

SOUND AS AN AESTHETIC ELEMENT AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN MARKETING

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Abstract: Sounds are everywhere, but we are so used to them, that we stop noticing that we actually hear something. This doesn't mean that they are meaningless, on the contrary sounds have symbolism that can be used as a competitive advantage. The purpose of this paper is to offer to the reader a background image on sounds as an aesthetic element. The article describes what sounds are, sounds' categories, their meanings (sounds' symbolism) and how we may use them as a marketing tool. The findings are based on a qualitative research and show the things you should know before incorporate sounds into your strategy and how to use them as an effective marketing instrument (atmospherics, brand and identity, product, ads). Making these steps can lead to a strong element of differentiation (well-known sounds that you can never forget – e.g. MGM's lion). Of course, it is important to align it to the consumers' expectations. This paper contributes to unifying one's knowledge in aesthetics and also, it is drawn on a wide range of sources.

Keywords: consumer, sounds, sound symbolism, aesthetics, marketing tool.

Introduction

Walking on the street and hearing the noise made by cars, watching a musical act or maybe relaxing in a quiet place and listening only to the birds' voice, no matter which of these situations you recognize, all are different types of sounds.

Nowadays, aesthetics is the element that makes the difference between products because the technical functions are easily copied. When buying a phone, we all analyze what it can do, but we don't even think for a second how it would be if it wouldn't sound when somebody is calling or more, the quality of the sound. When entering the shop in which the phone is, we find it normal to hear an environmental music, likewise we recognize the jingle of a brand but as a consumer we are not always aware of its effect. Because all these influence consumer's decision at a conscious or subliminal level, companies should study sounds and used them in their marketing strategy in order to achieve awareness and a bigger number of clients.

In this article, firstly, we analyze what sounds are, their characteristics and their structure, in order to have a better understanding of them and being able to make connections. Then, we present their meanings, so the firms can use them properly when deciding their identity, the values they want to share and what mood to be created. Last, but not least, we

describe the main marketing applications of sounds, thereby, companies can have a big picture of how to develop a complex and successful strategy based on sounds.

Method

The main purpose of this research is to make an extended review on the literature review regarding the role and the importance of sounds in marketing. The information identified in the existing literature are analyzed in order to offer a clear image regarding the main functions that sounds can have as a marketing tool. So, this study is an exploratory one and will enrich one's knowledge on sounds as an aesthetic elements, presenting a useful classification regarding their applications in marketing to both, theorists and practitioners.

Body

What are sounds and their elements

What are sounds?! Known also as auditory sensations, they are generated by sound waves and are the result of periodical air rarefaction and condensation, made by the physical corps' vibration (Schmitt and Simonson, 2002; Raichel, 2006). According to Schmitt and Simonson (2002) sounds can be divided in 3 categories: verbal, musical and noises. The verbal sounds implies the recognition of sounds made by speaking a language. The musical ones are actually the musical notes and noises refer to discordant sounds. Özcan and van Egmond (2012) group the sounds in 2 categories: consequential sounds and intentional sounds. The first includes those sounds made by a product as a result of its function (e.g. the sound made by the hairdryer when it's working or the one produced by a car's engine). The second category represents the sound that are not mandatory for a product, but the producer add them in order to create an additional value (e.g. parking sensors for cars). Comparing these two approaches we have noticed that even if the categories presented by Schmitt and Simonson and Özcan and van Egmond are very different, at a closer look, we realized that due to the technological progress, consequential sounds can include music and noises, whereas intentional ones are music and may be verbal (e.g. when the food in the microwave is ready, a sound is made; in a few years, probably there will be devices that will actually say "It's ready!"). So, the second approach is more complex and it includes the first one.

Beside the categories in which are divided, sounds have also different features through which can be characterized and interpreted. These are: frequency, amplitude and form, known also as intensity, duration and tonality (Schmitt and Simonson, 2002). Bruner (1990) said that sounds are illustrated through tone (an ascending or descending scale), rhythm (time) and texture (volume and timbre). Even if, the expression is different, the words have the same signification, no matter what approach we choose, the meaning is identic.

