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The relevance of context

Analysing the linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic contexts for branding and advertising

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INTRODUCTION

Greek philosopher Aristotle, in the fourth century BC, stated in book I of his *Politics* that "man is by nature a political animal" and that society is crucial for human life: here, the adjective "political" refers specifically to the idea of the *pólis*, the city, intended as an association of individuals living together and creating a community in order to ensure not only collective survival, but also the development of reason and logic.

This concept of humanity and socialisation is far from being outdated: indeed, as Aristotle suggested, men need reciprocal social interaction as much as they need to feel part of a group or a community, not only to obtain the means that are necessary to live (items that can be as simple as shelter and food), but also to gain a sense of belonging, connection and personal development – an idea that is supported also by more recent theories, such as the renowned hierarchy of needs model proposed by Maslow in 1943. However, one key factor is fundamental in order to socialise, interact and connect with others, and that is communication.

At its most basic level, communication includes three main elements: a message to be delivered, a sender (or encoder) of such message and a receiver (or decoder). The conveyance of the message can then occur through different means, the most common and immediate of them being language. However, communication is surely not limited to the mere utterance or writing of words: indeed, people can encode and decode messages also through physical gestures and facial expressions (the so-called paralanguage) or through visual cues and graphical representations.

In addition to these elements, there is a further factor to take into account when communication is concerned and that can greatly influence social interaction: the concept of context. It may be quite difficult to provide a thorough definition of context, as its structure is stratified and its different parameters often tend to overlap, but in general it can be defined as "the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed"[1]. In

[1] Definition provided by the Lexico website (a collaboration between Dictionary.com and Oxford University Press), accessed at www.lexico.com/en/definition/context on July 2, 2020.

other words, as Goodwin and Duranti (1992)[2] explain, context is the "field of action" within which an event is embedded.

Context is relevant for communication and, consequently, for social interaction because it allows individuals to better decode, understand and interpret the message being received; context may, as a matter of fact, be crucial in determining the meaning of a sentence in a specific situation, which might be completely different in another occasion. In addition, taking into account specific dimensions of context also allows the message senders to improve the encoding process by making it more efficient and effective in conveying a certain need, opinion or statement.

The concept and role of context is thus quite relevant in terms of social interaction, but it is also a crucial factor for the marketing field: brands and companies, as a matter of fact, greatly rely on communication to "survive" in the market – namely, to earn profits. In order to stand out from the competition, gain competitive advantage and be chosen at the purchase stage of the customer journey, brands need to effectively communicate and convey their identity, values and beliefs and thus create a consistent and appealing image; moreover, they need to promote their products with advertisements that grab and maintain the audience attention while displaying key attributes and benefits. From this point of view, a strong communication strategy is the common thread that guides all these branding and promotional activities.

In terms of marketing communication, much similarly to the case of daily interactions, context is fundamental both on the company and on the customer side: on the one side, to create (and subsequently convey) a message promoting a brand or a product, companies need to choose *what* to communicate and which words to use (linguistic context), *how* to communicate it (paralinguistic and visual context), *where* the communication is taking place and finally *who* they are addressing (extralinguistic context); on the other side, the target audience or customer base needs to have some common ground with the company in terms of the just mentioned contextual factors in order to correctly understand and interpret the brand image or product benefits that are being conveyed.

[2] Goodwin C., Duranti A., 1992, *Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

The aim of the current dissertation is thus that of analysing how context affects communication in two fundamental fields of marketing, branding and advertising: as previously suggested, I chose to conduct this distinction as branding can be intended as the process of "creating" a brand image and identity by conveying brand values, beliefs and positive associations, while advertising can be defined as the promotion of a brand's products through the use of attention-grabbing and persuasive communication. In this sense, the present thesis will also provide some suggestions on how to integrate contextual considerations into branding and advertising strategies, also through the presentation of several real-life examples and case studies. In particular, some attention will be dedicated to the impact on context and communication of recent digital developments and social media platforms.

The structure of this thesis follows the classification of context usually proposed in pragmatic studies – namely, the previously cited distinction between linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic context.

Chapter 1 focuses on linguistic context. In the first section, a general description of linguistic context and co-text is provided, followed by a digression on its meaning and role in the digital era. In the second section, the field of branding is explored in terms of linguistic context, with a focus on the linguistic strategies that can be employed to create a meaningful and significant brand name; this reflection is followed by a brief analysis on the relevance of hashtags in self-branding strategies, by an analysis of payoffs as brand name co-text and by an insight on how to effectively approach foreign markets through branding-related translations. The third section moves the analysis on linguistic context towards advertising: here, the role of co-text and linguistic environment is explained, followed by the presentation of different linguistic devices and their effect in terms of promotional power. A digression on digital advertising is also conducted, followed by a brief analysis on promotional translations.

Chapter 2 deals with the impact of paralanguage and visual cues in the two selected marketing fields. The first section provides an explanation of the concept of paralanguage and describes the role played by visual factors and imagery in communication; a brief insight on how this context category is impacted by digital media is provided next. The second section deals with the use of paralanguage and visual cues in branding, focusing respectively on brand tone of voice and brand logos. The third

section takes advertising into account, describing the different modes of visual and gestural communication that can be employed in promotional efforts such as print ads or tv commercials.

Finally, chapter 3 analyses the role of the extralinguistic context, which is made up by the situational and the cognitive and cultural contexts; the definition and characterising features of these two different extralinguistic spheres are presented in the first section of the chapter. The second and third sections, following the same structure of the previous chapters, provide an analysis of the impact and influence of situational, cognitive and cultural factors on, respectively, branding and advertising.

In order to sum up the theoretical observations and models provided throughout the text and display how they have been employed by actual brands in the development of their marketing strategies, two case studies are presented at the end of each chapter, relating respectively to branding and advertising

CHAPTER 1
LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

1.1. LINGUISTIC CONTEXT EXPLAINED

1.1.1. A general definition of linguistic context

Language is a fundamental component of human life. It is the tool that, above everything else, enables us to communicate with each other and to conduct our daily activities, to express our feelings and emotions, to build a network of people around us with whom we can share our thoughts and opinions.

Every day we connect with others through spoken and written communication, using both traditional and innovative, digital tools. We set up and send messages, which are received and interpreted by our intended receivers – sometimes successfully, other times causing misunderstandings or failed communication. Similarly, we are also reached by messages sent by others and some of these contents are created and delivered by brands or firms; and, just in the same way as it can happen between two people in a conversation, promotional messages or attempts at portraying a certain brand image can be misinterpreted by customers.

Language, thus, is a powerful weapon and as such it needs to be put into use effectively and, sometimes, carefully. In particular, to reach the goal of successful communication, it needs to be understood correctly and, thus, inserted into a context.

Context is the essential frame that surrounds our words, expressions, utterances. It is one of the keys that allow us to decode the message that is being delivered to us by people, institutions or, as we will deeply elaborate later in this dissertation, brands and firms. Without context, a word is just a word; without a given place and time framing them, some expressions that would usually be instantly understandable become unexplainably meaningless or ambiguous.

According to the theory of pragmatics, context is traditionally distinguished into two categories: linguistic and extra-linguistic[1]. In addition to this dual classification, the present dissertation will also include a section focused on the relevance of paralinguistic context, identified as the set of non-verbal signs and signals that also functions as the surrounding environment of a sentence or utterance, supporting its understanding and helping in meaning identification. The present chapter, however, focuses on the definition and role of linguistic context.

Linguistic context, also defined as co-text by George Yule in his educational publication "Pragmatics"[2], is constituted by the previous and subsequent segments of the text being examined or of the conversation that is taking place; it represents the whole set in which the sentence or utterance is located.

