

# ABOUT SOUND MARK CONSIDERATIONS OF IDENTITY CONNOTATIONS

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## ESSAY 33/02

VISUAL LANGUAGE

GRAPHICS

CONNOTATIVE SIGN

The issue of visual identity is central to advertising projects and operationally starts from the design of an identifying brand even if with different aspects and ways of application, depending on the historical period and to the geographical and socio-cultural context. This diversification is well pointed out by the studies in place, that increasingly propose forms of flexible and mutant branding, according to logics very different from those applied in the past, derived from

the rigid and static application of the sign in every form of communication instrument –from typographic material, to packaging, to online contributions and so on.

Here is to emphasize a particular type of brand, that is the sound one, which belongs to the world of visual communication in motion and that, through the commercial spots, has entered everyday life, to check its possible interrelationship with two-dimensional visual graphical communication.

## INTRODUCTION

The work here presented is the continuation and deepening of what has already been discussed at IMG 2019, *From the sound to the sign. Graphic experiments for the visual transcription of the sound aesthetic experience* (Bistagnino & Falcidieno, 2020), which in the first part posed precisely some method questions about the possibility of establishing a parallel among verbal language, graphic language and sound language.

A few basic concepts are therefore considered as acquired (Bistagnino & Falcidieno, 2020), while we will now talk about a further parallelism, which sees a comparison between the primary design instrument of the identity visual communication—that is, the brand—and the counterpart made with sound.

Only a short, necessary premise, which wants to remind how the research in question has had multiple experiments over time and has been systematized and coordinated at the theoretical-methodological level in the volume *Sound emotion. Cinema & Advertising* (Castellano & Falcidieno, 2012).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the main concepts from which the here focused considerations on sound begin, is precisely the one that focuses on the qualities that a word or image, intended as signals and elements of the message—either written or represented—must have to be ‘winning’ that is, fully responsive to the purpose that they propose and which must also be re-proposed for sound communications. A signal—to be ‘winning’ and to respond completely to the proposed aim, taking into account what has been said in multiple locations—must be responsive to at least three parameters:

- lack of ambiguity;
- ease of storage;
- expressive simplicity.

And, besides these specifications, it is also necessary to refer to the main differentiation made in introducing reasoning on

sound as communication: communicating sound and communicating 'with' sound.

Communicating sound means being able to transmit it in a non-sound way, through images, words or tactile elements, which replace the sense of hearing with other senses; it is enough to think of the language of music on the scores or the onomatopoeias of comic narratives or the experimentation of music for the deaf to understand the meaning of a 'replacement' form to convey sound, be it coded and recognizable or entrusted to the sensitivity of the individual.

Another thing is to communicate 'with' sound, as in this case there is a question of using sound—noise or music—as an added value to the dynamic graphic project, as it often happens with the structuring of videos, commercials or other audiovisual expressions; thus, a value, also symbolic, is configured for sound manifestations, according on the solicitations that such forms of communication provoke in the observer.

For what is in the field of interest of this study—that is advertising—, one of the products, most affected by sound or noise as a memorable solicitation linked to what is visually shown and consequently with a brand function, is undoubtedly the 'commercial spot', which in a very short time must suggest and illustrate a concept, so as to move behaviors that can induce the appreciability of an outcome, no matter whether of commercial purchase, political support or ethical-social change.

It is also quite clear that the sound annotation can play one role rather than another within the visual narrative: it is essentially a matter of helping to emphasize and increase the emotional perception of the user in front of the story or to play a role that is quite similar to that of a sign connoting the identity of the promoter of the message itself, in this case not a visual, but an auditory one.

This second aspect proposes the possibility of designing a type of brand, which, although belonging to a sensory world not usual for graphics, proposes and uses the same compositional mechanisms.

The fundamental characteristics of a brand are the originality, the flexibility in the declination at different dimensional and color scales, the construction grid, which allows its reproducibility; a mark defines identity, a sound can connote it just as effectively, as some examples indicate, which can help in understanding the similarities between the visual graphic elaborate, connotative of identity, and the sound: an hymn connecting to a precise country or ritual music, such as wedding marches, funerals—or even the chimes of the bells—which follow precise rhythms connected to the liturgy of feasts, sorrows or more simply to hours.

From the above considerations it is useful to establish some similarities among static and dynamic graphical contexts, which according to the previously given theoretical premises found their reasons in being both languages and, therefore, real 'texts' translated into images and sounds: according to this logic, speech, music, noise are completely akin to writing, in its many and possible meanings, whether they are narration, simple quotations, onomatopoeia or single words.

The advertising communication products, where sound sources can be found, are advertisements, in which a story is set with texts and music, noises, and which—depending on the amplitude and duration—can be compared to elaborate texts ranging from a story to an epigram, by virtue of their time duration; the design effectiveness, therefore, depends on the appropriateness of the choices and on the compositional structure that uses the sound components—music or noise—and textual/visual.

## RESULTS, DISCUSSION

The sound contribution will thus fit into the chain of identity variations. The optimal areas of intervention to use sound or noise as a sign of brand identity are—as mentioned above—those related to advertising in the non-printed versions: movies, videos, websites, spots where the sound mark is repeated also in different variations, but coordinated, in a

way that is quite similar to what happens for the traditional graphics apparatus.

In fact, it is always necessary to adjust the communication project depending on the medium used, which is not only obtained with a dimensional change –spatial or temporal, depending on whether it is a graphic or a sound mark– but where, on the contrary, it is introduced a real compositional reformulation and relationships between the parts: in the visual identity of the sound, therefore, it ranges from complete songs to individual parts easily memorized –choruses for example– up to contractions consisting even in a single, fundamental and meaningful sound.

