovering shortly over a text box of an album or a playlist starts a small animation where the title of the album slides slightly up and reveals a set of icons to the user. There is a play button, a download icon, an add to favourites star, and a more icon (three dots) that lets me share the album on social media, along with a green hint icon. Clicking the small play icon starts opens a black music player that slides down above the fixed black header and the album starts playing. The music player features a previous, play/pause, skip, volume control, album cover, track title, track code, and sound wave of the track, duration, download, add to favourites, and more icon. The music player is minimal and blends with the header in the top of the page. This way of playing a track directly from the front page is a great way of engaging the users with the music early, while still letting them explore what the site has to offer.

Below the grid of images and playlists is a blue discover more button that directs to their Discover page.

[Screenshot 13]

Below the albums and playlists is a graphical infomercial that shows an overview of the services they provide. They are showcasing a 'Live chat'-feature (a feature not encountered in any other sessions), 'licensing', 'site tips', and 'tools'. The infomercial allows me to click on a set of simple icons, which changes the view on the middle and shows me a different bit of information. The icons are coloured in recurring colours displaying great use of a colour scheme.

[Screenshot 14-15]

In the bottom of the page is a 'Sign Up Now' section that describes the benefits of having a profile on the site. It reads 'Download tracks, create playlists, collaborate with your team and share with your clients.' with a light blue button reading 'Register Here' in white text. The footer in the very bottom has some standard navigation I expected to be there; 'About Us', 'More', 'Legal', and 'Connect' (social media icons). The footer is black with grey headers and white text. It is understated and do not draw much attention.

After having perused the homepage I scroll back to the top to begin the music search. I enter the predefined keywords 'jazz cool piano' and a quick search drop down animates into view.

[Screenshot 17]

Entering the keywords opens a quick search dropdown list. The list comes into view with an animation that puts a black opaque overlay over the home page and shows a black box with the search results. This type of animation makes the site seem fresh. However, with the three keywords I entered there is 0 results. This is highly unusual and was not encountered in any of the other sessions, there was at least some results from the free search. However, pressing enter with the very same keywords sends me to a search page where there apparently are some search results available with the keywords.

[Screenshot 18 - 19]

The search page features the same header as on the home page, but the search bar is now a part of the header next to the logo and it features my search phrase. To the left is a dark blue sidebar menu that allows me to filter my results by version type, edit, instrument, genre, mood, tempo, music for, era, country, and label. There is many, but also precise options for me to filter my results, which initially seems useful and promising. The right side of the page show me the search results and there is 1124 tracks that match my search. The results are shown on track level, but I can also choose to view them by album level. I furthermore have three options to toggle sound wave, track description, and keywords to be shown or hidden in the list of results.

Below is the list of results, which shows the track title, amount of versions, length, track ID, and stems. I can also see the track description, sound wave, and keywords which are toggled by default. [The results provide a good overview with plenty information to visually process while listening to a track.](#) Just below the track title of each result is a small play/pause button, download, add to favourites, and more icons.

As luck would have it, the second track in the list 'Four A.M.' sounds very promising as it is a piano trio playing a slow, laid back groove suitable for 'the after-hours romance' as written in the description. [The descriptions are short and accurate, making it easy to decide which tracks to take into consideration.](#) Even though the second track seems promising I decide to listen to some more tracks and not settling just yet. [This site does not have a 'more like this' or 'similar'-feature, which could have been useful for staying in the right category as the second track.](#) It quickly becomes clear that the search results are very diverse, spanning from slow groovy jazz tracks, to quirky comedy swing. So in order to find potentially useable tracks I will most likely have to filter the results.

[Going back to the track I liked, gives me a few options for finding more useful tracks. I can either try to apply a filter in the left sidebar menu or click one of the keywords that are associated with the track.](#) The keywords attached to the track are: 1950s, 1960s, jazz trio, piano, intrigue, light hearted, jazzy, passionate, archival/vintage, emotional/caring, romance, cool jazz, and slow. I decide to choose one of the keywords as they might be the most appropriate to my search. Hovering over the keywords turns them into the light blue used throughout the site. I choose 'jazz trio' first, as the instruments featured in the track are important to production. This slims down the search results from 1124 to 157 tracks.

[I once again look to the track description for my first clue of the track. The keywords turn out not to be fitting all the time, even though I chose jazz trio and several big band jazz tracks appear in my search, which is a bit off-putting.](#) I reach the bottom of the search results and encounter the footer from the home page with a light blue button above reading 'Load more'. I click the button and more search results loads into view. After scrolling and listening through a large list tracks I finally encounter another track with potential called 'Candlelight Dinner'. The track is however a little bit fast paced, so I decide to go back to the first track 'Four A.M.' and go with that.

[Screenshot 20]

I click the download arrow under the track title and is told to log in or register in an orange text box appearing in the lower right corner. I attempted to create an account, but UPM review the applications before granting access to download any tracks and I therefore had to wait for approval. In the mean time, I had to consider my interaction with the website as over.

[When exploring the site I clicked the live chat icon in the header, however instead of opening a chat with an employee, I was shown a form I could fill out and send them my inquiry. I found this to be rather embarrassing as they prominently showed that their live chat was available 24/7 on the home page.](#)

Overall impression of Universal Production Music

The overall impression of UPM was very modern. The website looked very recently designed as it employs many modern design choices, such as gradients, flat colours, parallax scrolling, shadows and depth, choice of modern sans serif fonts (Avenir revealed by source code) used along with Universals more traditional font for brand recognition. [UPM's site displayed a flair for innovative feature, predominantly on their home page which succeeded in drawing me into the site to explore more.](#) The website was colourful, yet balanced. The colours were understated, but deliberately chosen and used consistently throughout the site. E.g. the light blue colour was always used for primary interaction, playing/pausing a track, the colour for all buttons, highlighting navigation when hovering over an element and much more. Further exploring the site revealed that Universal Production Music was previously named UPPM and was rebranded in 2017 - confirming my suspicions of a recent redesign/rebrand.

