

Tune Your Brand In. The Perfect Jingle Mix

Students: Adela Bindea, Angela Seserman, Mihaela Bara

Assist. Ioana Iancu

Department of Communication and Public Relations
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

Email: ioana.iancu@polito.ubbcluj.ro,
adela.bindea@yahoo.com,
mirrorego@yahoo.com,
mihaela_bara_tia@yahoo.com

Keywords: audio branding, jingle, memory, strategy

Abstract: *The main focus of the present study is the concept of 'jingle', correlated to its impact on consumers and the auditory memory of individuals. The article presents other studies in psychology, brand management and audio branding. Analyzing a series of features of a sonic identity, this study aims to present the best strategy in choosing a jingle for a brand.*

Introduction

*"Be creative and distinct. Remember above all
that nobody is listening (but they can all hear you)"
(Daniel Jackson)*

In the past decades, audio branding has not been greatly used when creating brand identities. It is only a few years ago that companies began taking into consideration a sonic identity, when advertising has arrived to a point where only the best could survive, only the best would be remembered by the consumer. It is the moment when technology has become a part of our lives through Internet and every other sound generating gadget that people use, such as, for instance, iPods or MP3 Players.

The effectiveness of sound branding is due to two main reasons. First, it is the fact that one does not have to listen in order to hear. On one hand, the minds of the

consumers are bombed with information, ads, promotions and other visual content, which cannot be fully retained and which tend to annoy people. Therefore, it ends in a total ignorance regarding common ads. On the other hand, sound and music are a really powerful memory trigger and they increase the ability to recall. Thus, we think that audio branding would be a much more clever approach to get a message through. Second, a brand must have a complete identity in order to have an impact on the consumers. This is the reason why a brand must be built on both visual and sonic elements, melted together in perfect synergy.

Our research will empirically analyze the mechanisms of the usage of music and other sonic elements in advertising and will offer some guidelines on how to create an efficient jingle, one that completes a brand's identity and gets inside the minds of consumers. Moreover, we suggest a strategic incorporation of audio branding in the marketing policy and positioning strategy.

Theoretical Framework

Audio-Branding

What is audio branding? Also referred to as sonic branding or sound branding, audio branding is, according to Bill Nygren of Boom Sonic Branding, "the aural equivalent of the graphic logo." In other words, "sonic brands are sound identities that penetrate the emotional and logical mind. A hybrid of voice, sound design and original music, the sonic brand works by harnessing music's power to trigger an emotional response." (K. Barnet)

As a newly emerged field, audio branding is not yet strongly theorized and the standards are flexible. However, we are going to carry out a general presentation of the most important components of a sound brand. The oldest and probably the most common element of audio branding is the jingle. Although usually it is considered to be used only for television programs, a jingle is also used on the radio or on the Internet. In addition, it is, according to Mediamusicnow.com, "a slogan or vocal line set to an engaging melody mainly used as an advertisement or to open or close a show". (Mediamusicnow) Jingles are designed to be memorable and stick in the mind of the listener. Nevertheless, their complexity varies from a singer with a voiceover to a long elaborate music piece. Examples are the Coca Cola jingles "It's the real thing" or "Can't beat the feeling".

As noted by Daniel Jackson, a sound logo (audio logo or sonic logo) is a short distinctive melody or other sequence of sound, mostly positioned at the beginning or ending of a commercial. "It can be seen as the acoustic equivalent of a visual logo. Often a combination of both types of logo is used to enforce the recognition of a brand." (D. Jackson 2004, 142) The best example is the Intel logo (composed by Walter Werzowa). (Inter sound logo)

Music – the best mnemonic device

Until recent years, the branding process consisted of an ensemble of visual elements meant to capture the viewer's visual attention using mostly prints and TV commercials. However, with the growth of the amount of written information aimed to 'feast our eyes', brands have no more assurance that their logo will be the one memorized. The human mind can not possibly retain all that information. In this context, a recent Xerox study showed that one must read at least 1.000.000 words per week just to stay abreast of new information. The average business person today is required to read 4 million words per month. That is close to 50 million words per year. It would take the average reader (reading 200 words per minute) 3.333 hours of reading each year in order to read that much. (Rapid Reading Skills)

Miller, in a famous article called 'The magical number seven, plus or minus two', showed that people can retain seven pieces of information in their short-term memory: seven numbers, letters, words, seven tones of a particular pitch. (G. Miller 2006, 331) The following figure emphasizes the limits of recall from working memory.