Let's consider, for example, the word "date"; taken as a mere noun, it may assume different meanings, but only according to the linguistic context in which it is used we are able to specify a fixed definition. In the sentence "today's date is February 5th, 2020", the words surrounding "date" (such as "today" or "February") clarify that in this case the noun is referring to a determined point in time; however, in the sentence "Mark took Jane out on a date", the meaning changes and "date" becomes a romantic appointment.

Linguistic context, in addition, can also refer to a larger environment: for example, it can be easier to attribute the correct meaning to a quote by considering the book or literary work to which it belongs.

Let's consider, for example, the following sentence:

We use cookies for many purposes.

Supposing that this phrase has been found in a book of recipes for desserts, the meaning is quite clear: cookies (as in biscuits) can be used in many ways when baking or decorating a cake or pastries.

[1] This distinction is widely applied and recognized in the fields of pragmatics and liguistics; for example, it can be found in Akman V., Bazzanella C., 2003, *The complexity of context: guest editors' introduction*, Journal of Pragmatics, vol. 35, p. 323.
[2] Yule G., 1996, *Pragmatics,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 21.

However, the previous quote does not refer to that kind of cookies: as a matter of fact, it is part of Google's Privacy and Terms section concerning the "small piece[s] of text sent to your browser by a website you visit"[3] – which are, indeed, called cookies.

Considering literally what comes before and after a word, a sentence or a quote is thus fundamental both for the receiver and the sender of a message. On the one hand, the receiver needs to identify and understand the linguistic context of what is being communicated in order to effectively interpret its meaning and references; on the other hand, the setting up of a clear and comprehensible linguistic context is a necessary step for the sender, in order to get the defined message to be delivered correctly and to avoid misunderstandings.

This applies also to the domain of marketing, and especially to the fields of branding and communications – two topics that the present dissertation will further explore in the following paragraphs of this chapter. As a matter of fact, a clear linguistic context is a prerequisite to deliver efficiently a promotional message or a content conveying the image of a brand; ensuring that the words and linguistic environment surrounding the message itself enable the audience to understand the desired meaning should be a mandatory step for any marketing strategy.

Consider, for example, the case of a brand producing soft drinks that wants to address current and/or possible future customers with a new tagline. An option could be "Coke refreshes you like no other can"[4], a sentence that plays on the double meaning of the word "can" as both a modal verb and a tin container for food or, like in this case, drinks. Actually, in American English slang, "can" could also mean prison or toilet[5]; however, the linguistic context of the previous sentence suggests, thanks to words like "coke" and "refreshes", that this is not the meaning intended by the company creating the promotional content.

In the case of the previous example, the linguistic context does not only help the reader in the overall understanding of the phrase, but it also indicates which meaning to

[3] Google Privacy and Terms, *How Google uses cookies.* Accessed on February 3, 2020 at policies.google.com/technologies/cookies?hl=en-US.
[4] This sample slogan is an example found in the following paper: Elleuch M. F., 2014, *The Literal Translation of English Advertising Slogans into Arabic and the Loss of the Originally Intended Effects*, CALR Linguistic Journal, vol. 5.
[5] Definition provided by the online go Dictionary.

attribute to words having more than one interpretation (such as "can"); thus, the linguistic context plays a relevant role also when disambiguation is needed.

Pragmatic ambiguity occurs whenever the meaning of a word or a sentence can be understood in different ways; this type of ambiguity is usually defined as grammatical, semantic or pragmatic (Macagno, Bigi 2018)[6]. Grammatical ambiguity is, in turn, classifiable as either lexical (one word with multiple meanings) or syntactic (depending on the structure and order or the words in the sentence); usually, it is grammatical ambiguity that is solvable with the help of linguistic context.

Of course, even in the case of ambiguous words or phrases, linguistic context (or lack thereof) can be exploited by firms and brands to create witty and original promotional messages or slogans; playing with homonyms, word puns, multiple meanings or neologisms could prove to be an efficient strategy, attracting and amusing customers – even in cases of unintended typos, like the case study of IKEA presented in section 1.4 will demonstrate.

Linguistic context, thus, is a fundamental element to be considered when communication is concerned and when the common goal between sender and receiver is the correct understanding of the object of communication itself.

An argument further supporting the relevance of this aspect of pragmatics is the fact that, while reading, people tend to perform a process of skimming and selection of words, from which they extract the general message of the text at hand.

During our daily life, in fact, we are subject to a continuous flow of information that is constantly being pushed towards us, especially thanks to the development and rapid diffusion of digital technologies and social networks. Data from studies conducted in 2012[7] show a supply of global data reaching the amount of 2.8 zettabytes (corresponding to 2.8 trillion gigabytes), with predictions for the year 2020 going up to 40 zettabytes – numbers that seem unquantifiable, but that provide a tangible example of what is meant by the term of information overload.

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[6] Macagno F., Bigi S., 2018, *Types of Dialogue and Pragmatic Ambiguity*. In: Oswald S. et al., *Argumentation and Language — Linguistic, Cognitive and Discursive Explorations.* Argumentation Library, vol 32.
[7] Burn-Murdoch J., 2012, *Study: less than 1% of the world's data is analysed, over 80% is unprotected,* The Guardian website, December 19th, accessed February 3, 2020.

This growing expansion of data and information has caused our span of attention to narrow[8] and it has led us to fall into biases such as attentional blindness or attentional narrowing[9] in order to save time and effort. These phenomena, when applied to the field of pragmatics and to the role of linguistic context, imply that people tend to read in a non-linear fashion, with rapid and discontinuous eye movements and predicting "what comes next" thanks to the sequence of words in the text. This process is explored in Yvonne Bindi's "Language Design"[10], where the author provides examples that highlight how the problematic effects of narrowed attention and lack of an appropriate linguistic context fail to communicate a message effectively.

This means that the sender (which could be, for example, a brand designing its own communication strategy) needs to take into account also the most recent and updated trends concerning reading attitude and attention span in order to create an efficient linguistic context surrounding and supporting the message to be delivered.

1.1.2. Linguistic context in the digital era

Beside the information overload, the development of digital technologies and the diffusion of social networks have brought additional modifications to our language and communication habits - changes which consequently affected and innovated the structure of linguistic context.

The diffusion of social media and microblogging platforms such as, respectively, Instagram and Twitter, and the advent of instant messaging applications like WhatsApp have introduced new languages and communication tools, like the hashtag symbol and emojis. These two elements are now part of our daily digital interactions and play a fundamental role in understanding the context of a message.

Concerning the hashtag symbol, many studies and researches have been conducted in order to analyse its development as a fundamental part of online communication.

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[8] Lorenz-Spreen, P., Mønsted, B.M., Hövel, P. et al., 2019, *Accelerating dynamics of collective attention,* Nature Communications, vol. 10, article 1759.

[9] According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, attentional blindness is defined as a "failure to notice visual stimuli", while attentional narrowing is defined as the "restricting of attention [...] to a small set of information sources with the potential omission of critical, task-relevant information".

[10] Bindi Y., 2017, *Language design,* Apogeo, Milano, pp. 4-5.

Zappavigna (2015)[11], considering the HERMES2013 Twitter corpus containing 100 million words and more than 2.6 million hashtags, proposed a differentiation of their functions into 3 main categories, which are not mutually exclusive: hashtags can perform a textual, interpersonal or experiential role.

The textual function is the basic and fundamental one: hashtags, indeed, are visible social metadata[12] used to enable the search process and to categorize conversations and contents posted online, in order to clarify their belonging to greater sets of information. The innovative nature of hashtags is here represented by the fact that they are defined as "visible" and "social": usually, indeed, traditional metadata is hidden, as its function is merely practical and systematic; hashtags, instead, have become an integrated part of the communication process, incorporated with the message itself. The fact that hashtags are "social" (and thus generated organically by users) is a further proof of their relevance for the digital linguistic context, becoming a new form of punctuation and expression.

