City University Research Journal
Volume 05 Number 02 July 2015 Article 11

EFFECTS OF SONIC LOGO ON BRAND RECOGNITION OF THE ADVERTISED BRAND

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ABSTRACT

This study reviews the effect of a structural feature of commercials known as sonic logo on brand recognition. The major aim of this study is to check whether familiarity or unfamiliarity with the brand has an impact on sonic logos ability to be encoded in the consumer's mind. The experimental study tests ten sonic logos from different brands, seven of them are familiar brands and the remaining three are unfamiliar. Total of five commercials have been shown to 47 participants. The findings suggests brands whose sonic logos have not been heard by participants before but the brands these sonic logos belong to are familiar to participants have a greater recognition of their respective sonic logos as compare to those brands which are unfamiliar to participants.

Key Words: Sonic Branding, Sonic / Audio Logo, Brand Recognition

INTRODUCTION

With the constant development of media, and evolution of our audio visual technology, people are constantly bombarded with audio from all directions every day. This means it's becoming more difficult for the brands to be heard in this increasing chaos.It has become a challenge for marketers to get the attention of consumers as the “noise” is distorting communication further. However, it is the well-known fact that distinguished companies express their own corporate communications with both of visual logo and slogans. Consumers are exposed to 3000 commercials every day, hence demanding more efforts by companies to communicate efficiently and distinctively (Godin, 2007).This visual space of communication has already been quite saturated but there has been less attention towards audio side of the communication. As one Branding agency says by promoting itself that “People have ears too, you know”.

It's been proven that sound is a strong memory trigger because it heightens the brain ability to recall information (Wallace, 1900). For example sometime you can tell what an object is just by the sound it makes (telephone ring), and by using only a few sounds its possible for you to hear what time of day it is, and hearing specific music we might create an alarming situation or put you into an entertaining place (mostly used by movies). It can also takes us to different locations all over the world (i-e every country has its own traditional style of music).

During the last decade the marketers have shifted their attention more towards emotional features of marketing communication (Lee, 2007). In today's competitive market where it is hard to get attention of consumer, the Kotler' 4 P's seemed insufficient to create brand awareness. This change has led to turn the focus more towards the company behind the brands rather than functional benefits of products.

Products have thus developed into brands, which gives more value to consumers. In today's world consumers are looking for brands which relates to their personality and values (Vonk, 2007).

In new millennium as consumer are most sensual conscious as ever before, sensory branding has emerged as the mean of communication for companies. Amongst the several components of the concept is that of sound, which is believed to play a significant role in enhancing both the brand image and consumer awareness (Vonk, 2007). Thus, contemporary organizations have over the decades, gradually acknowledged the impact and potential of audio, and a few prominent companies are already taking advantage of sonic branding, by using their own distinguished sound as part of their corporate communications. Therefore, brands such as Intel, Nokia, Airtel and a few other established companies use the power of a sound logo (or audio signature) to reinforce their overall brand identity.

Despite its emerging prominence in the world of marketing, the concept of sonic branding pertaining to corporate identity lacks marketing perspectives on how to use this phenomenon as an extension of visual representation of the brand. The literature of this evolving field is mostly descriptive in nature and does not give solid theoretical considerations that firms can implement for improving their brand identity. (Vonk, 2007).

This research aims to cover one of the indicators of brand awareness i.e. brand recognition. Thus, the purpose of this research is to examine the effects of sonic logo on brand recognition and to find out whether a firm's consistent use of its sonic logo is helping to improve its overall brand identity. The research further attempts to find out whether first time exposure to a sonic logo of an unfamiliar brand has the ability to be later recognized by means of its sonic logo thus providing us with a solid ground to either reject or accept the conclusion derived by previous researches which indicate that there is no significant relationship between a sonic logo and brand recognition (the previous research tested this phenomenon by one time exposure of the brand's sonic logo to the participants).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since decades marketers have used visual elements to differentiate their products from those of competitors. However, most recently they have realized that the sense of hearing is considered to be a powerful memory trigger and thus have taken advantage of the fact. Contemporary companies often employ sound as a tool to enhance their brand equity (Lusensky 2010). When dealing with the auditory dimension of a brand, consumers often only spot and recognize a particular brand when the sounds used to represent it are familiar and recognizable. Nevertheless, just as a strong graphical identity aids consumer to spot you, similarly a strong sonic identity will help them catch you as well (Jackson, 2004).