Sounds' symbolism

Why it is important to know all these?! Because the sound made by a product can have a functional role (Özcan and van Egmond, 2012); for example the more powerful the engine of a car is, the angrier it will sound (of course, nowadays specialist want to develop silent cars, but the persons that are passionate about cars, will always love to hear sound made by the engine of a Ferrari – collection cars). So, depending on the categories from which the product is, the sound made is associate with different noises. More, the individual makes also mental connotations which lead to a lexical representation; for example when a person hear the syntax “sport” will reflect on the object, whereas when it will hear “sport car” automatically will think at its functional characteristic. This happens not only due to the sound, but also due to the reason that causes the sound (Vanderveer, 1979; Gaver, 1993; Fabiani et al., 1996; Marcell et al, 2000). That’s why it is important to study sounds’ symbolism, which is defined as the mental association made by individual between sounds and different attributes (Spence, 2012). Sounds are linked to products’ positioning (Klink, 2001; Lowrey and Shrum, 2007), decision regarding the price (Coulter and Coulter, 2010), logo’s design (Klink; 2003), preference for a particular product (Klink, 2001) and the creation of the brand (Abel și Glinert, 2008; Begley, 2002; Belli, 2001; Collins, 1977; Douglas, 1981; Lowrey and Shrum, 2007; McNeil, 1982; Vanden Bergh et al., 1984; all cited in Spence, 2012). Sounds symbolism can be analyzed from 2 points of view: the sounds of letters and the features of sounds (tonality, intensity, etc. – presented above).

Sounds’ symbolism – the sound of letters

The most well-known and analyzed letters by the researchers are: k, i and e. the first example that turn “k” into a big success was the brand “Kraft”, followed by Kellog’s, Kodak, KFC, K-Mart, IKEA and others (Schloss, 1981; Vanden Bergh, 1990; Vanden Bergh et al., 1987; Abel and Glinert, 2008). “I” is considered to be a veritable key point for the stores that commercialize cheap products or little ones (small size) (Edgar Sapir, 1929; Hinton et al., 1994; Newman, 1933; Davis, 1961; Diffloth, 1994 and Ultan, 1978 all cited in Spencer, 2012). Successful examples are: Aldi, Lidl, Londis, Iceland, Mini Cooper (Spence, 2012). Letter “e” is also correlated to something small, thinner or softer (French 1977; Klink; 2000). Of course, there are other examples that don’t respect these rules and are successful. For example, respondents, when were put to choose between Frisch and Frosch ice-cream, most of them chose Frosch because it sound more creamy due to the letter “o” (Yorkston and Menon, 2004). Another aspect noticed in the literature is the difference that appears between particular consonants (stop consonants or fricative), vowels (front or back vowels), their position in word and the pronunciation generated (Ladefoged, 1993; MacKay, 1978 Yorkston și Menon, 2004; Klink, 2000; Walker și Smith, 1985). Unfortunately, there exist also unsuccessful examples such as, Cadbury’s Koko chocolate (Spencer, 2012).

As it can be seen the sound of letters is an important aspect to be taken into account because it can help you in achieving success. The situations in which the company should pay attention to this are when creating the name - the brand, the slogans and the jingles. They have to make this if they want to transmit the right message.

Sounds' symbolism – the features of sounds

The second category that includes the features of sounds analyzes the meanings of tones, rhythm and texture. Because it creates different moods (Table no. 2) it can determine different behavior as in the table below:

Table no. 1 – The influence of sounds' symbolism on consumer behavior

Influence	Authors
Buying intention	Alpert and Alpert (1986, 1988);
Perceived activity and appeal	Holbrook and Anand (1988);
Choice behavior	Gorn (1982), Kellaris and Cox (1987);
Shopping behavior	Milliman (1982); Smith and Curnow (1966)
In-restaurants behavior	Milliman (1986);
Cognitive and affective response	Stout and Leckenby (1988);
Expressing emotions	Clynes and Nettheim (1982), Gundlach (1935); Hevner (1953 a, 1936, 1937); Kinnear (1959), Van Stone (1960); Rigg (1940a,b); Scherer and Oshinsky (1977); Swanwich (1973); Watson (1942); Wedin (1972); Vinovich (1975);
Perceived and preferred complexity	Heyduk (1975);
Pleasure	Smith and Cuddy (1986);