The interpersonal role of hashtags, on the other side, performs the function of "negotiating relationships" (Zappavigna, 2015) with other internet users, for example by expressing a "metacomment" about the posted content that can be perceived as relatable by the audience.

Finally, the experiential function serves as an indicator of "what the tweet is about" (Scott, 2018)[13], but without focusing solely on the enabling of the research process: hashtags perform in this sense the act of contextualization, as their meaning or that of the published content or message may not be easily or immediately identifiable by the whole audience being reached.

It is now clear why hashtags have become a relevant element to take into consideration when setting up an efficient linguistic context in the digital era: they are part of the conversation and they are part of the toolset needed to understand a message and give it the appropriate meaning.

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[11] Zappavigna M., 2015, *Searchable talk: the linguistic functions of hashtags*, Social Semiotics.

[12] Metadata are defined as additional information to a primary form of content aimed at a clearer understanding of the content itself once it has been published or archived (Zappavigna, 2015).

[13] Scott K., 2018, *"Hashtags work everywhere": The Pragmatic Functions of Spoken Hashtags*, Discourse, Context & Media, vol. 22, pp. 57-64.

Together with hashtags, emojis are now part of our digital language as well. Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "small digital images or icons used to express an idea, emotion, etc. in electronic communications"[14], emojis derive from emoticons, "pictorial representations of facial expressions using punctuation marks" (Ljubešić and Fišer, 2016)[15]. Emojis are being constantly updated in order to represent more and more places, people and objects and thus enable us to enrich our text-based communication in more than one digital and/or online *locus*.

Given their visual and graphical nature, the role of emojis as part of the context will be further analysed in chapter 2, which concerns paralinguistic and visual context: emojis, indeed, perform the function of substituting paralinguistic components of communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, and so on.

As it has been described so far, there are many components of co-text to take into consideration when setting up a message to deliver. Paying attention to their role can prevent misunderstandings and failed communication in our daily life, and this proves to be particularly relevant for firms and brands aiming to start a conversation with their current and future customers. Setting up a clear, understandable linguistic context is thus a prerequisite for a successful marketing strategy; in the following section, this argument will be further explored with a focus in the fields of branding and advertising.

1.2. LINGUISTIC CONTEXT IN BRANDING

1.2.1. The role of co-text and linguistic environment in branding

According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is defined as an intangible asset characterized as a "name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers"[16]. It is thus a fundamental element to appropriately design and manage in order to gain competitive advantage and communicate product features, services and benefits (Kotler et al., 1999)[17].

[14] Oxford English Dictionary, Third Edition, December 2013.
[15] Ljubešić N., Fišer D., 2016, *A Global Analysis of Emoji Usage*, ACL 2016, p. 82.
[16] This definition is available on ama.org, the official website of the American Marketing Association.
[17] Kotler P. et al., 1999, *Principles of Marketing,* Second European Edition, Prentice Hall Europe, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, p. 570.

A brand can deliver different levels of meaning concerning its products: on this matter, marketing professor and renowned management expert Philip Kotler identified four layers of brand meaning. First of all, a brand can help customers in associating specific attributes to the goods it refers to, creating links and connections with product characteristics; then, it can aid the translation of said attributes into benefits emotionally and functionally tied to the product and to the advantages it will bring to the customer purchasing it; a brand can also be a way to express the buyer's own values, as customers often conduct their purchasing choices according to what they prioritize and appreciate most; finally, a brand can be exploited as a tool to project a personality, which usually matches the (desired or actual) self-image of its buyers (Kotler et al., 1999).

From this point of view, branding can then be defined as the strategy employed to add value to the brand itself and its products, by providing a consistent image across the various channels through which it is conveyed and portrayed. Branding should display the desired attributes and make them easy to identify; it should highlight the benefits available for the customers who will purchase the brand's products, underlining their perks with respect to the competition; branding should also design the appropriate ways to convey the values esteemed by the target customers and, at the same time, it should identify and set up a clear and consistent personality.

As we have seen, there are several elements that, combined together, make up the structure of a brand. Some of these can also be represented by promotional efforts and advertising, to which I will dedicate the section 1.3 of the present chapter in order to provide a more detailed analysis. Moreover, given that the focus of this same chapter is the linguistic context, for the time being I will focus on the aspects concerning the naming of a brand; matters regarding other non-verbal or visual elements of branding, such as tone of voice, signs, symbols, shapes or colours, will be explored in chapter 2, as they are part of the paralinguistic and visual context. Factors pertaining the situational and cultural aspects of branding will, instead, be presented in chapter 3.

The name of a brand plays a fundamental role in marketing: it is the principal and often first element coming in contact with the customers and it is present in many touchpoints along the customer journey. It is a sort of "business card", providing a first-impact impression on the customers and giving the firm the possibility to convey attributes,

values, benefits and personality features of the brand in one or a couple of words; as such, the brand name needs to be chosen and formulated carefully.

It is important to note that brand names are particularly effective in their original language, while many problems and issues arise when translation into a foreign tongue is required following, for example, a brand's international expansion; in this section I will consider both scenarios, starting with the requirements and strategies concerning the naming process in the home country and the role played by linguistic context in this particular case.

Note that, in the following analysis, a broader concept of linguistic context will be adopted: it will not be considered just in its pragmatics definition (as in "what comes before and after a word or sentence"), but it will also be intended as a set including aspects such as spelling and pronunciation or phonetics. This choice has been made in order to include relevant observations by different scholars[18] and, when referring to this wider set, the term "linguistic environment" will be used.

The textual part of a brand is made up of combinations of letters, words, numbers, signs or ideograms (as, for example, in Asian languages such as Japanese and Chinese) belonging to different alphabets. This whole set concurs to the communication of the brand's meaning, complete of its attributes, benefits, values, personality. A brand name should be easy to spell in its native context, but it should also be easy to pronounce because of the relevance of sounds and phonetics in conveying the intended message and in affecting "verbal, auditory and intellectual meaning" (Usunier, Shaner, 2002) [19].

According to research in the area of brand naming linguistics, it has been found that a major part of brand equity is connected, among other things, to the significant peculiarities of the brand name itself (Usunier, Shaner, 2002). An empirical demonstration of this claim can be found in the fact that the message conveyed by many brand names, such as 7-Eleven, can be immediately and clearly understood only by an audience with at least basic command of the brand name's language – for everyone else, it is just a name connected to a set of products and most of its meaning gets lost.

[18] See, for example, Usunier and Shaner's definition of a brand name's linguistic context: "the text, sound, visual cues and meanings associated with […] linguistic cues"; cf. also Liu's "micro-context", defined as "linguistic environment […] including pronunciation, morphological form and 'meaning senses' of a brand name". See footnotes n. 19 and 20 for references.

Let us further explore the 7-Eleven example: the brand name of the renowned convenience stores chain is presented as a combination of a number and a word (which is, in turn, a numeral itself) and it conveys the idea of a service open to extended hours, namely from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., but actually providing 24-hour availability. This type of brand name is not just a mere noun associated to a set of products or services, but it constitutes a clear and concise description of some key attributes and benefits of the store chain.

This first example focuses on the combination of meanings provided by numbers and letters and is more strictly related to co-text in its pragmatic sense: in order to better understand a brand name or part of it, we need to look at how it is structured and the linguistic context in which it is inserted – namely, "what comes before and after" it in a textual sense.