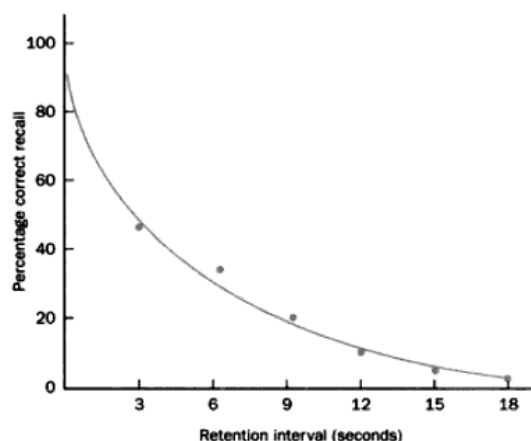


Figure 1. Limits of recall from working memory. *Source:* Adapted from L.M. Peterson and J.M. Peterson, "Short-term retention of individual verbal items", *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 1959, 331.

The figure presents the percentage correct recall of the stimulus as a function of the duration of the distractor task. Miller demonstrated in his study that the percentage of correct recall reduced drastically after 6 seconds.

While Henderson and Cote (1998) conclude that consumers are more attracted to non-simple forms, natural (harmonic) shapes and harmonic shapes, Carter (1999) showed that a powerful brand depends on the consistent use of the logo. (R. Riezebos *et al.* 2003, 140) In the same context, Yalch (1991) revealed in a study on the efficacy of jingles that jingles have an important effect on brand recall, as shown in the figure below. (S Brown and U. Volgsten 2006, 221)

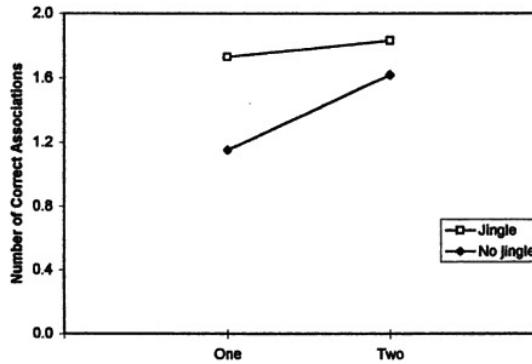


Figure 2. The effects of jingle on brand recall. *Source:* Adapted from R. F. Yalch, (1991). Memory in a jingle jungle: Music as a mnemonic device in communicating advertising slogans. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76(2), 268-275.

In a previous study using radio as the medium, carried out by Marks and Miller, sound effects were found to lead to an increased level of imagery processing. (D. W. Miller and L. J. Marks 1997) At the same time, Dr. Adrian North and Dr. Hargreaves from Leicester University has shown that brands with music that fit their brand identity are 96% more likely to be recalled than those with non-fit music or no music at all. “Respondents are 24% more likely to buy a product with music that they recall, like, and understand compared with 8% where the opposite applies”. (A. C. North *et al.* 2004)

Summing up, we can conclude that, based on previous research, music (jingle, sound logo or sound effects) is one of the best mnemonic devices to use for increasing brand recall. Thus, we consider sonic branding an excellent approach to make a brand stand out.

Brand, musical identity and audio strategy

A brand can be defined by the products/services, their attributes, promotion politics but also by the music that is correlated with the product. By hearing a commercial, one can identify the product’s slogan but also the jingle. In 1977, The National Association for Music Education of the USA defined the jingle as “a song, words and music, about a client’s product. This definition represented an “innovative idea”, the identification and promotion of a product through the music. “This was an innovative idea in media advertising. Singing commercials proved to be effective, and many advertisers began to use this technique.” (L. Gills 1977, p.105)

Any product or brand has a musical identity. We can correlate the product that we see or buy with a sound (the jingle, or a music piece) but we can also correlate a song with the ad where it was used in. These days, recognizing a song by what commercial it was in is as common as knowing it by the title, and that’s how the market wants it. According to a research conducted by branding guru Martin Lindstrom and

marketing research company Millward Brown, sound has a 41% influence on how people perceive brands. (J. Chang 2006, 16)

Many studies about the use of music in advertising try to show the importance of using music in commercials and its impact on those who see and listen to commercials. Authors such as Douglas Olsen, Kineta Hung and others have written articles which present studies made on these themes and the results lead us to the same conclusion: the use of music in advertising is very important, although it does not have the power to determine consumers to buy a product. (D. Olsen 1995, K. Hung 2001)

