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WHEN THE INTERNET SEEMS TO BE DEAF. SOUND RESOURCES TO ENRICH ONLINE RADIO ADVERTISING

ABSTRACT

Radio, advertising and the Internet often forget that sound is a rich and versatile resource for achieving objectives such as to gain the consumer's immediate response, to build reputation and a brand image, to improve attention and recall, and to provide a functional and emotional user experience. To that end, adequate work in audio design should be performed to solve this deficiency. The success of several big brands in creating a solid audio brand demonstrates its relevance and beneficial consequences. This paper aims to analyze the sound strategy of three companies: McDonalds; Intel; and Coca-Cola. We study how sound resources are creatively applied to brand advertisement management of these companies. The analyzed variables in this study are the sound composition thought the use of music, sound effects and voice, the communicative function of the sound, and the strategic relationship between the brand, the product and the sound. The results of this study indicate that a suitable sound branding strategy can reinforce the advertising effectiveness of a brand.

KEYWORDS

Audio branding; sound branding; advertisement; radio

INTRODUCTION

Most advertisers still conceive of radio as a poor mass medium, which it is in part a good description because current radio is using only 50% of its expressiveness capacity (Rodero, 2008; Vázquez, 2001). While other media, like television, have completely renewed their language and have adapted to new audiences and ways of perception, radio and its advertising continues using obsolete formats. The same diagnosis can be applied to the Internet.

The web seems to be deaf as it is focused on image and has underestimated the possibilities of sound. While quality of videos and images is an important aspect of the production, sound is almost irrelevant in that process. This is why we can listen to online radio stations, podcasts or videos with a bad quality or a poor treatment of sound. How often do we hear a song or tune and say, “I remember this sound; is it from an advertisement?” However, how many times do we identify it with the right brand? The study conducted by Flyabit (Audio Brand Studio) and the Audio Branding Association revealed that 72% of the subjects interviewed recalled/remembered having heard the music in a commercial, but more than the half of them could not identify the brand correctly (although almost all the brands managed to communicate the pretended values). Along with this, the Audio Branding Association published a study made out in Spain, with a paradoxical conclusion: “In a country with great potential and musical tradition like ours, the audio is misused to build brand.” The argument is that advertisers want their client’s product to be “visually sensed” and, in most cases, they forget that although radio has no image, it provides a full colored landscape in the mind of the listener. The listener could perceive the ad as a movie in “the theater of his mind” – that means, to be imagined. Sound is a rich and versatile resource to achieve important objectives for advertising such as an immediate response of the consumer, to build reputation and a brand image, to improve attention and recall, and to provide a functional and emotional user’s experience (Spence, 2011). Sound resources can convey communicative values about a brand and reinforce listener’s aptitudes and emotions about that brand (Herrera, 2014). Consequently, it is important to create an audio brand strategy when designing a communication campaign.

Audio Branding (or Sound or Sonic Branding) is the discipline that studies the brand building from a sound approach. Audio Branding tries to build a solid brand and to provoke an excellent user experience through sound (Fulberg, 2003). This sound strategy, as a part of the whole multi-sensory strategy, can fulfill several objectives, such as to achieve an immediate response of the consumer, to reinforce the brand reputation, to improve recall of the products, or to get a functional and emotional client experience (Spence, 2008; Spence, Shankar & Blumenthal, 2010). Some studies have shown that the suitable use of sound in an advertising strategy can influence clients’ reactions (see Audio Branding Congress, 2012; Lindstrom, 2005).

To achieve these goals, audio branding has to create a sound design that integrates different techniques using voice, sound effects and music.

The combination of these sound features can convey communicative values, positively differentiate a product or service, and elicit listeners' feelings and emotions. Specifically, the sound strategy can provide an important value to the brand by associating several sounds with objects or actions, by identifying the brand through a certain sound (Zampini, & Spence, 2004, 2005) and by stimulating emotions using specific sound features, starting with the name of the brand (Klink, 2000).

A suitable audio branding strategy should include some audio/sound logos or jingles, the sound of the announced product or service (especially if it is characteristic of the product), sound effects and music with different communicative effects to reinforce attitudes and emotions, and a voice that match with the essence, characteristics and values of the brand and the products or services (Rodero, Larrea & Vázquez, 2013; Arichábala, 2014).