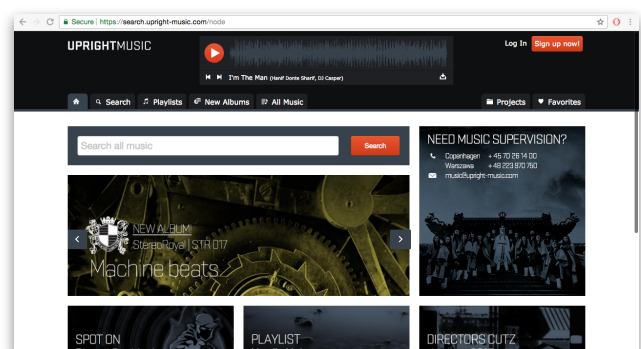
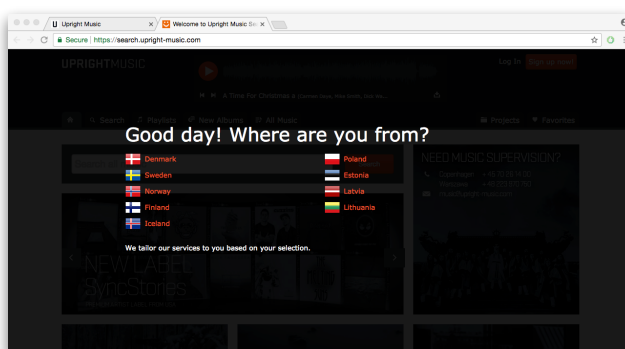
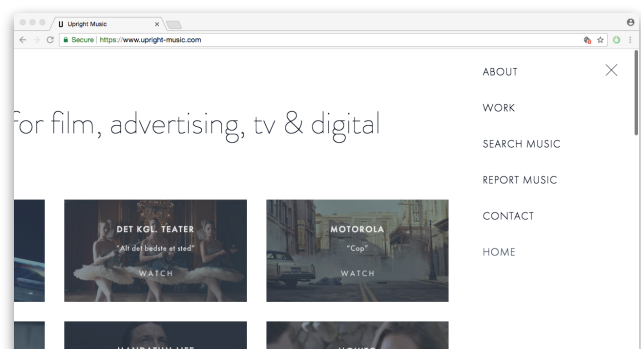
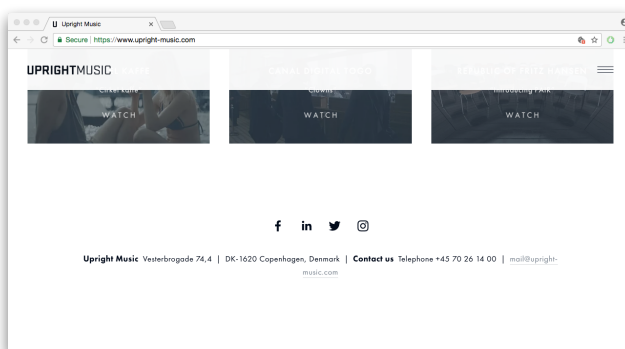
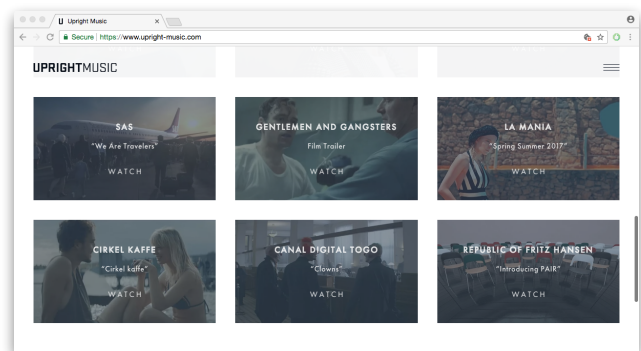
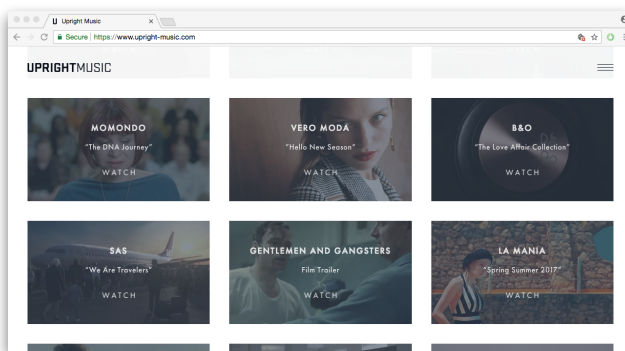
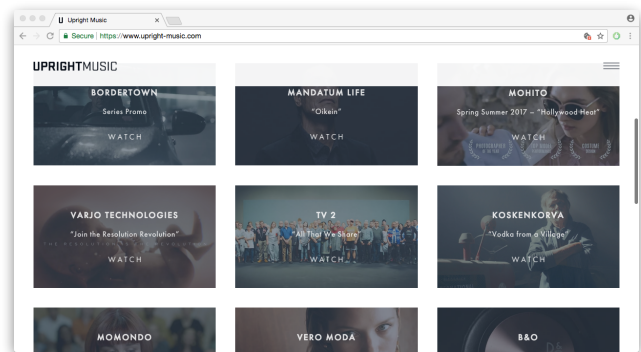
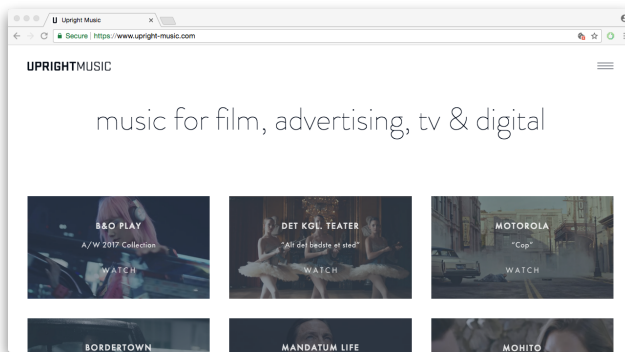
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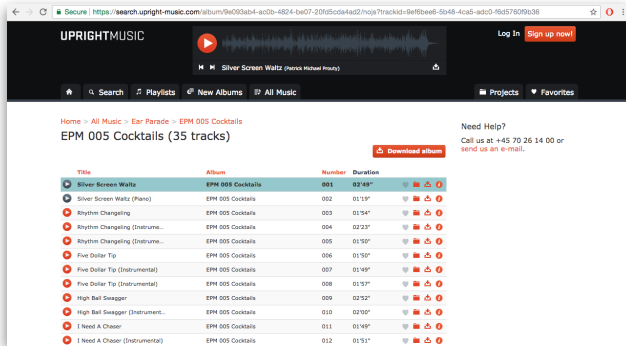
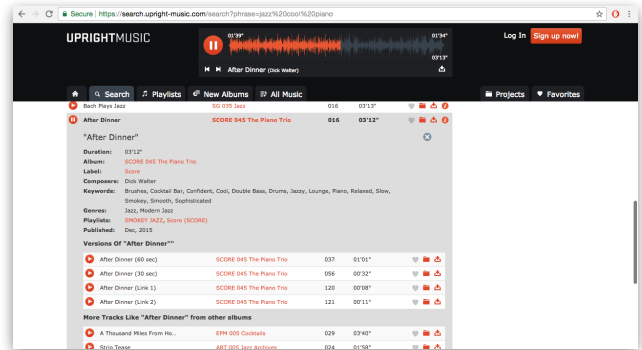
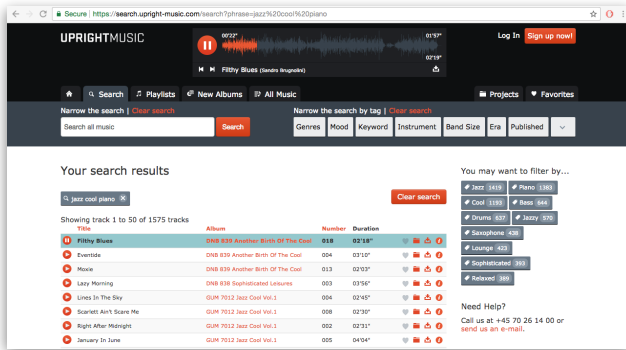
Appendix B: Screenshots

All screenshots are numerically ordered left to right.