Let's take as a further example the American magazine Better Homes and Gardens. From its brand name, we understand firstly what that it is about living, lifestyle and gardening; however, by looking at the adjective preceding the two main covered topics, the name suggests a further message. This is the fact that the "Homes and Gardens" presented in each feature of the magazine are "better" and preferable, thus implying editorial contents of higher quality and value; the second term of comparison is unspecified and implicit and it is the reader who has to decode who this expression refers to. This occurrence, as a consequence, seems to expand the context in which the brand name is inserted, not taking up the responsibility of directly attacking competitors but, at the same time, underlining the magazine's superiority and quality.

In addition to this interpretation of co-text in branding, as Liu[20] proposes, the linguistic context may be intended to include also morphological form and spelling together with pronunciation and sound. The analysis of such a "linguistic environment" provides interesting insights and suggestions on how to make use of spelling and phonetics to create memorable and successful brand names.

According to Usunier and Shaner, a brand name's spelling and sound are key factors to take into account, especially in the company's home country. First and foremost, the

[19] Usunier J., Shaner J., 2002, *Using linguistics for creating better international brand names*, Journal of Marketing Communications, 8 (4), pp. 211-228.

textual part of a brand name and its spelling can contribute to the designation of the meaning of the name itself; such meaning can be of denotative or connotative nature (Usunier, Shaner, 2002).

Denotative meaning relates to a brand name's capability of identifying and indicate its related product or service; a clear example is the cereal brand All-Bran, defining how its products are made of 100% bran. Connotative meaning, instead, is defined by Usunier and Shaner as an interpretation suggesting key benefits and attributes of the object it refers to; in branding, this occurrence needs to be reinforced through an efficient and effective use of branding techniques, such as promotional efforts and advertising. An example of a connotative name is that of Milka chocolate bars, which, as the brand suggests, are made with natural ingredients such as milk.

Brand names should be easy to spell in order to be remembered and researched by customers (Usunier, Shaner, 2002); however, there are many cases in which successful brand names have been constructed and ideated with wrong or unusual letter combinations. As a matter of fact, in addition to the willingness to be meaningful through denotation or connotation, a company wants its brands to emerge and to distinguish themselves from competitors in order to be recalled and recognized by customers; to do this, it may be a game changer to detach from grammatical and spelling rules.

Take into consideration names such as Toys "Я" Us, Froot Loops or Dunkin' Donuts: all three present misspellings or unusual characters, but the intentions behind such naming decisions are clear and rational. Odd names, indeed, can act as attention-getters while warranting originality and uniqueness[21].

In addition to spelling, also sounds and phonetics play a role in brand naming linguistic processes. When they are concerned, it is important to consider that the sound qualities of a name's phonemes (speech sounds differentiating words) have a symbolic relationship to the object the name itself represents (Usunier, Shaner, 2002). In this area, many observations have been conducted and have led to conclusions such as the fact that names starting with letters like B, C, D or T (plosives) are easier to be recalled and recognized because of the strong sounds that are emitted when they are

[20] Liu J., 2017, *Interpretation and Construction of "Meaning-Senses" within Cross-cultural Context—Extension of Brand Name Translation Theory,* English Language and Literature Studies, 7 (4).

pronounced; or, the fact that K and P (also plosives) are often associated to "funny sounds". These and more phonetic variations inevitably concur to the enrichment of a brand name's message; Usunier and Shaner report the example of three words (*pouf, paf, pif*) used to describe increasing quartz hardness and explains how they, respectively, suggest soft quality, better quality and stronger resistance.

These phenomena also relate to the use of linguistic and especially phonetic devices to suggest and enrich the meaning and desired message of a brand name: alliteration (Kit Kat snacks), onomatopoeia (KaBoom energy drinks), assonance (YouTube) are a few examples of how the combination of spelling and sounds can prove to be extremely evocative, thus concurring to the aim of being remembered and sticking with the customer.

Furthermore, it is important to consider also how pronunciation can play a role in enriching the memorability of a brand name. An example demonstrating the effects of pronunciation in conveying a branding message is represented by the American restaurant chain Chick-fil-A. As it can be easily deduced, the main culinary specialty served on the premises of Chick-fil-A is chicken; however, the name of the brand tells us something else. On the one side, the spelling highlights how the food that is served is of great quality – this is because of the capital "A", standing for Grade-A selection[22]. On the other side, when pronounced out loud, the name Chick-fil-A sounds like "chicken fillet", representing the product that has made the restaurants successful.

The cases and examples presented so far illustrate how a branding strategy that consider both spelling and pronunciation can play a relevant role in communicating the intended message and in creating a brand image, which should then be maintained across the various channels selected by the marketing strategy in order to achieve consistency. Spelling and pronunciation both concur to the creation of a comprehensible linguistic environment and co-text, as they can be a reciprocal support to convey the message itself and because they can help the customer, who is coming into contact with the brand through its name, to understand what is being communicated.

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[21] Malady M., 2014, Off Brands - Understanding the terrible spelling and punctuation in corporate names, Slate website, March 5th, accessed on February 15, 2020.

[22] Dennis A., 2014, *Restaurant branding lessons from the Chick-Fil-A man: S. Truett Cathy*, Nice Branding Agency website, September 9th, accessed on February 9, 2020.

This has proven to be particularly true for Asian languages such as Japanese, Chinese or Korean. As a matter of fact, these languages rely mostly on the use of ideographs, which are in turn based on the basic unit of the character; this is a visual representation made up of strokes and carrying a distinct meaning enclosed in one syllable (Francis et al., 2002)[23]. Consequently, beside considering the overall name and meaning attributed to the brand, in the case of such languages particular relevance should be given also to the visual aspects of the characters employed and to the single meanings of each syllable: in fact, all these aspects concur to the linguistic contextualization of the brand name itself.

An example provided by Francis et al. in the case of Chinese brand names is that of Coca-Cola. The famous American brand producing soft drinks has always been characterized as joyful, happy, capable of bringing people together; these attributes are conveyed by both the Mandarin and the Cantonese names, respectively *ke-kou-ke-le* and *ho-hauho-lohk*, since the meaning of the characters used is "tasty and happy" (Francis et al., 2002). Furthermore, the translation from English was able to retain a sound similar to the original brand name.

1.2.2. The role of hashtags in brand naming and self-branding strategies

Beside meaning, spelling and sound-related considerations, another element could be taken into account when analysing the linguistic context of a brand name, especially since we live in a so-called "digital age"; such co-text component, mentioned also in section 1.1, is the hashtag.

It could be argued that, in order to provide further information about the nature of a service or product offered by a company, the hashtag could be incorporated into the brand name – especially when firms operating within digital or online domains are concerned. However, there are few examples of brands whose name is composed by the hashtag-word combination. This is because issues could arise when, for instance, the company's marketing strategy includes a degree of social media presence: in fact, on most platforms like Instagram and Twitter, the username handle is usually referred to by the use of the symbol @, which has a distinct function with respect to the hashtag;

[23] Francis J. N. et al., 2002, *Executive Insights: The Impact of Linguistic Differences on International Brand Name Standardization: A Comparison of English and Chinese Brand Names of Fortune-500 Companies,*

thus, having a brand name starting with # would make it incompatible with the platform handle, as the simultaneous use of @ and # is not allowed. Another issue related to brand names including the hashtag symbol is the fact that it may be necessary to provide a "written version" of the name itself with the # substituted by the word "hashtag", for example when creating a website domain; the mismatch between the alphabetic and the "symbolized" version of the brand name could generate confusion in the minds of customers, who could perceive the company as lacking consistency[24].

However, there is one example of a brand that has decided to use the hashtag in its name nonetheless: it is the case of *#paid*, an online service focused on providing tools for digital strategists and content creators. The use of the hashtag as part of the name is a decision clearly aimed at highlighting the field in which the company operates, namely that of social media and other internet platforms. However, the website domain of #paid and, for example, its Instagram account (respectively, hashtagpaid.com and @hashtagpaid) are not completely consistent with the brand name; this could create issues in directing the online traffic and visits towards the correct site or social media profile.