The big brands currently using a sound brand strategy are setting trends and creating significant competitive advantages. The goal of this study is to review how sound resources are creatively applied to brand advertisement management by analyzing the strategy of three different companies – McDonalds, Intel, and Coca-Cola.

METHOD

To fulfill this goal, this study has carried out an analysis of three brands recognized internationally and that have utilized to the use of the sound for the successfully identification of their brands. Therefore, the methodology has based on a qualitative analysis focused on three cases of study.

Before the analysis, the theoretical revision has allowed the definition of generic categories that define the audio branding, such as the sound effects of the logo, the creation of spaces, the sound effects, etc.

The cases of study have been selected using a survey carried out with 82 university students of Advertising and Public Relations. The participants were asked about the brands developing better sound branding. They then rated these brands with a five-point scale where five was the best value.

Participants were free to choose any brand. This criterion was established because the students are considered experts in the topic, since previously they performed sixty hours of training in sound and that they were also trained about the good use of the sound. Thus, the selection of cases is based on a criterion contrasted and considered valid to allow fulfilling this work's goals.

Once the students rated the brands, the total value obtained for each of the marks was estimated, which made possible determining which were the best valued brands in relation to the use of sound branding. These brands were selected for this study. The mark most valued brand was McDonald, second Intel, and third, Coca-Cola.

First, using the resources of each company's website, we studied its mission, vision and key concepts with which these brands are defined themselves. Next four sound features were analyzed: logo; musical form; effects; and voices.

- Sound structure: representation and identification of the different sound elements used by the brand:

- Logo: The sound symbol of the brand. It can be melodic, horizontal or concave and can be sung, spoken or instrumental. It must be identifiable and easy to remember.
- Musical form: It can be natural (vocals, instrument, etc.) or synthetic.
- Effects: Sound effects allow for the listener to perceive the auditory image, i.e. of the benchmark to which restores. It may be symbolic or iconic.
- Voice: The voice is sound and, as such, presents a number of features that takes on a special significance that is not present in other modes of communication. It can be a style, a particular stamp, being a famous, familiar or common voice.
- Environments: Creation of spaces and reception conditions: morning, evening, winters, holidays, etc.

- Communicative function: Sound can communicate different messages depending on its function:

- Ornamental: When the sound effect has a value purely incidental and, essentially, only it serves as reinforcement.
- Descriptive: When the sound effect presents itself as a support that helps to describe a place or an ambience.
- Expressive: When the sound effect has a proper communicative value, although it is not part of the reality that it is described.
- Narrative. Sound effects that alone evoke an action.

- Strategic function: The sound structure may have a communicative function in the framework of the corporate strategy of the company, brand or product, or be cyclical of the message type.

The analysis of these variables in each of these brands will allow an understanding of the audio strategy branding utilized by each of the brands that are a case of study in this work.

RESULTS

1) The case of McDonald's

The fast-food company strategically defines its brand and products according to the following key concepts:

1. Quality and food safety.
2. Customer satisfaction, trust and love.

The study of seven commercials released in McDonald's YouTube channel shows how its sound branding is characterized by different forms such as the sound logo and sound signature. The sound logo usually consists of a brief jingle plus a human voice singing the company's slogan "I'm lovin' it." The consistency of this sound trademark serves the purpose of making McDonald's brand identifiable no matter the wide range of products being advertised, or the countries and targets the company tries to reach. The use of a basic consistent sound logo leaves room for the rest of sound elements to adapt to every campaign (such as voices, music and sound effects) according to the singularities of each country, and exploring non-corporative sound resources if necessary.

Every campaign introduces new target-oriented sound elements. A festive music, for instance, is suitable for a piece featuring Roland McDonalds.

This music does not pursue a corporate strategy, but a product-based one: to promote spaces and products for children and children's celebrations. On many occasions, the music used in the spots has an expressive function meant to thrill. For instance, the image campaign focused on the personal life of the actor who plays the clown role on the ads, although in those cases it is not a corporate music, but the soundtrack of the spot without a strategic function per se. The same occurs for the music used in a spot about a recurrent love story set in a McDonald's restaurant, the 2012 campaign with the slogan "There is a McDonald's for everyone."