Brevity is always difficult to achieve in an exhaustive way and in this sense it is necessary to reason when talking about a few seconds spots and the sound mark combined with them; in such a limited time space, a story is told, brought to a conclusion with the exaltation of the message to be transmitted, in order to hit the user and make the purpose of communication easily recognizable.

**Fig. 1** Onomatopoeia, *Brancamenta* spot (“BRRR...BRANCAMENTA!”). Retrieved April 29, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENS4SCDTZTY>



**Fig. 2** Jingle, *Clementoni* spot ("CLEM CLEM"). Retrieved April 29, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5X6qNbvfDpE>



**Fig. 3** Composed sound for the company, *Plasmon* spot. Retrieved April 29, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDNCgFET9So>

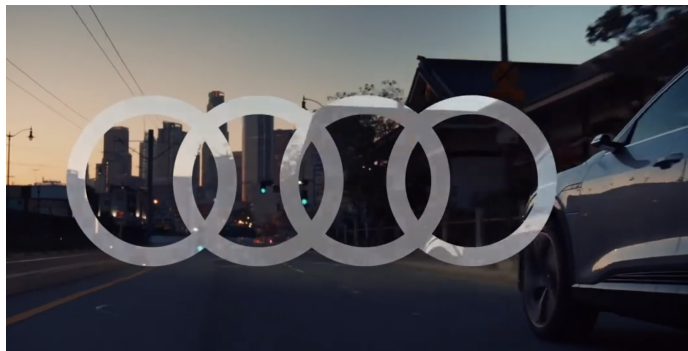


Equally necessary is to configure a correct design in reference to the specific functions that the sound must comply with, within the visual composition, just as it does for graphics; generally speaking, by summarizing and drawing conclusions derived mainly from radio communications as more related to the value of sound alone, five main roles can be identified (Julien, 2003):

- demarctive;
- implicit;
- decorative;
- affective;
- ethical.

Finally, it is also possible to propose a list of the main forms of sound brand applied to commercials taken from the volume *Sound emotion. Cinema & Advertising* (Castellano & Falcidieno, 2012, pp. 109-111):

**Fig. 4** Music, *Audi* spot. Retrieved April 29, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvEAKlsAAts>



**Fig. 5** Sound of objects,  
Magnum spot. Retrieved April 29,  
2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTmegHcGdm8>



#### - Onomatopoeias

“Esempio chiarissimo, in questo ambito, strettamente connesso al mondo della comunicazione linguistica e grafica, è rappresentato dalla pubblicità per il liquore Brancamenta: in questo caso, infatti, l'onomatopea è la parola Brrrr, parte iniziale del nome del prodotto, che viene letta e scritta per suggerire l'idea stessa del freddo. La bevanda, infatti, a base di menta, ha come caratteristica proprio quella di essere rinfrescante e questo è il messaggio da veicolare al pubblico” (p. 109).

#### - Music and Jingle

“A tale proposito, può essere elemento chiarificatore [...] separare la musica vera e propria dal jingle, che nel suo primo significato identifica il tintinnio, lo squillo, ma nel secondo significato, invece, rimanda a una rima senza significato; tormentone, dunque, [...] segno fortemente legato alla sfera dell'intuizione, del sentimento, dell'approccio percettivo. Esempi chiarificatori possono essere le prime campagne video della Barilla e quelle della Coca Cola, per l'identità collegata ad un brano musicale composto appositamente per l'azienda [...]; le campagne video per il limoncello Limoncè o per le zuppe surgelate That's Amore per l'utilizzo di brani musicali famosi [...]; gli spot di CheBanca e CRAI per la rivisitazione di brani famosi; le pubblicità della Bauli per il jingle” (p. 110).

#### - Sound of objects

“Tra i suoni di oggetti in senso stretto, si possono considerare gli strumenti musicali, le suppellettili e gli accessori da cucina, spazzolini da denti e articoli sportivi e così via, mentre per i rumori legati al prodotto il rimando principale è al cibo—gelati ricoperti come il Magnum della Algida, patatine e merendine—o alle bevande, fino al rumore mimato del gas dell'acqua frizzante Brio Blu” (p. 111).

Another element to be considered as for the critical reading of the sound mark is its position within the spot, which can be in the opening, along the narrative or in closing, always and in any case placed in such a way as to be made unique and recognizable; this means global compositional choices, which take into account all the components—textual, image, can be seen from the history of the manifesto and advertising in general, as well as from the history of visual art.



**Fig. 6** Sound of objects, *Mentadent* spot. Retrieved April 29, 2020 from <http://polisemantica.blogspot.com/2013/01/mentadent-il-sorriso-di-biancaneve.html>



**Fig. 7** Sound of objects, *Pringles* spot. Retrieved April 29, 2020 from <https://vimeo.com/258093437>



## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, to effectively understand the relationship among sound brands and visual brands, a reference may be the companies that start from the formulation of an extended brand, linked to the name of the promoter, and then move on to a synthesis and to the extremization of an essential and chromatic reduction, or directly intervene by linking the product to a synthetic sign that represents and identifies it; often even for the connotative sound elements of identity it is no longer necessary to carry out the narration to have confirmation of the promoter: the sound element is sufficient.

These considerations, therefore, want to emphasize the belonging of the sound element as a further possible component of graphic communication, in particular of the visual identity; it is a valid alternative or addition to the traditional brand in terms of dynamic achievements, especially advertising, as it is the case of the commercial spot, a product that—as seen also by the exemplifications—particularly lends itself to host such an instrument.

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