Whereas hashtags have proven to be difficult to incorporate into a brand name, even if their presence could enrich its linguistic context given their nature as metadata, they could nevertheless be used for a different form of branding: online self-branding.

With the advent of social networks, the border line separating the categories of users and producers (in this field defined as creators) has become increasingly thin and irrelevant; in most cases, people creating profiles on platforms like Instagram and YouTube are not passive users or "spectators", but they contribute to the quantity of content posted online with photos, videos, artwork and so on. To give an idea of how much content is shared on online platforms, it has been estimated that, as early as 2015, Instagram users posted 216.000 new photos every minute, while Twitter users tweeted 277.000 times[25].

Journal of International Marketing, 10 (1), pp. 98–116.

[24] These observations are provided also by the digital strategist Daisy Qin on the Quora website at webwww.quora.com/Is-it-a-good-marketing-strategy-to-name-a-company-hashtag-something.

[25] Taylor J., 2015, *211 Million: This Is How Much Online Content is Created Every Minute*, Little Jack Marketing website, April 3rd, accessed on February 10, 2020.

The diffusion of user-generated content (UGC) gave rise to the phenomena of self-branding (or personal branding) and micro-celebrity. Self-branding is defined as the "process of turning oneself into a product […], engaging in self-commodification" (Lair et al., 2005)[26]; micro-celebrity, on the other hand, refers to renowned individuals whose fame is relatively circumscribed (in a geographical sense or also referring to a specific cultural niche) and probably short-lived[27].

These two newly formed trends, when related to the internet sphere, imply the construction of one's identity conveyed through to the sharing of original content and interactions with fellow users; thus, the personal image is proposed as a good to be consumed by others in order to obtain social or economic gains (Page, 2012)[28]. Here, branding is not a prerogative of firms and their marketing department, but it becomes a daily activity performed by social media users.

The role of hashtags as branding co-text in this case becomes relevant. According to Page's study, hashtags have become a "crucial currency" in the participatory culture of our digital age; they are an essential tool for those users who want to obtain visibility, and thus they go beyond their basic function of information aggregators. In addition, hashtags concur to the creation of a wider co-text for the posts in which they are used: indeed, their "aggregational" nature allows the content to be reconnected (and thus inserted) into a broader conversation, thus providing further information for the content's understanding.

Consider the case of Twitter, investigated by Page: specific hashtags included in a posted tweet, for example, perform the function of associating that single tweet to a greater set of related content, making it more frequently visible in a sort of "one-to-many" broadcast. This creates a substitute to addressed messages and conversational interactions, positioning the tweet "within a given field of interest or expertise" (Page, 2012). This process contributes to the construction of a user's intended image and identity and is easily found and replicated on other platforms as well, such as Instagram.

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[26] Lair, D. J. et al., 2005, *Marketization and the Recasting of the Professional Self,* Management Communication Quarterly, 18 (3), pp. 307–343.
[27] Definition adapted from the Collins online dictionary.
[28] Page R., 2012, *The linguistics of self-branding and micro-celebrity in Twitter: The role of hashtags*, Discourse & Communication, 6 (2), pp. 181–201.

This kind of branding through the use of hashtags can be employed by companies, too; in many cases, it is also a way to convey the brand's payoff or catchphrase, which can be considered as a more literal expression of linguistic context in branding.

1.2.3. Payoffs as branding co-text

So far, it has been mentioned how an efficient linguistic context can be created and supported with the use of easy and memorable brand name spelling and by taking into account the effects of pronunciation and sound in conveying the intended message and portraying the brand image; the role of hashtags in self-branding cases has also been shown. However, in section 1.1, we have defined co-text also as "what comes before and after" a certain word or phrase. In the case of brand names, this broader linguistic context can be identified with the payoffs accompanying the name or logo of the company.

A payoff, in this sense, completes the message conveyed by the brand name and helps customers to understand it. It is defined as a variant of a branding slogan: a short, memorable sentence that may involve figures of speech, linguistic deviations, intentional misspellings and that encloses a persuasive strategy aimed at highlighting the benefits and attributes of the brand and its products.

Payoffs constitute an opportunity for brands to develop their own unique vocabulary, while maintaining consistency in terms of image, identity, personality. They can also be a way of conveying the brand's tone of voice, a form of paralinguistic context that will be further explored in chapter 2.

By enhancing brand awareness through recall and recognition, payoffs also contribute substantially to brand equity, increasing the chances of gaining competitive advantage and differentiation. All these functions and advantages are summarised in figure 1.1, a visual map developed by Abdi and Irandoust in 2013[29] referring to slogans as a wider set, but applicable also to the role of payoffs.

[29] Abdi S., Irandoust A., 2013, *The importance of advertising slogans and their proper designing in brand equity*, International Journal of Organizational Leadership, vol. 2, pp. 62-69.

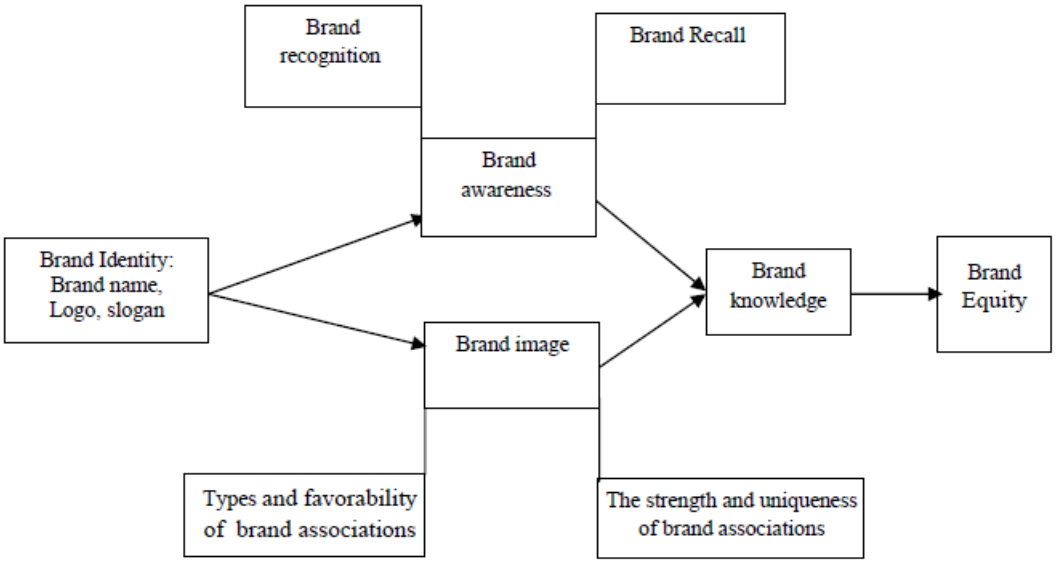

Figure 1.1. Relationship between brand equity and advertising slogans (Abdi, Irandoust, 2013)

As previously mentioned, payoffs also affect and construct the linguistic context of a brand name. Consider, for example, the American fast food chain KFC. These three letters stand for Kentucky Fried Chicken, which is the main product offered on their premises; however, supposing that a customer is coming into contact with the brand name for the first time through, for example, a website banner, they hardly suggest anything. Not even the logo would be of any help in distinguishing the type of offer proposed by the company: it represents, indeed, a smiling middle-aged man with a white shirt and a red apron, with no apparent reference to the brand's products.

Supposing that there are no further indications about the nature of the company except for name, logo and payoff[30], one could look at the latter to obtain some clarification: in the case of KFC, the catchphrase is "It's finger lickin' good". This sentence clearly refers to food, as the action of licking one's fingers is often performed after a good meal; this further suggests that said meal is to be consumed without cutlery, a peculiarity of most fast foods. The deduction following these observations is likely to direct the customer towards a more or less correct interpretation of the company's offer.