In modern day marketing, sonic branding is often described as the organized process in which the auditory element becomes a part of the brand and its brand identity. It may consist of an audio logo, a short jingle, or a brand theme." (Jackson, 2004). Whereas, a sonic logo/audio logo is the auditory equivalent of a visual logo, and is the most typical form of a sonic branding device. Sonic logo, also known as "sogos" (term generated from the combination of two words, sound and logo) are short melodies not more than five to six seconds long (Plaghat, 2009).

Many global companies have realized that music - the essence of sonic branding- does not bind itself to boundaries. It is a universal understood language, which can prove to be a powerful brand communication tool.(Jackson, 2004).It has been accepted that music has the ability to generate certain emotional responses (Fulberg, 2003). This fact has let the marketers to use specific type of music in the background of advertisements. Music in advertising has been studied as manipulating attitudes towards the product (Gorn, 1982; Park & Mclnnis, 1990). Studies have also been done on the impact of jingles on the consumer moods (Alpert & Alpert, 1990).

Brand recognition is the term used for the ability of the brand to be recognized amongst its consumer for its certain brand characteristics (Hamid et. al, 2012).It is the ability of the respondents to recognize a brand by its association with a particular set of attributes, such as a tagline, logo and other unique characteristics.

Sonic branding often results in the creation of a memory trigger, linking a sound with the brand, product or its services which could generate a pleasant memory (Bronner & Hirt 2007).Sonic branding as a solution for powerful brand identity tool has gained popularity in the past few years. Many companies have adopted the concept of sonic branding, but few companies are aggressively using this tool as means of their brand communication. It is believed that Intel's sonic logo is heard every five minutes in its ad somewhere in the world (Jackson, 2004). And according to Martin Lindstorm 74% of Europeans recognize the Nokia tune.

A study conducted by Vekataraman (2007) has focused on the impact of sonic branding on the memory by comparing the effects of two logo presentation styles; logo only and logo with sonic sound. Findings of the study suggest that no significant relationship exists between sonic branding and brand recognition and its recall. But the experiment conducted during the study to calculate sonic logo's impact on memory was based on the brands which were never seen or heard before by the participants. To fill the pertaining research gap, this research will include brands both familiar and unfamiliar alongside with different stress on the consistency of their use in their ads.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of research the Annie Lang's Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Message Processing (LC4MP) has been used (Lang, 2006). This theory explains that message processing involves three major process- Encoding, Storage and retrieval. The LC4MP suggests that any feature of message that generates an

orienting response increases the attention to the message i.e. increase the resources assigned to the encoding the message. The aim of this study is to find out how effective is sonic logo in encoding the message. Recognition test will help in this study to find its effectiveness.

The dependent variable for this study is brand recognition which measures encoding. This is one of the indicators to measure consumer awareness. (Rossiter, 1983) whereas, the independent variables are familiarity and unfamiliarity with the brand. Hence while analyzing and comparing responses to sonic brands on the basis of its familiarity and unfamiliarity, and the amount of consistent use of sound logo in the ads, we can understand the effectiveness of sonic logo as a resource for allocation toward encoding i.e. brand recognition.

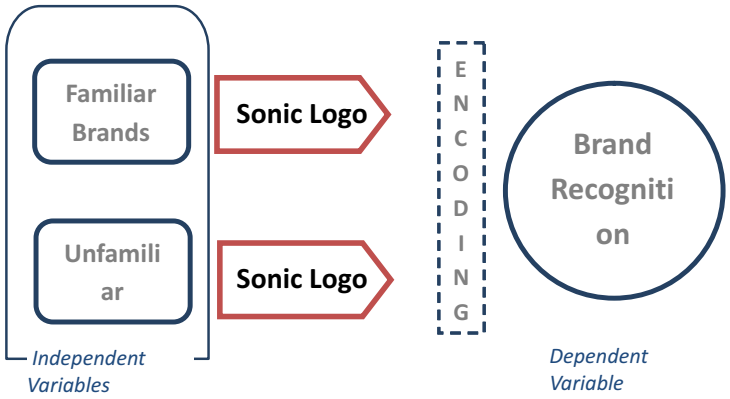

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted on the basis of an experiment on 7 'familiar' brands (Nokia, Intel, Airtel, Telenor, LG, Mercedes, Zong) and 3 'unfamiliar' brands (Michelin, Renault, SNCF). A total of 5 commercials (of LG, Renault, Mercedes-Benz, Michelin, SNCF) were played before the participants prior to answering the questionnaire, 3 of 'non-familiar' brands and 2 of 'familiar brands'. The familiarity and unfamiliarity of the brands were assumed on the basis of its products availability in the market and presence of its ads in T.V channels or any other medium.