Two important studies emphasize the importance of music in commercials and how much music affects the perception of consumers about a brand or a product. One of the conclusions is that music can direct the interpretation, can influence it, it can generate emotions through the rhythm of music, it can emphasize and dramatize those emotions. (K. Hung 2001) In the same context, Douglas Olsen presents a study in an article that analyzes how the advertisers can use silence in radio commercials in order to increase the attention of the listeners and make them retain the information presented in the moment of silence. The results showed that when using a silent background, it is more likely that the information presented in that moment to be retained. The effect is stronger if the commercial is followed by another one with a louder background noise. (D. Olsen, 1995)

The feelings that a song/jingle gives is very important. What we hear from a brand and how we process it plays a big role in what we say, think and feel about a company. (N. Framus 2008) Knowing what impact the music used in commercials has on consumers we can find information about how to create and choose the best music for the products we create, as advertisers. Noel Framus gives a large set of tips: good design is clear thinking made visible; create a shared understanding of how you use music and sound today; trust your sonic artists, most musicians live and breathe in the now, using what is true; design for the future; involve senior management. (N. Framus 2008, 52) It is also important to “determine business goals, build a musical identity and avoid personal preferences”. (J. Chang 2006, 16)

Along with the Positioning Strategy and the USP (Unique Selling Proposition), we believe that brands should approach a sonic strategy as well. This means that each brand should consider its positioning strategy concerning a sonic identity. The jingle, sound logo or any other musical piece used in the advertising should be in perfect harmony with the brand's values. For example, the new Mercedes-Benz sound logo is a 3-note musical piece, based on an original recording of an English boys choir from the 1990s and “it is emotional, elegant, and unmistakably associated with our brand”, as Dr. Olaf Göttgens, Vice President Brand Communications Mercedes-Benz Cars states. (Official Press Release, Daimler AG “Mercedes Band Introduces Sound Logo”)

The study conducted at the School of Economics And Management of Lund University introduces a new concept in audio branding: Audio Position Identifier (API) (Berdine Vonk et al., 2007, 21). As presented in the figure below, this new position identifier shows how much audio branding was integrated in the overall strategy,

analyzing the level of audio branding and proposes different ways of positioning according to the methods adopted.



Figure 3. Audio Position Identifier (Strength of a Brand Identity vs. Level of Audio Branding) *Source:* Berdine Vonk et al., “Breaking the Silence - A managerial approach for companies to realize their audio potential”, School of Economics And Management, Lund University, 21

While these studies are very helpful in our research, none of these focus on the creation process of the jingle or sound logo. Thus, this study will center on the auditory memory of the individual and how this can be used in making an efficient jingle/sound logo.

Methodological Framework

This study is focused on finding the elements that best enable the consumers to remember a jingle: the perfect jingle mix. The main research questions are the following: How does the short-term and medium-term auditory memory of consumers react to jingles they have never heard before? How does the auditory memory of consumers react to well-known jingles? What are the consumers’ opinions on the importance of sound in commercials? The research methods used are content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Jackson presents three different classifications of sound. These are voice, ambiance (e.g. sound of rain drops or a bird singing) and music. (D. Jackson 2004) Although all sounds are important to define the memory and perception process, our research will be focused on the music elements a jingle needs in order to stay in the consumer’s memory and enable a long-term sonic branding.

We have analyzed the jingles from a sample of twenty TV commercials, randomly selected by zapping for five days (05.04.2009 - 10.04.2009), during prime-time. After reaching the satisfactory amount of data, we selected the most frequent commercials and conducted an analysis based on the following criteria: consonance, rhythm, complexity, pitch, scale, time signature, and tempo. Consonance refers to those sounds

that are pleasing, and it is in opposition to dissonance – more often used in modern and contemporary music, and referring to the notes that do not ‘match’, that sound annoying. Rhythm is the variation of the length and accentuation of a series of sounds or other events. While complexity refers to the number of instruments, the amount of vocal parts, the length and number of notes used, pitch refers to higher or lower notes. Scales can be divided in major and minor scales. While the major scales sound happier, the minor ones are more melancholic. Time signature is a notational convention used in Western musical notation to specify how many beats are in each measure and what note value constitutes one beat. Tempo is the speed or pace of a given piece.

We have chosen these particular criteria in order to determine which has the biggest influence on the human mind and emotions. Based on the same parameters we have developed some jingles, which were tested on the selected subjects.

TV Commercials Analysis

The commercials were divided into three categories, depending on the type of product they advertise for. The first class of commercials is composed of “low risk” every-day-use products, such as cosmetics, clothes and food. The second one consists of “medium risk” products. In this category we can include electronics, banking products and other items that implicate a higher cost. Finally, we have the “high risk” products which consist of luxury items, such as expensive cars or jewelry.