[30] Of course, in an everyday scenario, there could be other elements accompanying the brand name and facilitating the understanding of its message and offer; for example, there could be pictures of the menu or other environmental indicators, but these are part of, respectively, the visual and situational context and thus go beyond the purpose of the current chapter.

In the previous example, the linguistic context surrounding the acronym KFC proved to be relevant in identifying the literal meaning of the brand name; in some cases, the payoff and its function as linguistic context can also enrich the message that the company wants to convey to its target audience.

Consider, for example, the subscription service Dollar Shave Club. The brand name is already quite clear in defining what the company is about: male-targeted shaving and grooming products, delivered on a monthly basis. No further literal comprehension would be needed here, but the Dollar Shave Club has decided to incorporate into its branding strategy also the payoff "Shave time. Shave money". Such a catchphrase has a double function: on the one hand, it reinforces the literal meaning of the brand by using the word "shave" twice, also making use of the strategic expedient of repetition to facilitate brand recall; on the other hand, it brings forward two benefits of the product offering, as customers will be able to save time and money thanks to the monthly subscription. The wordplay around the two words "shave" and "save" is also an additional way to attract the attention of the targeted audience.

Of course, different degrees of creativity (or, on the contrary, simplicity and immediateness) can be attributed to payoffs during their textual and verbal formulation; literary devices such as metaphors, wordplay, ambiguity can be also applied. Given that, in addition to being brand name enhancing tools, payoffs can be considered part of advertising and promotional efforts, all these topics and strategies will be further explored in section 1.3, where the role of linguistic context for ad-hoc advertising campaigns is presented.

So far, linguistic context has proven to have a relevant role in branding from many points of view: from brand names, to digital domains and personal branding strategies, to payoffs. However, there is an issue that is common to all these research areas and that is particularly tied to linguistics: the translation of branding elements into foreign languages, in which the linguistic context of both source and target language plays a fundamental role.

1.2.4. The relevance of linguistic context for branding translations

Many of the brands and companies that conduct their business today have chosen to pursue an international strategy. Expanding outside one's origin country is not an easy and immediate task: beside the numerous operational adjustments, many branding-related activities need to take place to eventually adapt and tailor a company's image and identity to the new, targeted locations in order to maintain global consistency and positioning. These improvements include, among other factors, linguistic, cognitive and cultural implications, as different countries are characterized by diverse languages, mindsets and cultural backgrounds; in this section, the aspects concerning the branding-related linguistic context will be explored – in particular, the analysis will focus on the translation of brand names and on the role played by co-text in this circumstance.

As it has been previously demonstrated, brand names are used to identify and aid the recall of a set of products offered by a company, especially in order to differentiate it from competitors; moreover, brand names represent a way to convey a message concerning the benefits, attributes, values, personality of the products and the company. Given the importance and the impact of this branding component, many firms decide to adapt it across the countries in which they operate to appeal to each location's background.

However, translating a company's brand name and/or its attached slogan (and the degree to which the translation is operated) is not a default choice: there may be cases in which the brand name, maybe even together with its related product offering, is standardized and proposed without changes to the new market. There is, of course, a justified reasoning behind this choice and it will be explored further down in this section. But let's first analyse the cases in which translation is the preferred path.

It is important to note that the translation of a brand name from a language to another is to be performed by taking into account multiple dimensions that are intertwined together; as a matter of fact, macro-meso-micro context of both source language and target language should be relied on (Liu, 2017). Liu uses the terminology "macro context" to describe those parts of the source language referring to the brand name's social and cultural background; "meso context", instead, concerns to the branding decisions made by the company, while the "micro context" is an expression of the

linguistic environment surrounding the brand name. This last type of context is the object of the current section.

A first aspect of the linguistic environment that could be taken into account when translating a brand name is constituted by the modality of object categorization employed by people in different countries.

In a research paper by Carnevale et al.[31], this topic is explained by mentioning the structural differences between Western languages like English and Asian ones such as Mandarin. The latter languages, indeed, make use of classifiers associated to object names, thus providing a reference point for categorization; in this case, people tend to perceive two different items as similar if they share a classifier, while Western language speakers often rely on taxonomy for object classification. An example provided is that of Chinese children associating "bananas" with "monkey" because of a thematic relationship, in contrast with American kids preferring the association of "monkeys" with "pandas" based on their taxonomic belonging to the "animal" category (Carnevale et al., 2017).

This first linguistic consideration can be useful for brands that expand globally, as it provides firms with tools aimed at a better understanding of the linguistic preferences and tendencies of the targeted country.

In addition, a company may want to look at whether the brand name already exists in the target country, for example as a word in use, and which meanings are already attached to it. An example is that of the "Mist Stick" curling iron by Clairol: even if it sold well in the US, once it was proposed on the German market it became hard to convince customers to buy it – this occurred because the word "mist" already existed in Germany, and it meant "manure" (Brooks, 2019)[32].

Moving on, an additional consideration may refer to the relationships between pronunciation and word meaning; this is relevant in terms of linguistic context if we consider it in a broader sense with respect to its pragmatics definition, thus accepting Liu's and other scholars' inclusion of phonetics and spelling in the "linguistic

[31] Carnevale M. et al., 2017, *Brand linguistics: A theory-driven framework for the study of language in branding*, International Journal of Research in Marketing, 34 (2), pp. 572-591.
[32] Brooks R., 2019, *Translating Brand Names for International Success*, K International, July 8th, accessed on February 13, 2020.

environment". As previously mentioned, indeed, the phonetics of a certain word can help to convey further information, so during translation of brand names it may be important to maintain this aspect when considering the target language.

An example clarifying this concept is provided by Liu in his 2017 study. In 2009, the Microsoft research engine Bing was released and, of course, the company wanted to expand its related promotional efforts in China as well as in other locations. The name "Bing" thus needed to be translated, but the main issue was that it sounded the same as the character meaning "disease"; in order to avoid any negative associations, Microsoft decided to create a word with a sound similar to that of the English brand name (even if it was not exactly the same) but that could not be interpreted as "disease" – so, Bing's Chinese translation became "biying"[33], which means "must answer".

The previous example highlights how pronunciation and phonetics, when moving from a language to another, can affect a brand name and how in some cases it may be necessary to sacrifice part of the literal translation in order to preserve the original meaning and message. This issue will be explored again in the next chapters, but from different points of view.

The Bing example also brings forward the issue of choosing between transliteration or transcreation when translating. On the one hand, transliteration is intended as the process of reproducing either the original brand name's sound or spelling in the target language script – a decision that may lead to the loss of meaning. This was the option selected by Adidas, whose Chinese translation "Ādídásī"[34] sounds like the original name but does not allow any specific or relevant meaning in Chinese.

On the other hand, transcreation is the path chosen by Microsoft with Bing: it is the act of recreating the brand name, sacrificing some aspects of its spelling or phonetics, but maintaining and/or conveying a specific message or meaning.

Of course, in some cases, there may be the chance of maintaining both the sound and the meaning of the original name throughout the translation process. This is the case of

[33] Roman alphabet transcription of the corresponding Chinese character.
[34] Roman alphabet transcription of the corresponding Chinese character.

Nike, translated into Chinese as "nài kè"[35]: the pronunciation is almost the same and the meaning of the translation is "endurance" (Brooks, 2019).

These linguistic strategies for translation can be applied to payoffs as well, since they are also part of the "verbal" sphere of branding. Here, the translation issues and need for carefulness are magnified: in fact, instead of a simple word, there is a whole phrase to turn into another language and undesired meanings or messages may be harder to avoid.