Source: information and authors are cited from Bruner, 1990, pp. 96 – 97

Analyzing table no. 1, we can notice that sounds' symbolism has an influence upon several aspects regarding consumer when going shopping. More, these auditory sensations may accompany the individual during the entire process of buying (starting from the moment that a person is just seeking a product till he actually buy it). For example: when someone is searching for a new car; the first moment in which he meets sounds is when he enters the showroom and hears environmental music – this music can make him stay or can determine him to leave, so he will shape his behavior according to the noises he hears. Considering that he stayed, further, he can be attracted by the sound made by the engine, by the audio system or maybe by the closing doors. All these will lead to receiving a cognitive or affective response from the consumer regarding his experience that can transform in forming the buying intention. The problem that can appear in situations like this one refers to the fact that each individual may prefer another type of music or a different tonality and intensity. Given this, researchers concluded that there exist different variations of sounds that induce different moods. In the table below you can find what tone determines a particular state of mind.

Table no. 2 – mood determine through music

Mood	Musical element					
	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Tempo</i>	<i>Pitch</i>	<i>Rhythm</i>	<i>Harmony</i>	<i>Volume</i>
<i>Serious</i>	Major	Slow	Low	Firm	Consonant	Medium
<i>Sad</i>	Minor				Dissonant	
<i>Sentimental</i>			Medium	Flowing	Consonant	Slow

<i>Serene</i>	Major	Fast	High	Uneven	Dissonant	Medium
<i>Humorous</i>			High			
<i>Happy</i>		Medium	Firm	Tare		
<i>Exciting</i>			Medium			
<i>Majestic</i>	Minor	Slow	Low	Uneven	Varied	

Source: taken from Bruner, 1990, p. 100

Knowing all these ties that can be done, firm can use them in their advantage in order to create the atmosphere they desire and that aligns to consumers' expectations. Going further with the example presented above, but now analyzing it through the eyes of the seller (showroom), respecting the rules mentioned can give them the confidence that the client won't leave the showroom because the environmental music is not appropriate, because they knew how to choose the sounds that determine a serious or exciting state of mind and not a sad one.

Investigating deeper the sounds' symbolism, specialists discovered that auditory sensations can be also connected to others aesthetics' elements, such as: color, form and tastes. In table no. 3 you can see a description of them.

Table no. 3 – Associations between sounds, colors, forms and tastes

		<i>Vowels</i>	<i>Consonants</i>	<i>Tone-</i>	<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Musical parameters</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Color</i>
Oral-somatosensation	<i>Carbonation</i>	Front	Plosives	-	-	-	Angular	Red
	<i>Creamy, rich texture</i>	Back	-	-	-	-	Rounded	-
	<i>Thickness</i>		-	-	-	-	-	-
	<i>Crunchy/Cri</i>	-	Plosives	-	-	-	Angular	-
<i>Bitterness</i>	Front/	Low-		Brass	Legato	Green		
Taste	<i>Sweetness</i>	Front	Plosives/s	High-	Piano	Softer, lower, onant	Rounded	Red
	<i>Sourness</i>	-	Voiceless		-	-	Dissonant and	Angular
	<i>Saltiness</i>	-	-	-	-	Staccato, and n wide musical	-	White
	<i>Umami</i>	-	-	Low-	-	-	-	-
	Flavor	<i>Citrus</i>	-	-	-	-	Syncopated and bright, sharp	Angular
<i>Vanilla</i>		-	-	-	Piano,	Slow adagio), dull timbre	-	-
<i>Fruit</i>		-	-	High-	nd	-	-	-

Source: taken from Spence, 2012, p. 46

Knowing all these connections can help a company in developing an aesthetic product with a complex strategy which can improve the process of recalling, thanks to the links

between all these interconnected aesthetic elements – like this, the individual will have many ways to identify a product, so if he can't see, will hear or taste and so on.