The reason behind selecting more of familiar brands and less of non-familiar brands is that to minimize the impact of "Recency Theory" which states that recall of brand is most if it is tested immediately after its exposure (Robert & William, 1974). That is, brands such as Nokia and Intel which is considered to be very recognized brands in terms of their sonic logos were tested without showing their ads. And brands which are familiar but their sonic logos are not very common (LG, Mercedes-Benz) were tested only after showing their ads. The aim is to test whether just the familiarity with

brands increases the chances of encoding the sonic logos and relating it to the particular brand. The second reason behind selecting 7 familiar brands is to test reliability of the instrument, that is, parallel forms reliability.

The sample consisted of 47 students, 13 females and 34 males, of the Institute of Managements Sciences from undergraduate business administration class participated in this experiment. Participation in experiment was based on convenience sampling.

The experiment was divided in two stages. In the first stage participants were asked to concentrate on the commercials to be played before them. Before the start of each commercial a logo and name behind the brand was displayed for four seconds. After watching the commercials, in the second stage questionnaires were handed over to the participants. Self-designed questionnaire was used as instrument where participants could identify to what level they recognize each sound that is played. A flash file was opened which contained ten buttons titled A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J. Behind each button a sonic logo of individual brand was programmed. Parallel to that a questionnaire was divided in the same format as the flash sound file; from A to J. Four options to check recognition were presented under each Alphabetic section in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to listen to sound when a button was clicked and to respond on the questionnaire by selecting one of the option. There was only one question in questionnaire: Do you recognize the brand behind this sound? Andoptions were, 1) I am sure this is ____ brand, 2) I suspect this is ____ brand, 3) I have heard this sound before, but don't know which brand it represents 4) I have never heard this sound before.

Each sound was played twice and participants were given 10 seconds to answer. All the 10 sounds were played in this manner. After briefing the participants each sound was played by clicking the buttons. Each sound was played twice and participants were given 10 seconds for answering each section.

The validity of the instrument is Construct valid: it measures only what it is intended to measure. As there is only one question that asks "Do you recognize the brand behind this sound". Also the reliability of the test is that of parallel form reliability as one question is tested over 10 different items.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis

This research was conducted to examine the effectiveness of sonic logos in recognizing certain brand. Brands that were tested were selected on the basis of its familiarity to the participants as previous research suggested doing so (Venkataraman, 2007). Thus, it was also tested to ascertain that whether the recognition of brand's sonic logo was affected by the familiarity with the brand. The results of unaided recognition test following the viewing of the five (5) commercials are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Result of brands with commercials watched

Unfamiliar Brands			Familiar Brands		Recognition
SNCF	**Michelin**	**Renault**	**LG**	**Mercedes**	
6.4%	***0%***	***6.4%***	***27.7%***	***48.9%***	**Recognize**
40.4%	*19.1%*	*21.3%*	*48.9%*	*19.1%*	**Heard but can't remember**
31.9%	*61.7%*	*57.4%*	*8.5%*	*8.5%*	**Never heard**
21.3%	*19.1%*	*14.9%*	*14.9%*	*23.4%*	**False recognition**

N=47

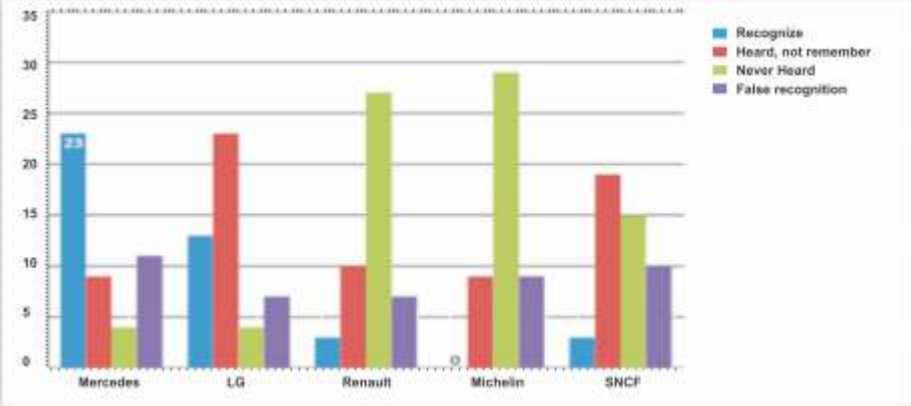

Figure 2: Result of brands with commercials watched

The findings indicate that the recognition of the familiar brands were higher than those of unfamiliar brands. The average recognition of both familiar brands was 38.29% whereas average recognition of all three unfamiliar brands was 6.38%. "Mercedes" brand had the highest level of recognition i.e. 48.9 % and LG being second among these brands had recognition of 27.7 %. Level of recognition of LG brand was lower; however, its ability to recognize the sound but not remembering the brand behind the sound was greater (48.9%).