Secondly, there is no unique corporate voice of McDonald's. The brand adapts its style and timbre to the target of each country where they

release advertising campaigns. It can be a voice that speaks to children, or a singed voice adapted to the speech style of the target, not to mention characters speaking young jargons and regional accents. The expressive form of McDonald's is scarcely ever represented in the voice of its employees, who are characterized as young, hip and with a great human sensibility and an appreciation for each client. This can be seen on the image campaign "love" and the spot aired during 2015 Super Bowl.

2. Intel

Intel is the world's largest microchip manufacturer. Its slogan, based on the statement "sponsors of tomorrow," provides an idea of Intel investment in innovation and future. Its brand value focuses on the several concepts – innovation, future, technology, science, and mathematics along with its employee's unique value. After reviewing twelve of its recent communications, our analysis provided the following results.

Intel makes an austere-integrated use of the different sound elements to build its sound logo and achieve brand identification. The logo is the most identified element of Intel's branding strategy. It has been used for more than 40 years. It consists of a synthetic concave sound produced with different instrumentation, occasionally hummed by one or more people. Indeed, in recent years the logo sound has turned into a humming of a group of people who represent the company's employees, along with their image in an aerial shot; both contribute to giving a more human sense to this highly technological brand.

Intel's corporate voice is based on a fairly general speech style. It is a serious, well-timbered, low-pitched, warm male voice. These features are repeated in different languages such as German, Spanish or French.

In addition, the sound effects tend to be based on technological holograms that appear on the ad, along with moving objects or even written legends on the screen. Intel advertising represents working environments, apparently real working spaces of the company, with an exaggerated futuristic aesthetics. Those are blue and white glazed spaces and silent settings where the few voices and effects reverberate.

Finally, music is rarely used, as effects usually appeared isolated; i.e., they do not belong to a melody. In the very few occasions that music is used, it is based on a horizontal synthetic instrumental sound, associated to objects and digital and symbolic movements. Even in a spot about an everyday situation, the ambient music of a party expresses sophistication and peculiarity, or music that refers to a technological and futuristic setting.

The use of all these elements can be adapted to certain countries as the case of Japan in the *Ultrabook* campaign with the ad *Tiger Commercial*.

3. Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola bases its brand-building strategy on the value of happiness shared with family and friends. So it is represented not only as a common beverage but as an opportunity to share the emotion and feelings of happiness with family and friends.

Through a review of nine ads, the audio branding is analyzed. First, the music represents a central role in the brand-building strategy. It is a crucial element through which the brand establishes a close relationship with its consumers and enhances the values of familiarity and happiness that define its brand image. "Coca-Cola is widely acknowledged for the power of music to connect people from all over the world," claimed Joe Belliotti, Director of Global Entertainment Marketing, The Coca-Cola Company.

The use of the expressive function of music is meant to thrill. It also allows the brand to communicate other brand image's main concerns – the ideal of a world as a family of intercultural roots. Therefore, the most universal language is music as it creates a global community, a melting pot of cultures.

Further, prescriptive voices are normally adapted to the different regionally accents, also adapting the choice of music and linking it to the musical tradition of the country campaigns.

Regarding to sound effects, the brand uses the opening-a-bottle effect to symbolize the expectation for change. At the same time, it uses natural sound effects that characterize the product, such as, for instance, the sound of gas escaping as opening a can, and the combination of liquid and ice melting as the basis for the well-known slogan, "The spark of life," which flirts with the effect of opening the can and transporting the consumer to another world. This also is achieved with the sound of throwing away an empty can.

Finally, the logo sound is based in five tones in all its versions. It is built out with different instruments, vocals and effects, that when combined create a difficult to forget multi-sensory sound.