Sounds as an aesthetic element and its importance in marketing

Why it is important to analyze the auditory style as an aesthetic element?! Firstly, because it has a great impact on consumer's buying decision. Due to this, a magazine was established, "Marketing through Music", that actually is studying only its influence. Moreover, all famous marketing agencies have a vice-president specialized only on music as a marketing tool (Garfield, 1988). Last, but not least, sounds have a key role in their relation with branding and advertising (Schmitt and Simonsn, 2002; Moore, 2010), an effect upon the consumer's experience and judgment regarding the product (Blauert and Jekosch, 1997; Spence and Zampiri, 2006) and can affect affective and cognitive stimulus (Clynes, 1980; Seidman, 1981; Clynes and Nettheim, 1982).

So, how can a company use sounds as a marketing tool?! In our research, we have identified 4 main functions. In the table below, you can find them presented in a synthesized way and also their description and main purpose.

Table no. 4 – The applications of sounds in marketing

Marketing function	Description	Authors who have studied their importance
<i>Atmospherics</i>	Through music it can be created both, a positive and negative atmosphere. Its importance is demonstrated by the time a consumer is willing to spend in a store. The more he stay, the chances to buy a product and spend more money that he proposed, increase. For a company, choosing the right environmental music can contribute in recognizing the store's identity and the way consumers evaluate it. North, Hargreaves and McKendrick (1997) showed that depending on the environmental music played into a store can be a selection criteria between a French and a German wine.	Kotler, 1973; Rossiter, 1982; MacInnis & Park, 1991; Bitner; 1992; Areni & Kim, 1993; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; North et al, 2004; Donovan & Beverland et al, 2006;
<i>Brand and identity</i>	Sounds' symbolism contribute to the increase of brand's awareness due to the fact that facilitates the process of learning and remembering a word. More, through the sound made by a letter you can transmit different moods; for example, according to Begley (2002), the letter "v" from Viagra communicates energy or according to Erlich (1995), the letter "z" from Prozac reveal "efficiency".	Klink, 2000; Schmitt & Simonson, 2002; Yorkston & Menon; 2004; Lowrey & Shrum, 2007; Klink & Athaide, 2012; Klink & Wu; 2013;

<i>Product</i>	Sound is a very important element for the product itself, having 2 main roles: <i>functionality</i> (e.g.: the sound made by the car's engine proves that is working or maybe if is more like a noise shows that the engine has a problem) and <i>additional value</i> (e.g.: the parking sensor help you in the process of parking making it easier for you, so you can park better without making an accident).	Lageat, et al., 2003; Laurant, 2003; Zeitler, Ellermeier, & Fastl, 2004; Susini, et al., 2004; van Egmond, 2008; Özcan & van Egmond, 2012;
<i>Ads (Commercials)</i>	Ads without sounds seem like something that happened 50 years ago. Music and sounds play a key role in an ad because through them you can transmit your slogans and jingles which may imprint easily in consumers' mind. The ways through which music can contribute in creating an advertisement are: entertainment, structure and memorability (Schmitt and Simonson, 2002). Companies should include them in their strategy because they can elicit emotional and behavioral responses.	Farnsworth, 1969; Holbrook & Schindler, 1989; Alpert & Aplert, 1990; Bower, 1991; Dube et al, 1995; Schmitt & Simonson, 2002; North et al, 2004;

Conclusions

Before opting for a strategy based on sounds, a company should know the 2 main categories that sounds are divided in, because only like this it would be able to implement it successfully. Moreover, when doing this, a firm should keep in mind the products' symbolism in order for it to make the right choice when choosing an environmental music, the name of the brand/jingle or the sounds made by the product when it's working.

The main application of sounds in marketing are: atmospherics, brand and identity, product and ads. When transforming them in a competitive advantage a company should pay attention in making them congruent to the consumers' expectations. Applying all these correctly will lead in the development of unique sounds that will be known for many years and which will become priceless. Giving these facts the companies will want to register and make them a trademark (for example: Nokia tune, Intel and MGM's lion (Moore, 2010)).

Future research

In order to validate the marketing applications of sounds, which we have identified after conducting the research above, we would like to realize (as a future research) a quantitative study which will analyze the consumers' perceptions regarding sounds' importance and functions and the influence of sounds on consumers' buying decision.

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