The above findings were of only those brands whose commercials were shown to participants before the test. In the recognition test there were a total of ten (10) sonic logos of different brands. Commercials of five of them were shown, whereas other five were tested without showing their commercials to the participants. Nevertheless participants were well familiar with these brands. Table 2 depicts the recognition of sonic logos of the familiar brands.

Table 2: Familiar Brands

Familiar Brands							Recognition
LG	Mercedes	Telenor	Intel	Airtel	Zong	Nokia	
27.7%	48.9%	*25.5 %*	46.8%	80.9%	*93.6%*	93.6%	Recognize
48.9%	19.1%	*48.9%*	*6.4%*	2.1%	*4.3%*	*2.1%*	Heard but can't remember
8.5%	8.5%	*17 %*	*4.3%*	2.1%	*0%*	*0%*	Never heard
14.9%	23.4%	*8.5%*	42.6%	*14.9%*	*2.1%*	4.3%	False recognition

N=47

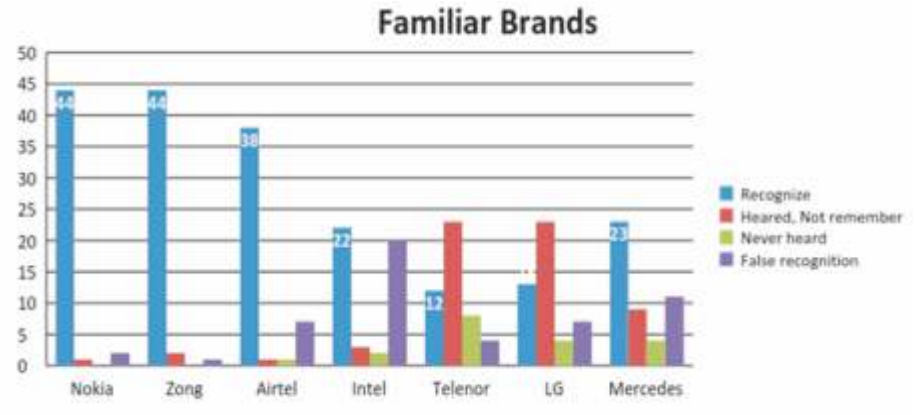

Figure 3: Familiar Brands

Accordingly, the highest level of recognition was of the "Nokia tune" i.e. 93.6%. However, unexpectedly "Zong" had the exactly same level of recognition (93.6%) representing the aggressive marketing campaigns and consistent use of its "sonic logo". As compared to "Zong", its competitor, "Telenor" had the lowest level of recognition (25.5%) among participants. However, 48.9% participants responded that they have heard the sound but they couldn't relate it to the brand. Although "Telenor" was introduced in the market four years before the launch of Zong, it still hasn't allowed its consumers to recognize its identity through sound.

Airtel with no services provided in Pakistan, had its tune recognized by 80.9% of participants representing the tune's attractiveness and its impact on viewer's memory, often watched by the local population in commercials of Indian channels.

In case of Intel, 46.8% participants recognized the sound as Intel's sonic logo and 42.6% linked its sound logo with some other brand. This stats show that almost all

participants recognized the sound but only 46.8% were able to relate it to the brand. It is to note that in one study the recognition of Intel sound logo was 56% in developed countries. It means that in developing nations like Pakistan, people are not really aware of microprocessors and PC's commercials are not quite common in the local channels. Mercedes and LG commercials were watched by participants before the recognition test and the results shows that Mercedes (48.9%) has high recognition than LG (27.7 %).
Thus, the overall findings of the research indicate that brands with a significant amount of familiarity, with addition to the consistency of the use of its sonic logo in different touch points can achieve high level of recognition with the help of sound. Table 3 represents the results obtained from the experiment on unfamiliar brands.