In the first category of products, the jingles were always accompanied by slogans. The jingles were composed on a single instrument, on major scales with a maximum of five notes, 90% of which were high- pitch. There were no dissonances found, and as for the tempo and time signature, there were no slow tap jingle found. All of them were in a medium of 120, on four quarter-notes per measure (4/4) or two quarter-notes per measure (2/4). All of the jingles were associated to slogans as well, 60% of which used words that rhyme.

The “medium risk” group of products includes jingles slightly different from the first one. The pitch switched to lower tonalities, while the complexity increased: an average of four instruments is used on a scale of up to eight notes. There was an equal amount of major and minor scale jingles, depending on the brand features; minor scales fit with serious commercials, the ones that try to transmit a deeper message and inspire trust and confidence, while the major scales are present in playful commercials, the ones that try to send out a good mood. The time signature stays the same, while the tempo varies towards slower taps. Jingles are not always related with slogans, vocals not being present in every jingle; also, rhyme is used less often.

“High risk” products have a different kind of pattern regarding audio branding. We can no longer talk about a jingle in this type of product class, but rather of a sound logo. This type of audio production is based on more complex musical structures, such as time signature (3/4, 5/4 etc.), on a larger variety of instruments, musical scales, the presence of dissonances, focusing mainly on a slower tempo. There were no musical slogans found in this category of products.

We have elaborated a theory regarding the difference between the jingles in the three classes of products, based on the consumers' attention. People are more likely to pay attention to commercials for products that involve a higher risk. Therefore, the low and medium risk products must develop an audio branding strategy that will enable them to penetrate the consumer's mind unconsciously and stay in his/her memory for as long as possible. Therefore, simple and attractive combinations of notes, instruments, words and other audio features must be used. In order to test this theory, we have developed jingles based on the same parameters and tested them on a number of subjects.

Memory testing

We aim to find out not just the subjects' choice regarding the jingle, but, more importantly, the type of jingles people remember. To see if the jingles that people choose match the ones they remember, a series of cvasi-experiments were carried out.

A pilot focus group with seven subjects took place, in order to find the flaws or gaps of the testing pattern. We established the order in which the testing should take place as well as the technical conditions. In addition, we decided not to use the focus group as a research method because the subjects' influencing one another made the results irrelevant. However, the discussions conducted with the subjects revealed the fact that jingles considered annoying were much easier remembered than the ones they liked.

Interviews

The interview was selected as a research method because it is a proper way of finding individuals' opinions separately, without having them influenced by one another or by any other sources. The respondents can also better express themselves during the discussions. We must underline the fact that the subjects were unaware that their audio memory was about to be tested, so that the results could be relevant.

The interview was structured in three parts, as well as a post-interview which was carried out by phone the second day. The first part consisted of asking the subjects to pick the jingle they liked the most from several pairs. Three pairs were structured on three different melodies that were recorded on low pitch notes and high ones; next six jingles constructed on minor and major scales were played. Three other pairs of jingles were developed, stressing out either consonance or dissonance, followed by one jingle that was played in four different tempos, starting from slow to fast (60bpm, 90bpm, 120bpm, 150bpm). As for the time signature, three jingles were composed in 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4. The subjects' preference regarding the complexity of the jingle was tested with five different jingles marked from simple to complex. While the simple one was built on a single instrument on a progression of three notes, the most complex one used five instruments and eleven notes. Finally the subjects had to listen to four jingles that were accompanied by slogans as well (with and without rhyme). This step was necessary to prepare the third part of the interview.

The second part of the interview consisted on a discussion about the importance that music used in advertising has for each of the participants and whether they

remember some particular jingles or like / dislike others. At this point, the participants were given parts of twenty famous slogans and were asked to fill in the missing text. Ten of the given slogans were initially accompanied by sound logos, and the other ten were just plain text ones.

In the final part of the interview, the subjects were asked to reproduce the jingles presented to them in the first part of the interview. This enabled us to test the short-term memory. In order to test the medium-term memory, each of the participants was called the next day and asked to reproduce the jingles from the previous day’s interview.

Results

When the respondents were asked to express their preference, most of the subjects choose the low pitch jingles in favor of the high pitch ones and minor scales in favor of major ones.