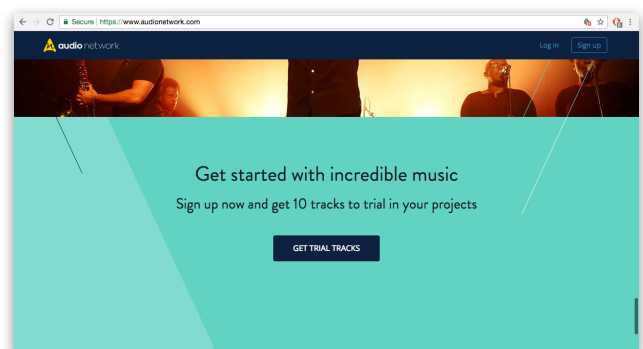
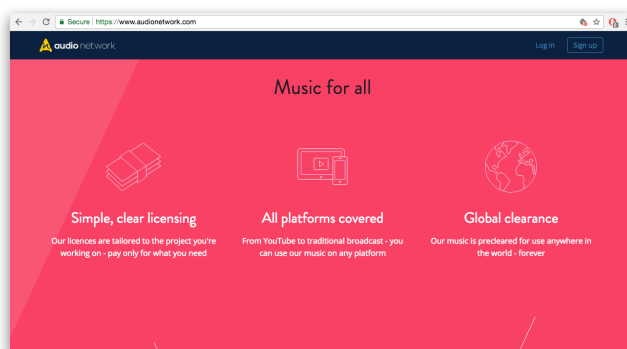
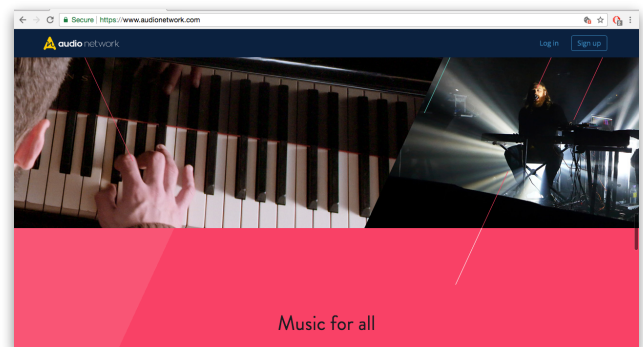
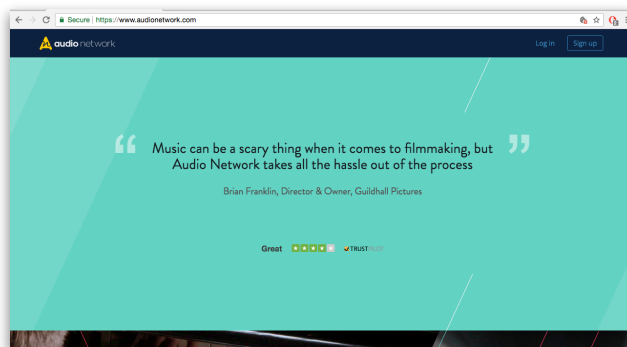
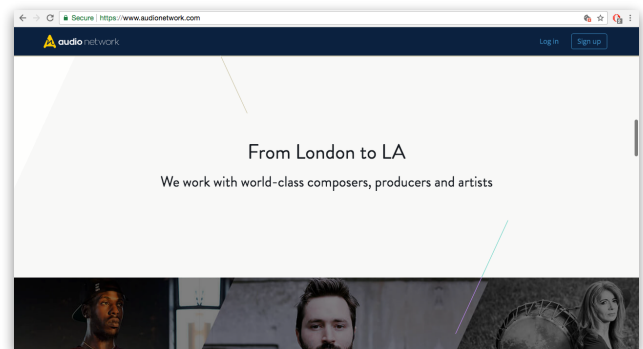
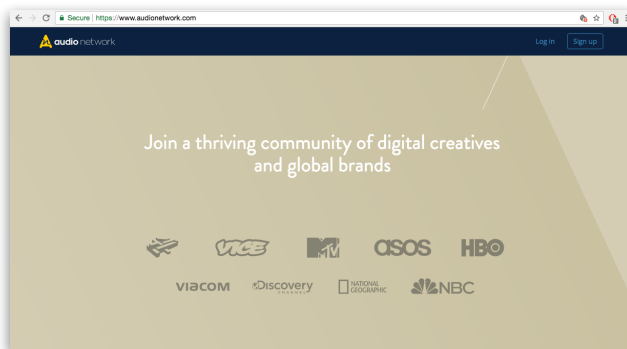
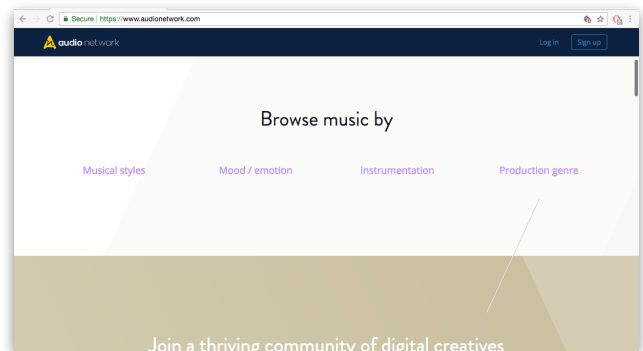
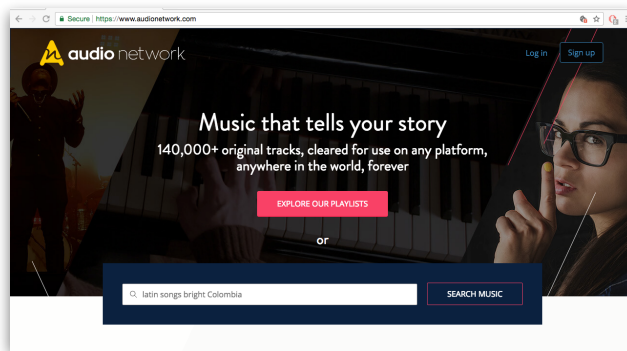
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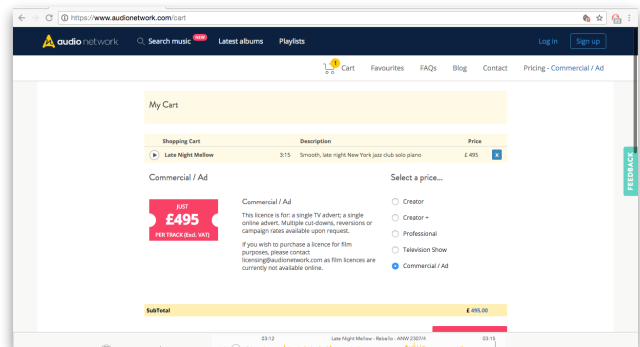
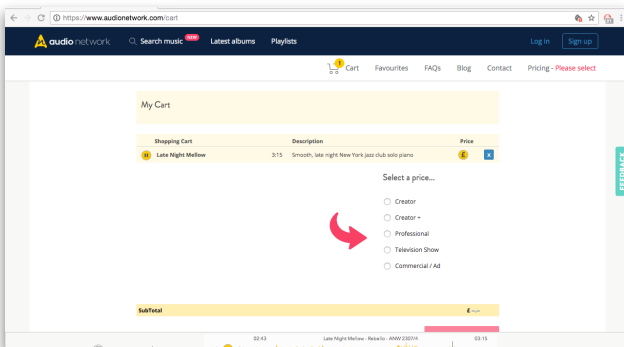
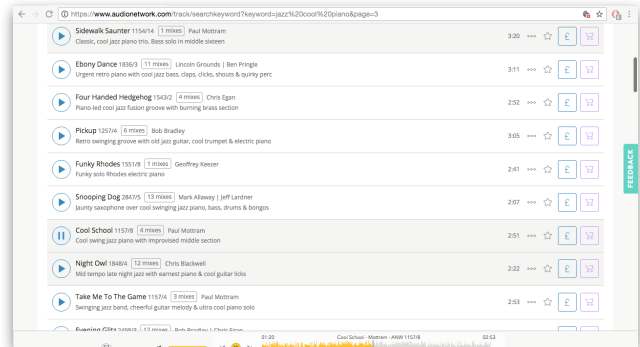
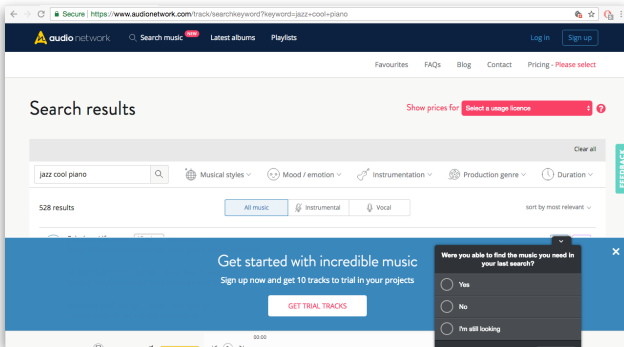
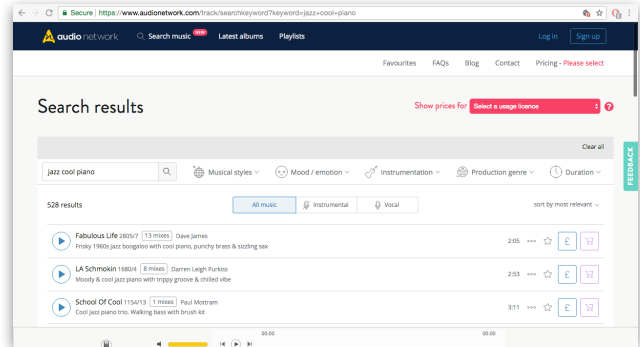
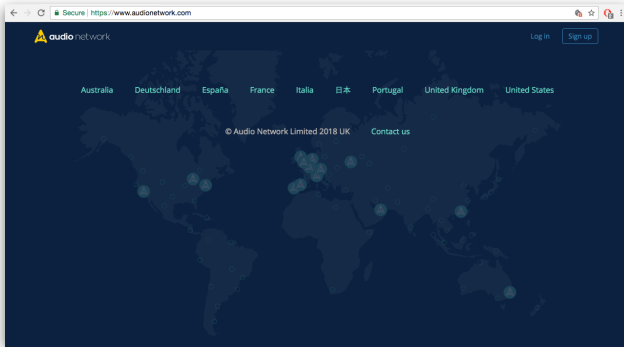
Session 1 - Upright Music



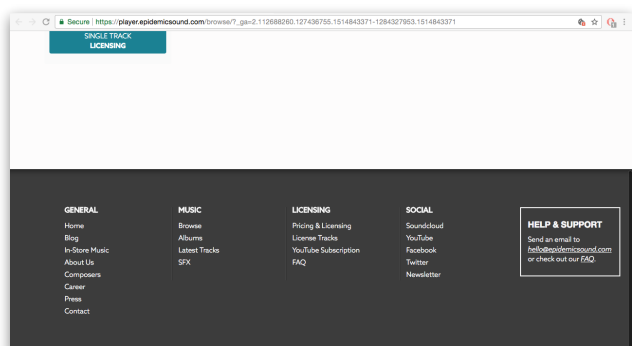
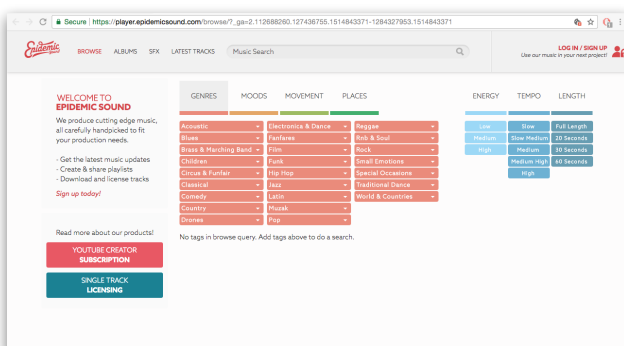
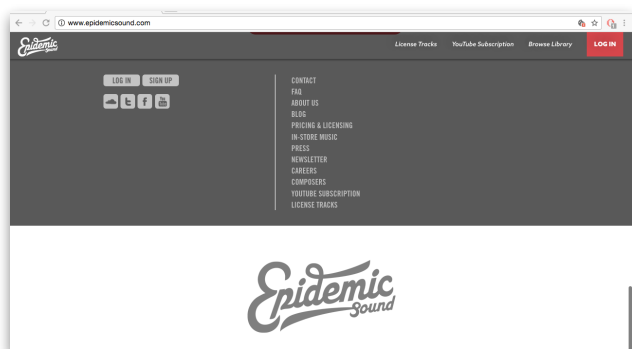
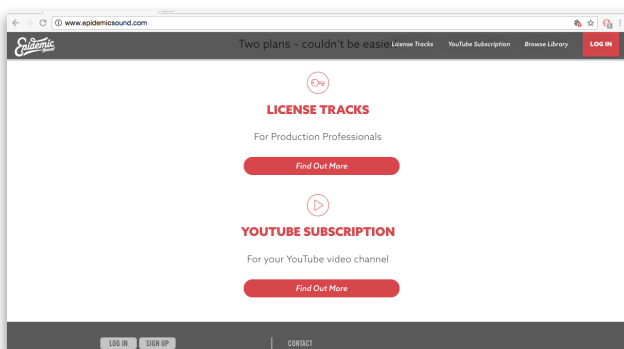
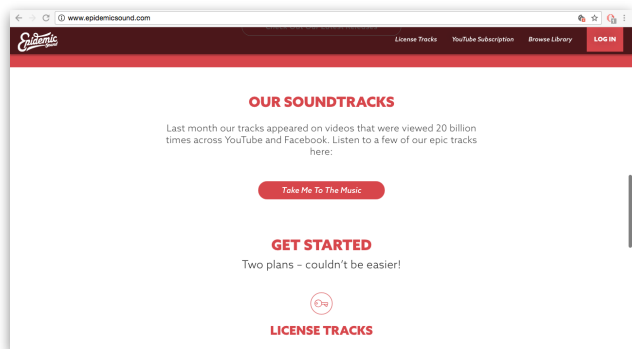
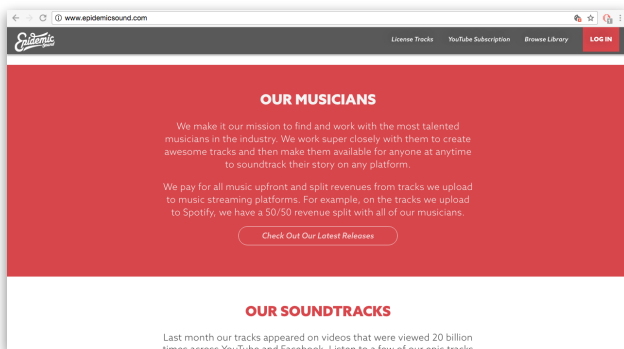
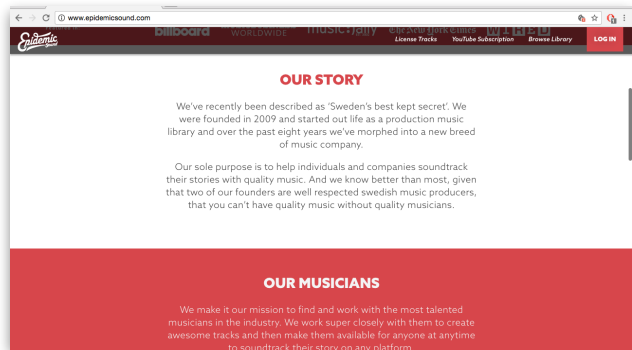
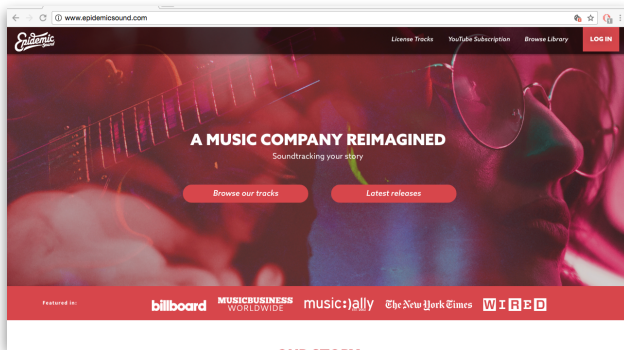