The main results of the analysis and the description of each category is represented in the following table:

		SOUND FORMS	COMMUNICATION FUNCTION	STRATEGIC FUNCTION
MCDONALDS	Logo	Melodic	Expressive & narrative	Yes
	Music	In the logo	Expressive	-
	Effect	-	-	-
	Voice	Young employees & regional accents	Descriptive	No
INTEL	Logo	Concave	Expressive & narrative	Yes
	Music	Synthetic	Descriptive	No
	Effect	Technological effects created by objects and spaces		
	Voice	Well-timbered, low-pitched, warm male voice; hummed logo.	Expressive & narrative	Yes
COCA-COLA	Logo	Melodic	Expressive & narrative	Yes
	Music	International and happy songs	Expressive & narrative	Yes
	Effect	Open bottle effect	Expressive	Yes
	Voice	Regional accents	Descriptive	No

Table 1

CONCLUSIONS

As shown in this paper, the sound branding strategy of the analyzed cases highlights the way in which a well-designed audio, integrated in different advertising messages, can enhance products and maintain the listener's memory of the brands.

The three brands analyzed in this study coincide in several respects, most notably the use of a logo, which is readily identifiable and easy to remember, and the use of the melodic and concave to display its communicative, narrative and expressive function in an efficient manner. That is to say, they use a simple effect to evoke an action that remains in the mind. The sound branding strategy, outlined in the above cases, shows how well-designed and integrated into different advertising messages and maintain power products auditory memory audio brands.

Music is used differently in each of the cases, reflecting their own style and giving a specific meaning to each campaign. For example, the McDonald's logo includes the slogan only to highlight the products and in some specific ones with the purpose to provoke emotion, as in children's promotions. Intel uses a synthetic piece with its characteristic instrumentation to

reaffirm the technological environment. Coca-Cola uses music as one of its main features in all its markets and with different genres, to reflect the basic message of happiness.

The prominent use of voices from carefully chosen people with everyday accents also occurs. And in the case of Coca-Cola and McDonald's, which are brands present in popular culture for several years now, the companies are seeking closeness with consumers. This strategy in constant renewal has led them to modify their relationship with consumers and therefore their advertising so as to segment its market to understand them as people in the broadest sense of the word to evoke positive experiences (Fernández Blanco & Alameda, 2009). This is why the food companies give voice to their employees and the beverage companies use accents and languages of each specific location.

Sound effects are very important in audio design. However, in the analyzed samples, these cannot be found in the McDonald's ads, with the exception of a tinkle in its logo. Intel includes them constantly since they work well to give more presence to technological products, and Coca-Cola has managed to integrate them in the most effective way, making the effect of opening the bottle and pouring the soda on the glass with ice as an identity mark of the brand for many years now.

Finally, it is clear that silence does not appear in any of the three, precisely because they are very short products, with sound present all the time, where it is difficult to integrate this element that works well in fiction and in some advertising that seeks to produce impact.

A good audio branding strategy greatly contributes to the objectives of two other major trends in advertising and marketing: multisensory marketing, which seeks to involve all the senses in the experience of a brand and where sound plays a key role; and, as attention time is modify due to a lot of stimuli in the media, brands can reinforce their logo with sound to gain more attention. "With a distinctive sound identity, customers internalize it even with their eyes closed" (Vives, 2014).

The concept of Lovemarks can be important for these brands because it promotes loyalty beyond rationality. Their ingredients are mystery, sensuality and intimacy, like any emotional relationship (Roberts, 2005). In this experience, the sound is also relevant; as can be seen during the last few years, McDonalds and Coca-Cola are among the most loved brands (Brandley; Maxian; Laubacher & Baker, 2007), occupying the places five and seven respectively in the ranking voted by consumers on the official website Lovemarks.com. In fact, Intel, Audi and Coca-Cola are "the companies which

implemented the best audio branding strategy worldwide” (ABA, 2015), according to the results of the Audio Branding Barometer 2013.

The Internet, with all its tools and millions of data, remains a deaf medium regarding their sound products, therefore entrepreneurs and creative people of new radio – especially the online multimedia platforms – ought to adopt and experiment with audio branding, as leading brands have been doing for years, to maintain its corporate image in good shape.

Online radio must turn to this element and consider that a campaign or strategy that takes into account the senses, especially hearing (that after seeing is the most important), become the experience more significant.

Although radio advertising is stuck in the same old way of announcing and the Internet is still a deaf medium, there are a few companies and brands outstanding for making an effective use of sound branding.

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