When presented five jingles with different musical complexities, the majority chose the 2-instruments, 5-notes jingle. We consider that the respondents made this choice because this type of jingle was the most balanced and enjoyable, not the most simple, but the most “catchy”. Moreover, whatever consists of more than 5 notes is generally difficult to remember by the average mind, as Miller proved in his article “The magical number seven, plus or minus two”. (G. Miller 2006, 331) The testing showed the following results:

The jingles testing the tempo revealed the following results:

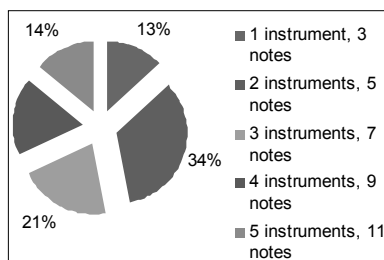


Figure 4. Preference of a different amount of musical complexity

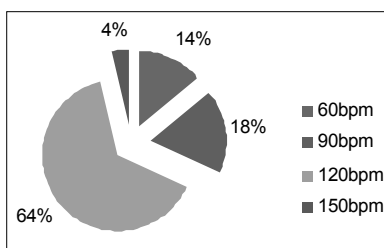


Figure 5. Preference for different tempos

After listening to the jingles that tested the time signature, the subjects chose as following:

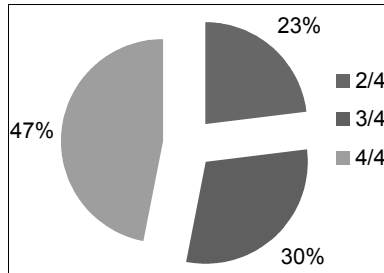


Figure 6. Preference for different time signatures

The majority of the subjects expressed their preference for the jingles in 120 bpm and 4/4. This tempo and this time signature are usually used in pop music to emphasize the beat; this determines the mind to stay focused on the sound and not to lose interest. Lower tempos would bore the mind, while higher tempos would exhaust the listener. The other two time signatures are more rarely used in popular music, this is why the most obvious choice was the most familiar sounding musical theme.

The discussions that were carried out revealed that the majority stated that they give no importance to the jingles and audio branding in general. They were able to name jingles they like as well as some they find annoying. The interesting outcome was noticeable when they were asked to reproduce these jingles. The jingles that had been previously considered annoying were remembered in a larger number, and the time of reaction was faster.

When testing the famous jingles accompanied by sound logos, we noticed that all the jingles ones that rhyme were recognized, whereas the ones that did not rhyme were not recognized by the majority of respondents.

At the end of the interview, the subjects were asked to reproduce the jingles they had previously heard. Most of the reproduced tunes were composed on high pitch notes. The subjects only remembered fast tempo jingles, on four beats per measure. The complex jingles were not remembered, but the first two were reproduced by 30% and 28% of the participants. From the scale point of view, 79% of the reproduced jingles were built on major scales, and only 21% of them were minor scale tunes.

The jingles that had slogans were remembered by this pattern: only 40% of the participants were able to reproduce the words as well as the tune, 53% remembered the tunes only. The remembered slogans were only the ones that rhyme.

From the telephone testing we collected the following data. No low pitch jingles were remembered, no minor scale jingles were remembered, even if these were initially preferred by the tested subjects. While only four of the subjects were able to reproduce the first two tunes from the complexity scale, only the 120 beat and 4/4 jingles were remembered. Two of the subjects remembered jingles with dissonances, even if the day

before they stated they found those jingles annoying: “Yes I can remember the tune; it’s been bugging me since I first heard it, and I still can’t get it out of my head”, said one of the subjects over the phone interview. Also, six of the participants remembered the slogans that rhyme, whereas none could remember the ones with no rhyme.

Conclusion

This research aims to define what the key elements are in order to make a jingle easy to memorize for the public. Our research showed that people’s taste in music does not necessarily affect their audio memory. The types of jingle people liked did not match the ones they remembered. Furthermore, the jingles they found annoying were remembered, whereas the ones they liked were forgotten. These results sustain our theory regarding preference and audio memory.

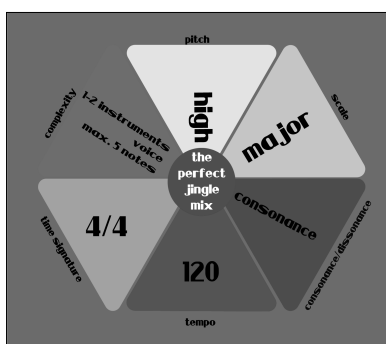


Figure 7. The perfect jingle mix

The jingle mix we have come up with strengthens the hypotheses that certain features make a tune easier to remember. We propose a jingle composed in a major scale, on a high pitch, with a reduced complexity (maximum 5 notes and 2 instruments), in 4/4 time and we recommend a tempo around 120 bpm. Moreover, dissonances should be avoided, as they make a tune harder to process.

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