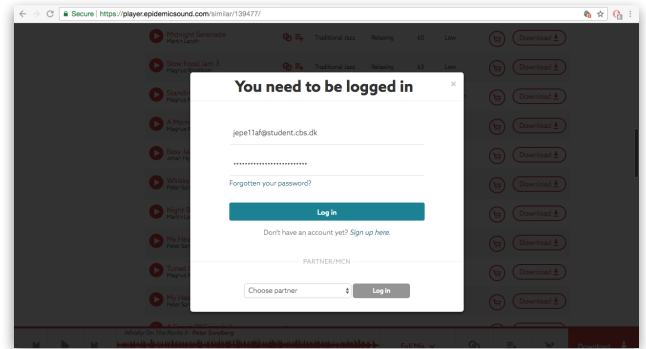
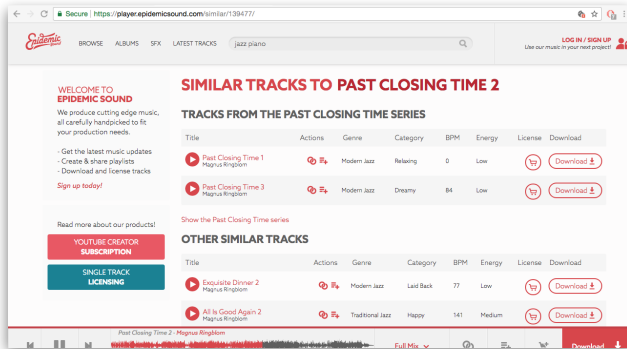
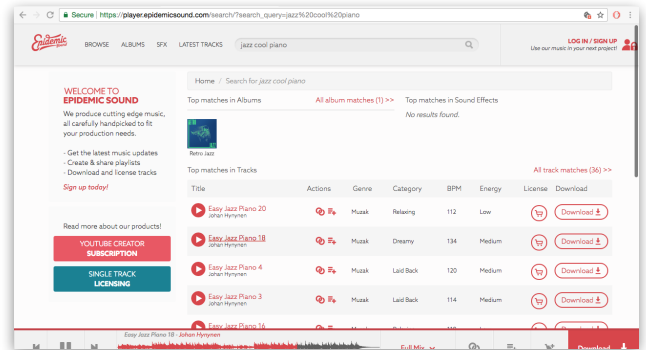
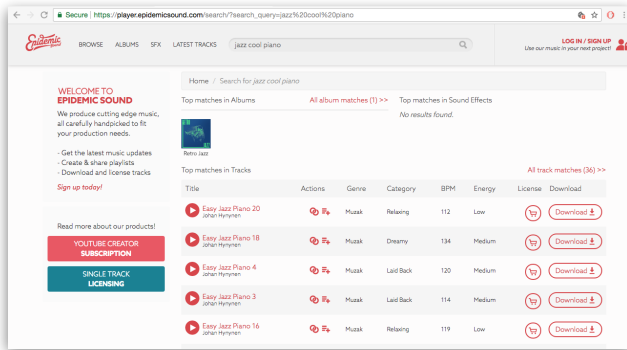
Session 2: Audio Network



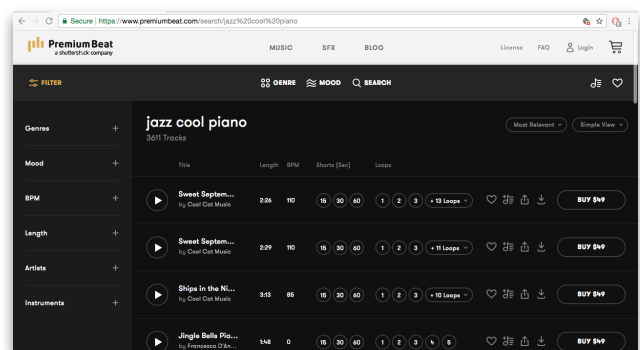
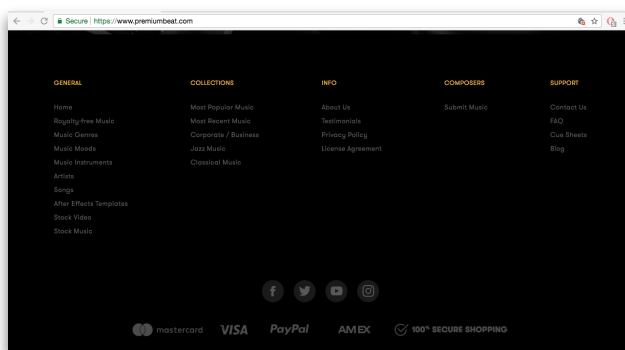
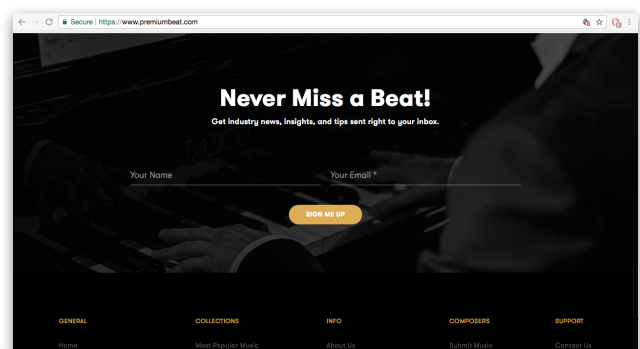
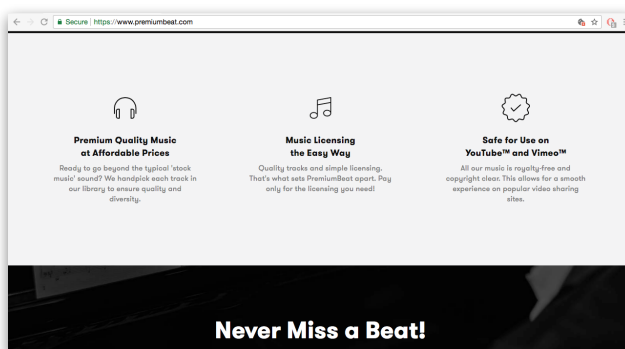
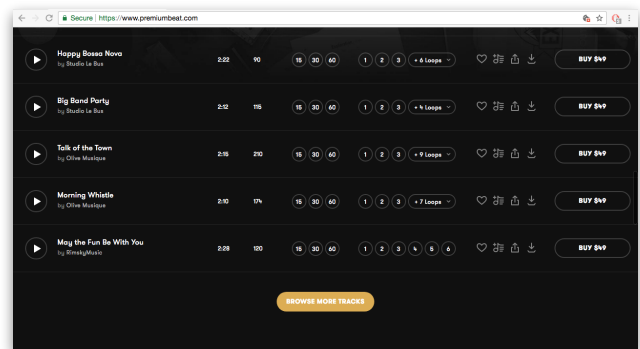
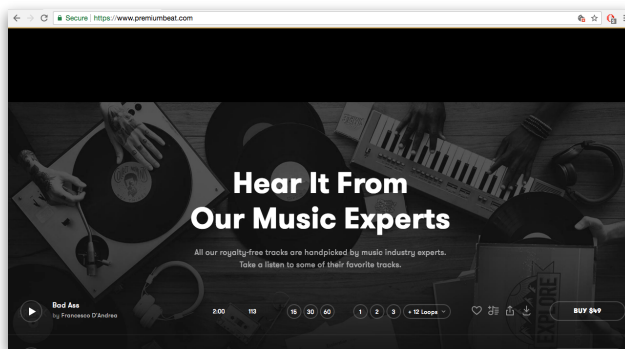
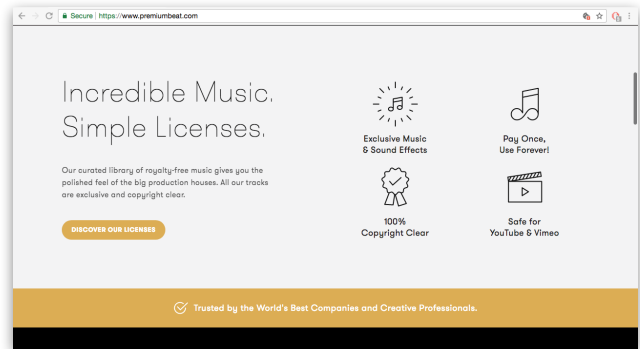
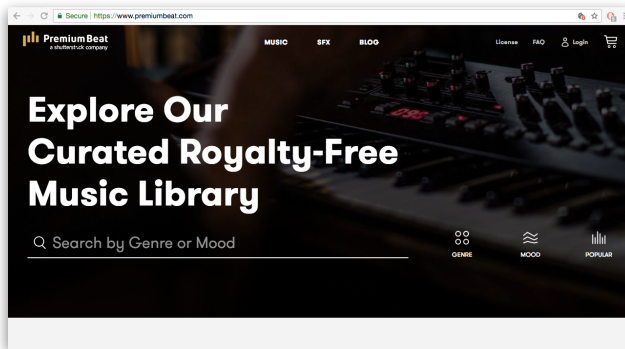