Let's consider KFC once again: the company, indeed, has an instance of a payoff translation gone wrong in its branding history. When the fast food chain entered in the Chinese market in the late 1980s, the catchphrase "It's finger lickin' good" got translated into what turned out to have the meaning of "Eat your fingers off!". This translation mistake led to a poor performance of the KFC point of sales in that country[36].

Not taking into consideration the linguistic meanings and implications of the target tongue can thus be detrimental to firms seeking to expand beyond their home country. Of course, translation does not pertain solely to linguistic aspects, but it must take into account also the sociocultural elements embedded in the meaning of certain words and in the target country's background. These factors will be explored further in chapter 3, which is relative to cognitive context.

As previously mentioned, translation is not a default choice: in some cases, it may not be needed, especially when the country-of-origin effect is involved. In this case, proposing a brand name in a new geographical market while maintaining its original language could prove to be an advantage: this occurs because people may be inclined to associate specific positive attributes to certain countries.

For example, according to Future Brand's 2012-2013 report, Italy ranked first in the country of origin effect dimensions for food and art and culture[37]; thus, for example, an Italian food brand presented abroad with its original name may give rise to positive associations related to this country and convey and ensure the quality of its products. France, instead, is typically related to concepts such as sophistication or *savoir vivre*

[35] Roman alphabet transcription of the corresponding Chinese character.
[36] Schooley S., 2019, *Lost in Translation: 10 International Marketing Fails*, Business News Daily online, August 12th, accessed on February 17, 2020.
[37] Future Brand, 2013, *Country Brand Index 2012-13*.

(Carnevale et al., 2017); thus, French-sounding names such as Dior or Chanel may find that they can take advantage of this correlation for their expansion strategies.

So far, it has been shown how the acknowledgement and understanding of the linguistic context, both in its pragmatic sense and from a broader point of view including factors such as spelling or pronunciation, is a prerogative of branding strategies. In addition, it can play a pivotal role also in the field of advertising, considered as a side branch of branding itself. This topic will be discussed in the next section.

1.3. LINGUISTIC CONTEXT IN ADVERTISING

1.3.1. The role of co-text and linguistic environment in advertising

As mentioned in the previous sections of the current chapter, advertising is considered one of the main aspects of branding, as it participates in the construction and communication of a coherent brand image.

Advertising is defined as any kind or form of public announcement with the aim of attracting and directing people's attention to the attributes, availability, costs of certain products or services (El-Dali, 2019)[38]. In particular, it is important to underline how the central element defining adverts is the presence of a "conscious intention behind the text" aimed at providing some kind of material or intangible benefit to the ad creators or to their image (Goddard, 2001)[39]. In addition to these features, advertising also requires a certain degree of participation by the audience, as some process of message decoding and, more generally, of interpretation is needed to grasp the meaning of each promotional effort.

Advertising can belong to one of three main sectors (El-Dali, 2019): consumer advertising, aimed at promoting commodities or services to a general audience; trade advertising, focused towards businesses and professional actors and making use of specific B2B media; public relations advertising, promoting society-related or political issues to communities or citizens. Each category presents specific requirements and tactics in order to successfully convey the intended message; thus, for brevity's sake, the

[38] El-Dali H. M., 2019, *The Language of Consumer Advertising: Linguistic and Psychological Perspectives*, Studies in Linguistics and Literature, 3 (2).
[39] Goddard A., 2001, *The Language of Advertising*, Routledge, London, p.7.

focus of this thesis will be only on consumer advertising, as it is the most widespread and illustrative.

Typically, advertisements are presented as combinations of various elements, which help their contextualization and direct the audience towards the correct interpretation of their meaning: headline, illustration (which, according to the chosen medium of communication, can be visual and/or audio), body copy, slogan or pay off, product name and other optional details (Piller, 2003)[40]. In addition, each advert can be distributed through various media, for example via print, radio, television, outdoor billboards or the internet; the medium is chosen according to the target audience to be reached and to which tool will best emphasize its components and message.

As figure 1.2 depicts, when put together, the components mentioned above set up the basic framework of advertising communication (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001)[41].

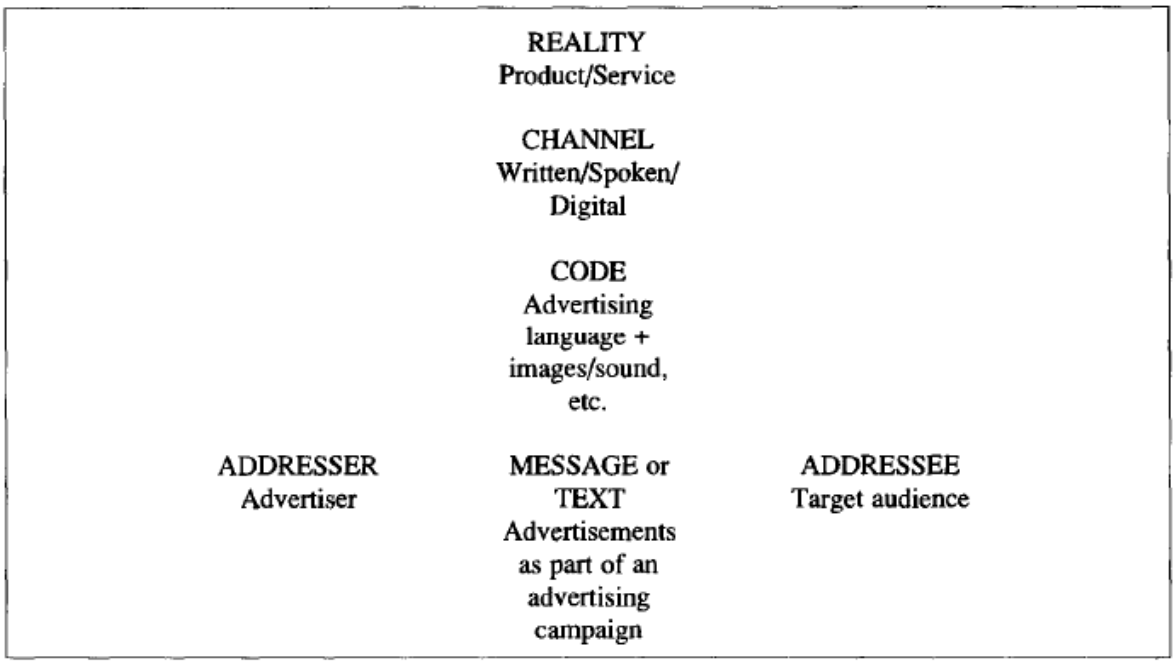

Figure 1.2. Pragmatic elements of advertising communication (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001)

[40] Piller I., 2003, *Advertising as a site of language contact*, Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, vol. 23, pp. 170-183.

[41] Fuertes-Olivera P. et al., 2001, *Persuasion and advertising English: Metadiscourse in slogans and headlines*, Journal of Pragmatics, 33, pp. 1291-1307.

These pragmatic elements concur to the creation of part of the advert's context; this section will focus on the textual part as it is the main participant in the setting up of the ad's co-text and linguistic environment, while the other factors (including those making up the paralinguistic, visual and extralinguistic context) will be analysed later in related chapters.

Before diving into the main features and strategies concerning the advertising linguistic context and environment, it is important to note that advertising can be conceived as a textual genre because of its specific peculiarities and formulations. According to Bazerman[42], genre is defined as a "socially recognized, repeated strategy for achieving similar goals" in socially comparable situations, thus highlighting the presence of a communicative aim. This view is shared also by Cheung[43], who underlines how such aim in advertising is twofold: on the one hand, adverts want to *inform* about the product or service they are about, on the other hand they also have the purpose of *persuading* the audience to purchase said product or service. These two goals can be more or less explicit in each promotional feature, but they are normally recognized by the viewers of the ads; thus, thanks to these identifiable functions and to the form in which they are presented, the message is classified by its recipients as belonging to the advertising genre.