Table 3: Unfamiliar Brands

Unfamiliar Brands			Recognition
SNCF	Michelin	Renult	
6.4%	*0%*	6.4%	Recognize
40.4%	19.1%	21.3%	Heard but can't remember
31.9%	61.7%	57.4%	Never heard
21.3%	*19.1%*	*14.9%*	False recognition

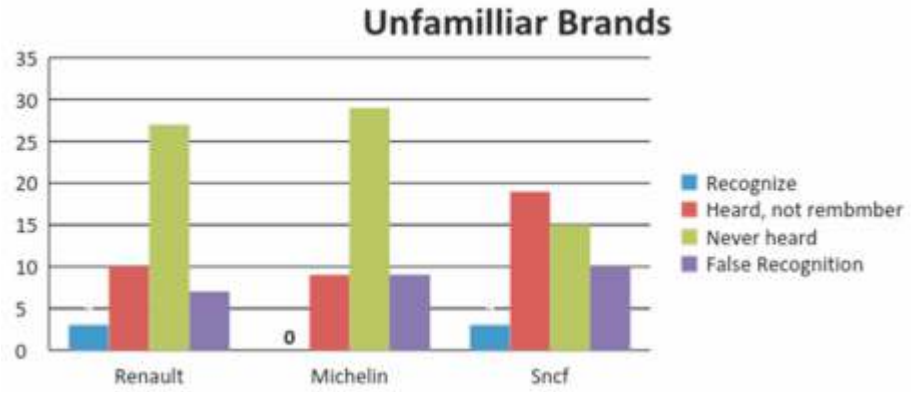

Figure 4: Unfamiliar Brands

Sonic logos of these unfamiliar brands were not recognized by majority of the participants. However, 40.4% participants responded to "SNCF" sonic logo, claiming that they had heard the sonic logo before, but they couldn't associate it to the brand. Moreover, "never heard" response for "SNCF" brand (31.9%) was much lower than Renault (57.4%) and Michelin (61.7%). This difference in the result of unfamiliar brands might be influence of one factor and that is in the commercial of "SNCF" brand, the sonic logo was composed into complete background music of the ad. Thus, the participants had more exposure to the sound logo of SNCF as compare to other two

unfamiliar brands.

DISCUSSION

This research attempts to find out the effect of specific structural feature of TV advertisements termed as "sonic logo" on the brand recognition. The main aim of the study was to test whether participants' familiarity or unfamiliarity with the brand has any effect on the ability of participants to recognize the brand behind its sonic logo.

The above findings of the experiment conducted shows that participants could identify the brands behind their sonic logos which were familiar to them more accurately than those which were not familiar to them. First it was tested by selecting five (5) brands, in which two (2) were familiar to the participants and other three (3) were unfamiliar. After showing commercials of these five (5) brands, recognition test was conducted. Results indicate that average recognition for familiar brands (38.29%) was much greater than those of unfamiliar brands (6.38%). It was also found out that with greater amount of exposure to the sonic logo of the brand the better it is encoded, as in case of unfamiliar SNCF brand.

To further strengthen the results the experiment also tested five other brands which were familiar to the participants but their commercials weren't watched by participants during experiment. These sonic logos were tested to balance the experiment, because testing sonic logos immediately after watching commercials might not have given realistic results. The results for these brands showed that there was high recognition for the brands which uses their sonic logos consistently in different touch points. For instance recognition of Zong's sonic logo was just as much as Nokia's. It portrays that Zong is consistently using its sonic logo in several touch points (commercials, call hold etc)

In case of Intel the experiment showed that its recognition was not as much as other familiar brands. This might be due to lack of advertisements of Intel in Pakistan region. Whereas Telenor, which commercials are very common in Pakistan, it had lowest recognition among familiar brands. This might be result of not being consistent with using their sonic logos at several different touch points, or may be their failure to isolate sonic logo from other background music or voices.

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of sonic logo to recognize the brand behind it. Previous research on this particular topic was conducted by Venkataraman (2007), which concluded that sonic logos have no positive relationship with brand recognition. The experiment conducted by him was based on all "unfamiliar brands". This factor might have influenced his conclusion.

This research was put forward by comparing results of brand recognition of familiar brands with unfamiliar brands on the basis of their sonic logos. The results indicated that recognition of "familiar brands" was much higher than that of "unfamiliar brands".

Participants couldn't recognize the sound of unfamiliar brands or if they could they couldn't associate it with the brand. The research, thus, provides solid grounds to reject his conclusion because for awareness of particular brand, there must be some familiarity with the brand, moreover to make an impact on the consumer's memory, brands should be consistent about the use of their sonic logos at the end of their commercials and several other touch points. Therefore, brands which use their sonic logos consistently can attain higher level of brand recognition by means of sound. Hence, improving their overall corporate identity.

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