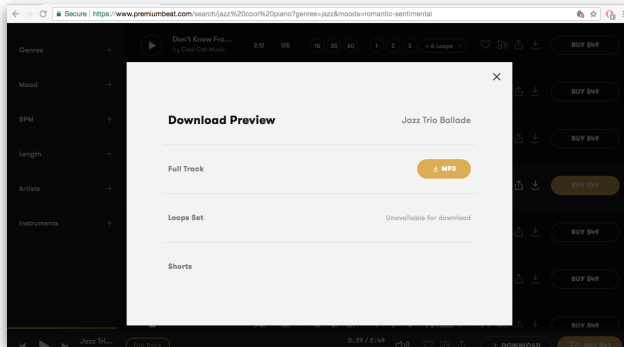
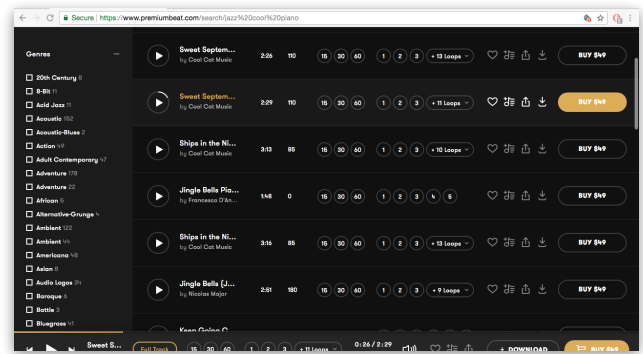
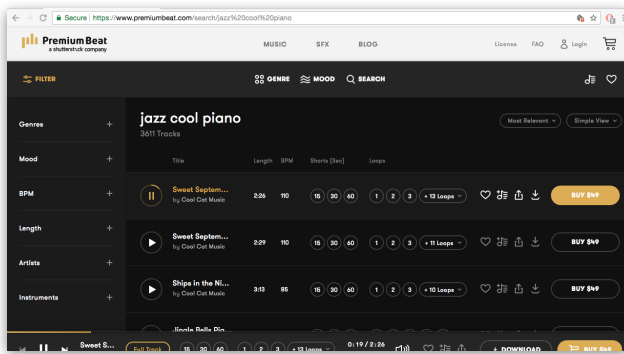
Session 3: Epidemic Sound



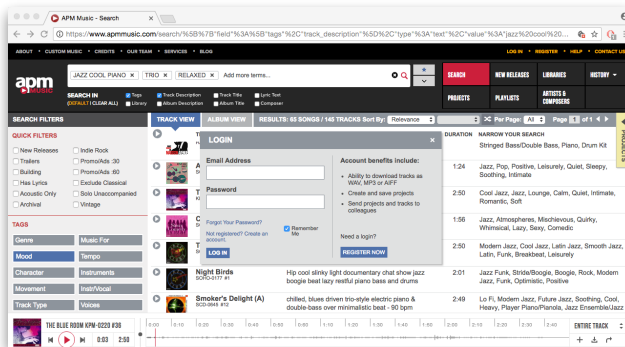
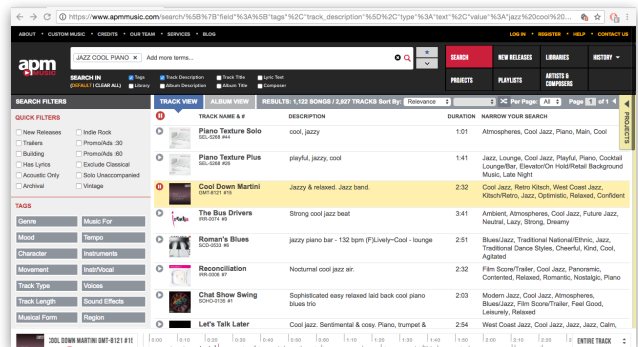
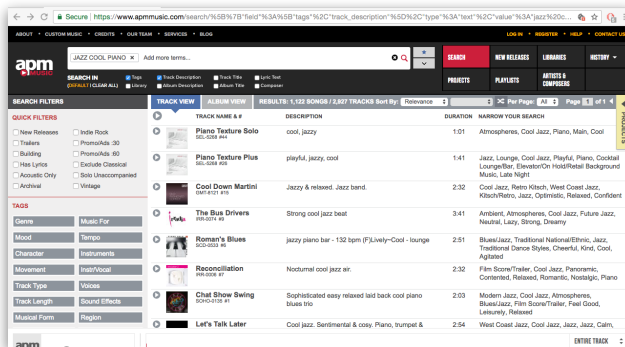
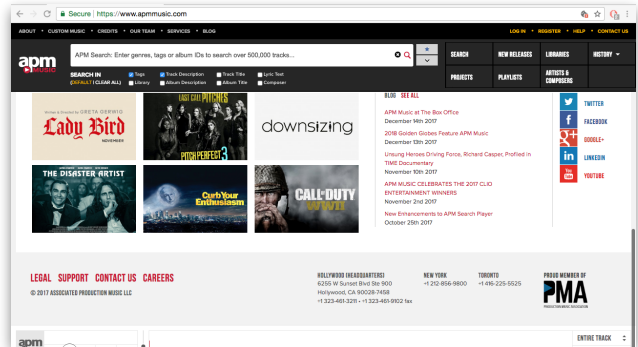
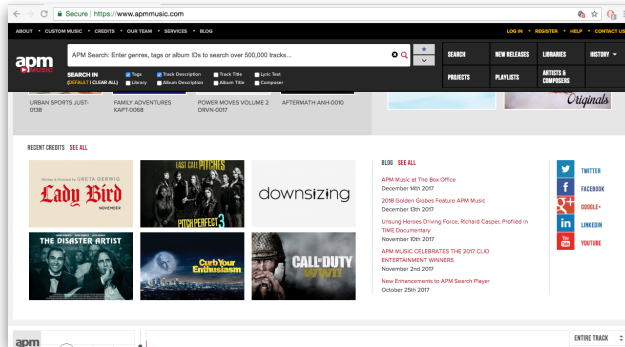
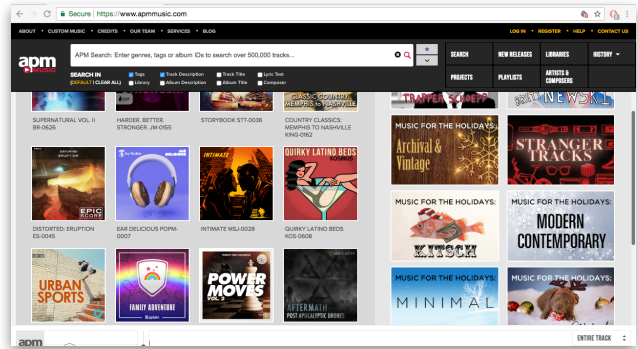
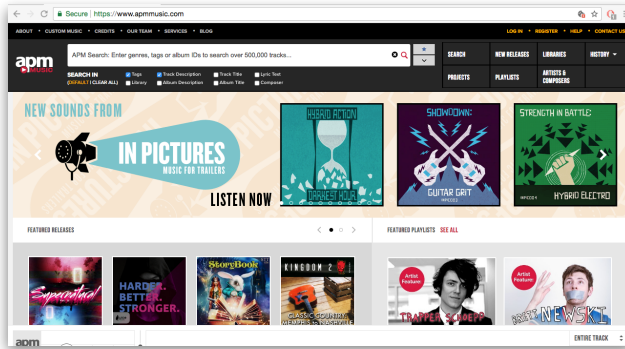


