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Music as brand, with reference to the film music of John Towner Williams (with particular emphasis on Williams's 'Main Title' for Star Wars)

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Abstract

In contemporary consumer culture, branding is the term given to the creation of an image or text (visual, aural, textural or multi-sensory) intended to represent a commodity or product sold by a producer or service provider. This product's commercial viability depends largely on the way it is presented (via branding) to its target market.

The aim of this research report is to show that music used consciously as a branding medium, with special reference to film music (in its commodified form), has become a brand in itself, as opposed to merely a component of a multi-modal commercial product. Through analyses of a central film music theme from *Star Wars: Episode IV*, composed by John Williams, I aim to identify what I will term `audio-branding techniques' within the music, thereby showing how music has come to be regarded as a brand. The audio branding techniques will relate directly to the four levels of analysis that I propose to conduct. The nature of branding implies the presence of three entities in the cultural and commercial `transaction' that takes place: namely, the service provider (creator), the product (commodity) and the target market (consumer). I intend to argue that, as a result of powerful creative collaborations between John Williams and his various directors (not to mention his own unique talent), this composer's film music has increasingly become an audio brand which is almost commensurate with the brand status of the film itself. Williams's ability to create a symbiotic relationship between a music brand and that of a film has set him apart from most other contemporary art and commercial composers. As a result, it is not simply the actors, directors and producers associated with a movie that induce one to buy tickets to see it, but Williams's independent audio branding style as well. I thus aim to prove that his film music is an audio brand independent of, and yet also allied with, other brands.

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Keywords

Branding – Film Music – John Towner Williams – *Star Wars* – Semiotics – Meaning and Music – Audio Branding Techniques – Multi-modal Music Analyses – Music as Commodity – Music as Cultural Identity Anchor.