Session 4: Premium Beat

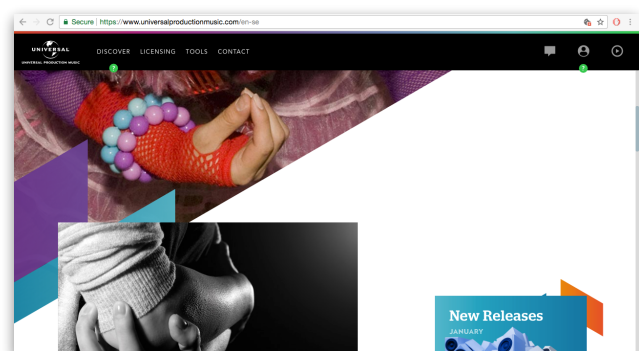
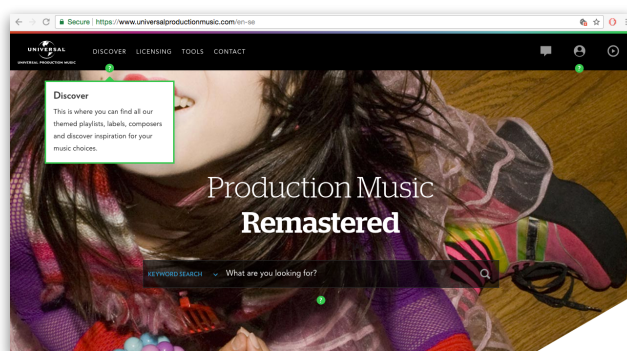
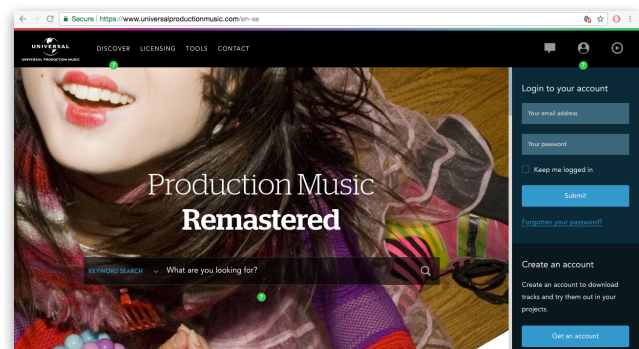
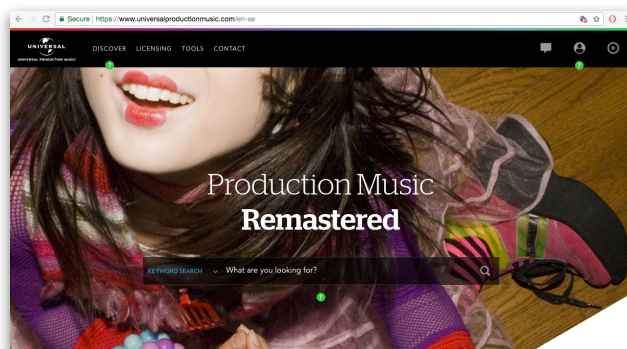
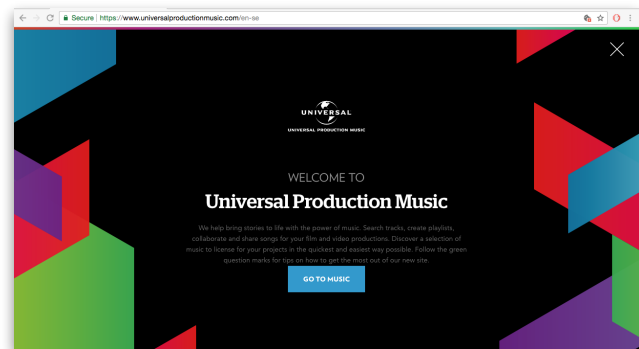
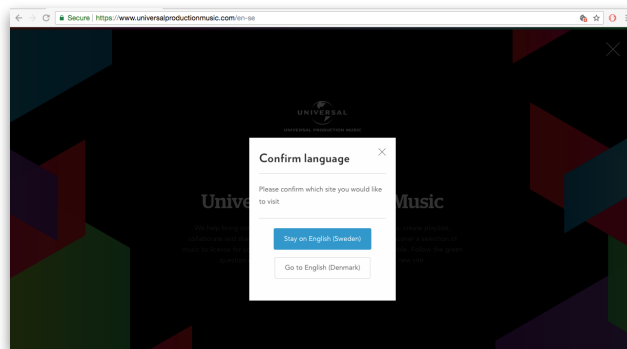
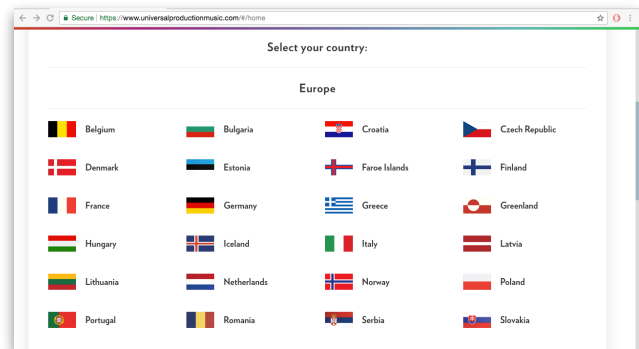
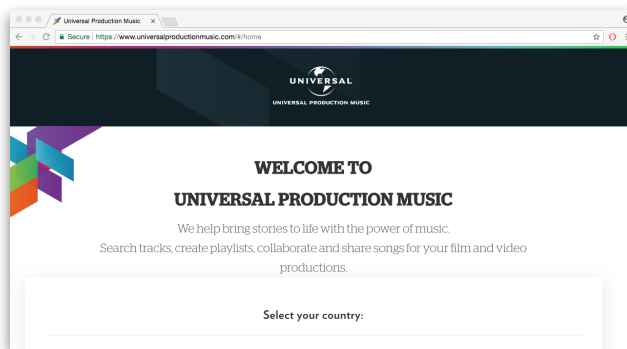


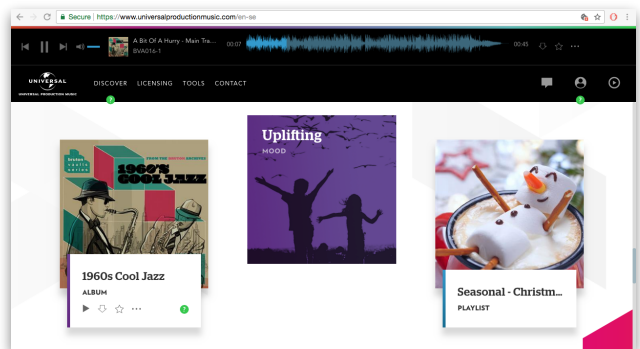
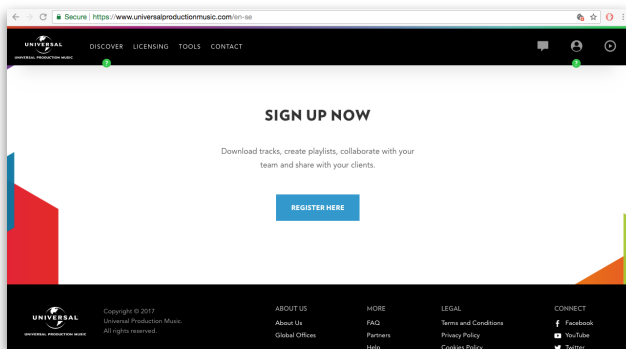
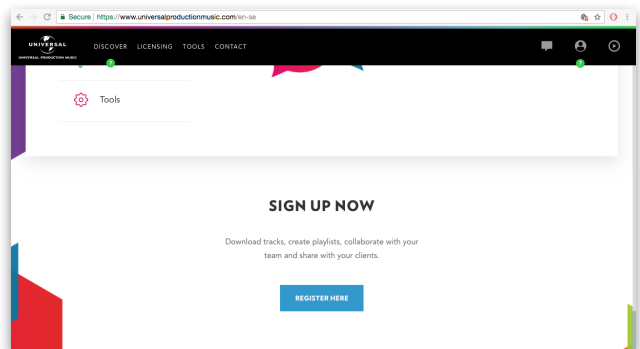
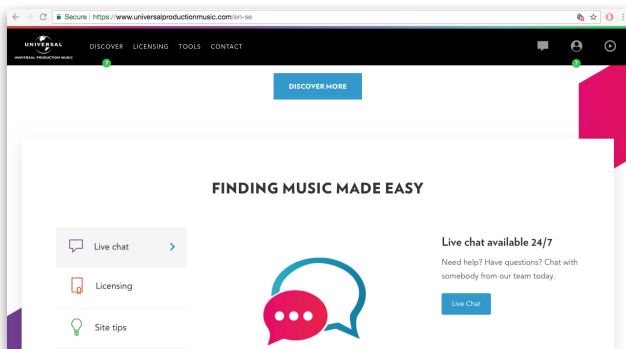
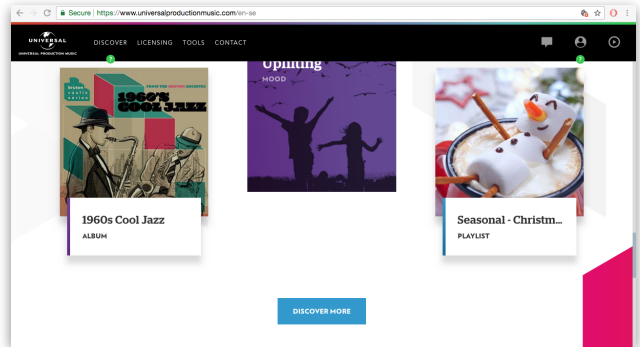
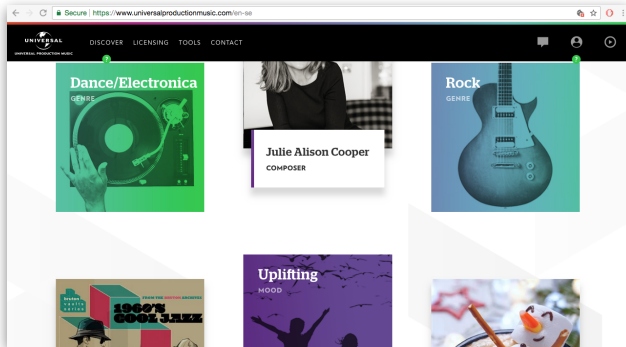
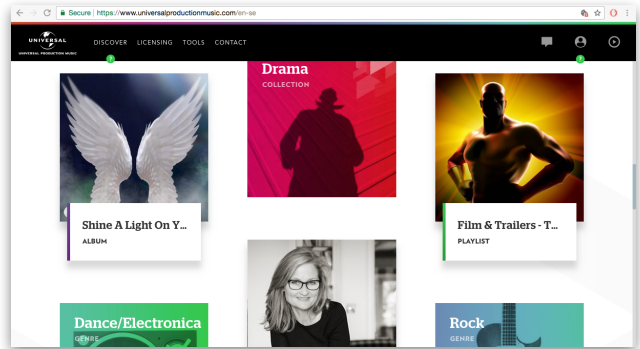
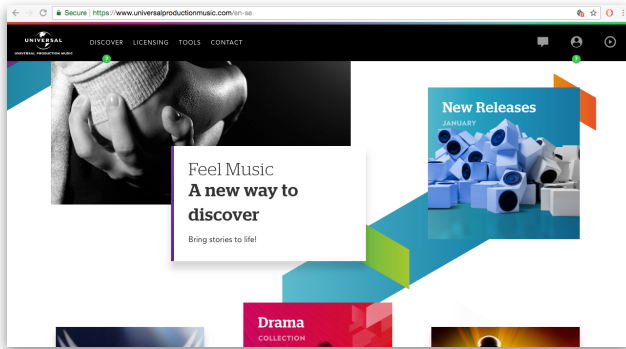


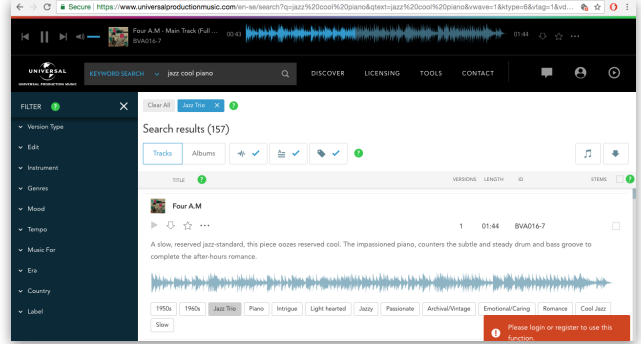
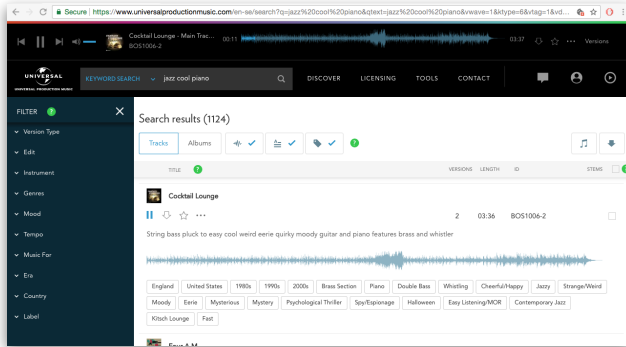
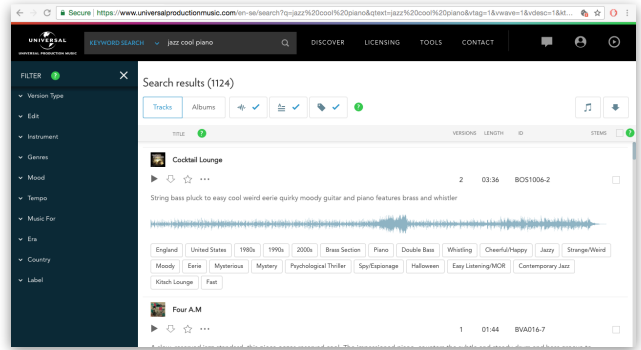
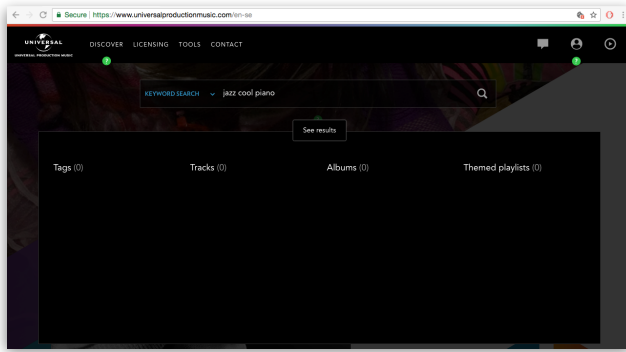
Session 5: APM Music



Session 6: Universal Production Music







Appendix

Appendix C: Data categories

CATEGORIES FOR VISUAL AESTHETICS - SESSION 1: UPRIGHT MUSIC

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
At first glance, the homepage looks very minimal, clean, and stylish.		The use of whitespace is pronounced, the white background is contrasted by a dark blue as the only colour.	The new tab shows a <i>significantly</i> different site that shares no traits with the homepage that send me here.
The corporate logo is equally minimal, indicating a deliberate style of minimalism in its design.		The colour scheme is equally minimal, essentially only using dark blue and white (if you do not count the logo, which for some reason is in black).	The inconsistency between the pages seems very unprofessional and could appear like the page isn't being managed.
			... all elements that elicit a primary action, such as search, play buttons, and sign up, now have a rich orange colour. The fonts have change from a sleek and minimal on the homepage, to a bulky and plain looking font.
			... the corporate logo, which incidentally is the only reoccurring and consistent design element ...
			The homepage and the search page looks like two completely different pages and could easily be confused to be two different companies ...
			The many changing design elements provides inconsistent aesthetics and a confusing experience when transitioning from the homepage to the search page.
			The transition from the home page to the search page was just awful. It looked like two completely different websites and the search page looked outdated. The major aesthetic changes was both out of place and it seemed very unprofessional.

CATEGORIES FOR USABILITY - SESSION 1: UPRIGHT MUSIC

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
... clicking the video thumbnails does not do elicit any action ... This is a bit unusual and makes it very difficult to view a video if I want to.	from an initial point of view there is only one option that is clear to the users, ... which is not what I am looking for.	The main navigation is most likely hidden behind the burger menu ...	Below the header is a prominent search bar.
There is no real indicator of what kind of music they have available or the service they provide, nor is there any options to search for music present. This is a bit annoying.	The search bar is located prominently and is easy to find, which is great when looking to search for a specific type of track.	On the homepage there is only a few options available; viewing a video, opening the burger menu, or going back to the site I came from	a brief sentence reading 'Showing track 1 to 50 of 1584', which gives a good overview of the amount of music that matched the search.
There is not much information displayed about the tracks beside the track title and album title. Given the lack of information about the tracks that are displayed, I don't really know where to start, so I just play the first track and hope for the best.	The lack of information or description of the tracks is a bit of a nuisance. It makes it difficult to assert whether the track might be useful or not, ...	I click the back button trying to go back, but nothing happens.	which means that if I want to filter my search I have to scroll back to the top to apply a filter.
	... it was too difficult to find the music and to get the search started.		An initial thought, the website does not look like it is an online production music library,

CATEGORIES FOR VISUAL AESTHETICS - SESSION 2: AUDIO NETWORK

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
The site appears vast, but has very little information on it ...	At first glance, the homepage of Audio Network looks modern and colourful.	... this logo has the distinct yellow 'A', which makes it stand out more.	The logo is deliberate and modern in its expression.
The page looks minimalistic and follows much of the same design style set by the homepage ...	At first glance it seemed modern but when scrolling down it just seems to employ a lot of modern design choices without any real idea or content behind it.	The colours used on the site is pink and blue in variations.	The photos appear to be stock photos, which makes the site look a bit generic.
		The text is in a new pale purple (almost neon like) colour on a white background adding to the sites colour scheme.	Audio Network has also implemented parallax scrolling on their site, however it is not done very well, which just ends up looking a bit awkward.
		The background here a dusty sand colour with some light geometric pattern, white text, and light grey logos.	It looks modern for the sake of looking modern.
		Even further down on a light teal background is a 'get started'-section encouraging the users to sign up.	A search music feature is a basic expectation for this kind of company and it seems strange to highlight that feature as new.
		The colours scheme is very diverse and uses many unnatural colours and some colours are only occurring once which makes their inclusion a bit strange.	Overall the site appeared somewhat modern.
		The colour palette is more subtle and the colours are used to symbolise navigation and interaction elements.	... the website seemed a bit cold and impersonal due to the colours and stock photos, this combined with the off-the-shelf approach which made the experience a little machine-like.

CATEGORIES FOR USABILITY - SESSION 2: AUDIO NETWORK

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
Below the tagline is a noticeable pink button with 'Explore our playlists' followed by a search field. The search field is showcasing a few keywords to inspire for a music search.	I decide to search for a track directly from the homepage	Scrolling a little down the page reveals wide section with 'Browse music by' followed by four options; musical styles, mood/emotion, instrumentation, and production genre.	The search results give a good overview of available navigation.
The initial blast of the home page is positive, clear tagline, primary navigation such as search and explore is discoverable and immediately available ...	The description of the track is very useful and I don't have to play every single track, but I have a visual way of figuring out which way might be the most useful to me.	Audio Network did a good job of promoting the search functionality, it was one of the first things I saw and it made it very easy to get to the music.	
The description of the track is very useful and I don't have to play every single track, but I have another way of figuring out which tracks might be the most useful to me. It is almost like digging for treasure and the track descriptions are clues as to where the treasure might be buried.	The short description of the tracks allow for a quick assessment of which tracks to listen to.		
	As opposed to Session 1, there is no download button available on this site, instead Audio Network employ an e-commerce inspired approach and uses add-to-cart and checkout features. ... This indicates that you have to be very certain of the track you pick, because you have to pay up front to download the track.		

CATEGORIES FOR VISUAL AESTHETICS - SESSION 3: EPIDEMIC SOUND

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
The homepage is consistent with its design choices, the colours and fonts look simple, modern, and well curated.	The design choices is well balanced, so the website looks thought through and stylish.	At first look the homepage is a bright encounter sporting a flat red colour ... with white text in the typeface called Source Sans Pro giving a good contrast between text and images.	The same flat red colour that has been present throughout the website is still present and it is used everywhere there is an action available.
The website employed a flat design which was clean, simple, and modern.		The site has a hero header with two music themed images (one is a guitar and the other is an audience member) edited together with a bright red glare.	The use of colours on the website is very good, it is simple but done in a very efficient way subtly letting the user knows where there is an opportunity to click.

CATEGORIES FOR USABILITY - SESSION 3: EPIDEMIC SOUND

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
	As there is a search bar available in the header I will use that as the first means of finding a track.	Below is two options for navigation towards music; 'Browse our tracks' and 'Latest releases' on two bright red buttons.	I learned that if I hover the mouse over the track title for a couple of seconds it displays a little box with the track title along with a few tags that describe the track. This would have been very helpful to know from the beginning and could have sped up my search.
	There is no description to visually filter through the tracks, but there is a couple of other indicators that helps a little bit.		the feature was too hidden and too unpractical to use efficiently, because the mouse-over required a few seconds to be displayed.

CATEGORIES FOR VISUAL AESTHETICS - SESSION 4: PREMIUM BEAT

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
First look of Premium Beat is clean, simple, and dark.	First look of Premium Beat is clean, simple, and dark. The site has a large black hero header with an image of a synthesiser (creating associations to modern electronic music).	The colour use is simple the gold colour from the corporate logo is used throughout the site along with a shaded white and black.	It jumps out that the full track title is not visible, suggesting that the page might be build for a bigger screen.
The website looks very modern and sleek with the dark theme (black and white) site with the gold colour suggesting that the site strives for a bit of elegance in their expression.	Further down the site shifts to black shaded image of a small keyboard, vinyls, headphones, turntables, and cassette tapes carefully laid out on a wooden desk (a stock photo most likely from the mother company).	The page is in the same style as the homepage and the background is a dark grey and black, with white text contrasting	

CATEGORIES FOR USABILITY - SESSION 4: PREMIUM BEAT

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
At first glance, the hero header and tagline attracts a lot of attention and guides the attention towards the search bar, making it very easy to get started.	Below the list of tracks is a gold 'browse more tracks'-button, that redirects to a search page.		There was no visual clues as to the type (content) of the track at all.
The gold is once again used for the 'sign me up'-button.	It is a bit redundant to have the same options offered so many times within a quite small place.		The search results leaves no visual way of assessing what type of tracks is being presented, no genre, keyword/tag, or description is provided, so all the tracks have to be played individually.
When playing a track a particular annoying feature becomes apparent; the tracks are watermarked. Every 13 second a soft male voice speaks "Premium Beat dot com" over the playing track. This is a very off-putting feature	Listening to the music on the site is no longer a fun or pleasuring part of finding a track, it is a necessity.		The only element I had to base my decision on was the track title and when a track is called 'Sweet September' it is way to ambiguous as to what it might sound like.
	The first 5-10 search results is still the same as before, so I decide to apply another filter - a mood filter.		
	Again some of the results are the initial results still displayed on the top, so I have to scroll down to find some new tracks.		
	The lack of overview presented on the search page was one of the most noticeable elements on the site, it complicated the music search considerably and forced me to listen to watermarked music.		

CATEGORIES FOR VISUAL AESTHETICS - SESSION 5: APM MUSIC

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
	APM's homepage is very dense and packed with colours, images, text, and general many things.	On the home page is many different fonts and colours because the homepage is showcasing and promoting different production music labels making it difficult to determine where APM ends and another brand begins.	The overall structure gives the impression that the company is a bit older than some of the other websites visited.
	At first it is nicely balanced, but with the rotating banner constantly switching between a different images gives a sense of unrest and stress.	The home page is colourful (and at times too colourful) and dynamic, my mind was barely at rest when I was browsing the homepage.	
	Below the fixed header is a large rotating banner taking up a good amount of website real estate switching between 11 different banners every few seconds.	When navigating the site I became more aware of the colours that belonged to APM, the home page was just very confusing.	

CATEGORIES FOR USABILITY - SESSION 5: APM MUSIC

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
Also noticeable on the home page is the music player, that is already fixed to the bottom of the view and is therefore always visible.	To the right of the logo is a big white search bar with text that reads 'APM Search: Enter genres, tags or album IDs to search over 500,000 tracks ...', you cannot really miss it.	In the top left is a very small black bar with navigation in light grey (which on most sites would have been found in the footer) containing 'about', 'custom music', 'credits', 'our team', 'services', and 'blog'.	It seems that APM has a wide selection of tracks and categories to choose from.
The search results and filters are displayed underneath the header in two main sections; a search filters section to the left and search results on the right.	There is a decent amount of navigation visible homepage and it is prominently placed.	... the page footer and four navigation links; legal, support, contact us, and careers, along with the address for the company's different locations in Hollywood, New York, and Toronto.	I later realised that the 'arrow down'-icon, I mistook for a download icon was a 'show more info'-icon. It turns out I had more available information the whole time, I just didn't know.
The description is helpful in the initial visual search of the results, but it quickly becomes clear that the description may vary in relevance.	Clicking the track (list entry) does nothing, even though the colours of the tracks switches when hovering over them, but in order to play the track I had to press a very small play icon.	I notice that the description is not always doing the track justice and can at times be lacking depth of what is actually going on in the tracks. But still, that is the main way I navigate through the search results for now as it allows me to go through tracks most efficiently.	
This seems a bit strange and inconsistent and makes me doubt its usefulness.	A similar tracks functions would have been helpful here.		
	The extra tag did not provide any useful results,		
	Listening through multiple tracks was not a smooth process. There was no autoplay or crossover to the next song in the list and pressing the very small play button was a bit tedious.		

CATEGORIES FOR VISUAL AESTHETICS - SESSION 6: UNIVERSAL PRODUCTION MUSIC

Simplicity <i>'Everything goes together on this site'</i>	Diversity <i>'The layout is pleasantly varied'</i>	Colourfulness <i>'The colour composition is attractive'</i>	Craftsmanship <i>'The layout appears professionally designed'</i>
It is understated and do not draw much attention.	... just below the header, is some geometric graphics made of several parallelograms coloured matching the thin bar in the top. This graphics shape is visually references in the header.	The colour scheme is selection of flat colours ...	The page looks very modern, like it has been updated or redesigned within the last couple of years.
The website was colourful, yet balanced.	Most notably are the hero header that populates the centre of the page.	This type of gradient colouring is a recent trend in web design which has been widely used through 2016 and 2017.	They want to make the user aware that they are re-thinking their business, while playing on the word 'remaster' with roots on music production.
	This type of animation makes the site seem fresh.	The background is a very light grey (close to a white).	When scrolling down the page the first thing that jumps out is the use of parallax scrolling ...
	The colours were understated, but deliberately chosen and used consistently throughout the site.	Below is a barely legible light grey text ...	The text box is slightly covering the image and looks to be hovering over the background with use of shadows, thus introducing a new element to the visual design - depth.
		It features a colourful image of a woman sitting on the floor, dressed in colourful clothing wearing a concubine-like makeup.	The overall impression of UPM was very modern.
		The use of colour is evident throughout the page and further down there is several images with links to various playlists referencing the overall colour scheme.	The website looked very recently designed as it employs many modern design choices, such as gradients, flat colours, parallax scrolling, shadows and depth, choice of modern sans serif fonts
		The icons are coloured in recurring colours displaying great use of a colour scheme.	

CATEGORIES FOR USABILITY - SESSION 6: UNIVERSAL PRODUCTION MUSIC

Ease Understanding, functions, structure, and content	Efficiency Speed and ease of finding content and completing task	Navigation Actions and time required to complete navigation	Transparency and control Awareness of progress and available options
The blue button is clearly highlighted and the site wants me to click this I get sent through the exact same process again ...	The primary navigation on the header is located in the left side next to the logo.	This is a good way of showing the width of repertoire and let the users visually experience what they can offer.
On top of the hero header is a title text and a search bar, essentially letting me search for music the minute I arrive at the page.	Hovering shortly over a text box of an album or a playlist starts a small animation where the title of the album slides slightly up and reveals a set of icons to the user.		
There is many, but also precise options for me to filter my results, which initially seems useful and promising.	This way of playing a track directly from the front page is a great way of engaging the users with the music early, while still letting them explore what the site has to offer.		
The descriptions are short and accurate, making it easy to decide which tracks to take into consideration.	The results provide a good overview with plenty information to visually process while listening to a track.		
UPM's site displayed a flair for innovative feature, predominantly on their home page which succeeded in drawing me into the site to explore more.	When exploring the site I clicked the live chat icon in the header, however instead of opening a chat with an employee, I was shown a form I could fill out and send them my inquiry. I found this to be rather embarrassing as they prominently showed that their live chat was available 24/7 on the home page.		