The "genre decoding" process is aided also by context, which interacts with the ad text and its rhetoric in order to better convey the message and respond to a social need. The presence of context (and co-text), indeed, allows the identification of similarities in textual patterns (Cheung, 2010): this means that context enables the audience to interpret the advert correctly. In order for this process to be efficiently conducted, however, particular attention needs to be paid to the construction and setting up of the (linguistic) context itself.

As it has been defined at the beginning of this chapter, the linguistic context (or co-text) in a pragmatic sense is composed by the preceding and subsequent words or sentences of a text or a conversation; moreover, when morphology and phonetics are added to the picture, the term linguistic environment has been adopted. When looking at these two

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[42] Bazerman C., 1988, *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin.

[43] Cheung M., 2010, *The globalization and localization of persuasive marketing communication: A cross-linguistic socio-cultural analysis,* Journal of Pragmatics 42, pp. 354-376.

factors and their influence in the realm of advertising, it is possible to discern different verbal strategies, techniques and devices that have been used to strengthen the communicative force of promotional efforts.

A proof of how much the linguistic context and environment can help to convey an advertising message is found in a 1994 pragmatics study by Myers[44]. The scholar, indeed, has distinguished three advertising periods in history; these periods are characterized by different aims, which are contextualized and communicated through the application of different linguistic and textual devices.

The first period identified by Myers is set in the 1890s, during which brands as we think of them today started to be more and more diffused and the main goal of advertisers was to attract the audience's attention while depicting attributes and price of products; the main device applied at the time was the use of a literary and scientific language paired with parallelisms, rhymes and repetitions, which allowed the ads to stand out from the competition. The second period goes from the 1920s to the 1960s and focused on the association of social meanings to brands; such meanings were conveyed through conversational tones and narrations, linguistic associations and metaphors. The third and final period started in the 1960s and has been more and more concerned with consumers, with adverts making use of devices such as humour, wordplay and irony.

This advertising periodization demonstrates the importance of linguistics contextualization; an additional argument supporting this thesis is provided by Leech in his 1966 research study[45]. He, as a matter of fact, identifies and introduces four fundamental factors that are required to create a successful advertisement and that focus on its linguistic context. The first one is the attention value, a side of advertising that has been already mentioned: promotional instances need to attract the attention of the audience and they can do so by, for instance, breaking linguistic conventions (through devices such as misspellings, neologisms, wordplay…). Then, adverts should be easily readable in order to maintain the previously earned attention: they need to convey simple and clear information with an informal, colloquial language that diminishes the distance between writer (the advertiser) and the reader (the customer), who is often addressed directly with deixis. Furthermore, the advert needs to be

[44] Myers G., 1989. *The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles,* Applied Linguistics, 10(l), pp. l-35.
[45] Leech G., 1966, *English in Advertising*, Longman, London.

memorable and familiar, a goal that can be achieved through techniques such as repetition of words, sounds, grammatical structures. Finally, the ad should be charged with selling power, expressed by calls to action or imperatives.

In light of these initial theorical considerations, the following section will focus on the analysis of the mentioned linguistic devices in detail, highlight their role as co-text and linguistic environment components in conveying a promotional message and easing its interpretation.

1.3.2. Linguistic devices in advertising

When making decisions concerning the linguistic aspects of an advertising, there are some strategies that can be applied in order to convey the intended message as efficiently as possible, to stand out from competing promotional efforts, to be recalled and remembered and, finally, to persuade customers to purchase the advertised products or services.

First of all, a brand can decide to create its very own language, a strategy that can be particularly helpful in maintaining a coherent and recognizable image across all the channels employed for promotion. A brand-specific nomenclature is, indeed, identifiable regardless of the linguistic context (Piller, 2003) and thus is able to give rise to almost immediate associations between terms used in advertisements and the relative brand and products.

Starbucks represents a clear example of a brand making use of a personalized language and vocabulary. Terms like “baristas”, “latte”, “venti” and so on are specific of their coffee shops and are often featured in their advertisements worldwide, as they represent linguistic trademarks of the company (Piller, 2003).

In other instances, the language used by a brand in its advertising campaigns may not be original, but, rather, it may borrow words and terms from foreign languages or even mock them. Piller brings forward as examples the use of anglicisms and English slogans in German advertising, such as the 2003 Douglas campaign featuring the sentence “Come in and find out”, and the use of a final “o” as suffix in different expressions (such as “el cheapo” or “no problemo”) to imitate the Spanish language. In particular, while the

use of word loans may take advantage of country-of-origin effect and positive associations to the "linguistically mentioned" country, the use of mock language may not be always positively accepted by the advertising audience: it may be seen as a form of verbal derision or, in some cases, even racism.

A further strategy concerning the setting up of the linguistic context in advertising is constituted by verbal framing, which may influence consumer behaviour. Verbal framing is related to the framing effect bias, defined as a process leading individuals to interpret the meaning of a message according to how information is presented to them; thus, different constructions of the same content can give rise to different interpretations of the content itself[46]. As explained by Carnevale et al. (2017), for example, framing a sentence through the use of imperatives (and thus conveying assertive messages) has proven to be more powerful when the aim was that of motivating consumers or directing them towards a specific action – a case provided is that of one of Greenpeace's campaigns, whose slogan was "Stop the catastrophe". Rhetorical questions are another instance of verbal framing, as they convey a sense of "openness": by asking a question instead of using direct and persuasive expressions, the advertisement delegates the final purchase decision to the viewer, who thus feels less pressured and thus more inclined to a positive reaction to the promotional message - an instance that, however, seems to occur mainly when the brand behind the advert is liked by the viewer (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, 2004)[47].

Finally, advertisers often make use of "buzz words" in order to convey the advertised product's unique selling proposition – that is, the distinguishing quality that turns the product itself into an unmissable, "must have" good to purchase. In this sense, buzz words help to create a connection with the customer as they play the role of immediate indicators of the product's most relevant features (Goddard, 2001). Interestingly, buzz words relate to topics that may change over time, according to what the worldwide trends and consumer inclinations are in a given moment; for example, given the rise in sustainability efforts and interest that has developed in the last few years, brands may focus on using buzz words such as "green", "sustainable", "eco-friendly" in their

[46] Baptista R., 2018, *Effetto framing: implicazioni per il marketing e per la comunicazione*, Inside Marketing website, February 9th, accessed on February 19, 2020.

advertisements, thus providing a co-text that inserts itself into the current cultural and historical context. An example of this strategy is that of The Body Shop 2019 catalogue advertisements, in which a line of perfumes was defined as being "Iconic, modern, cruelty free": including the words "cruelty free" in the product description provides further information about the values of the company and highlights how the brand is active in participating in sustainable practices.

In addition to these observations, Leech (*English in Advertising,* 1966) also provided an analysis on the specifics of "advertising grammar". Concerning this topic, he firstly noted the presence and recurrence of disjunctive syntax, which consists of sentences without subjects or verbs; various examples of this occurrence related to the beauty industry are provided in a 2013 research study by Kaur et al.[48]: one for all is the use of expressions such as "fiber-rich formula" and "vitamin E derivative" related to a Silky Girl mascara. The aim of disjunctive syntax in advertising is that of simulating conversational language in order to establish a closer relationship with the audience (Kaur et al., 2013).

Leech also noticed that in the advertising language certain words were used with a lower frequency (namely articles, pronouns, auxiliaries), identifying also a preference for the use of nouns rather than verbs or adjectives (El-Dali, 2019). This latter case of "noun favoritism" can also develop into an adjective-to-noun transformation with the aim of achieving a "striking effect" (Harbeck, 2014)[49]: positive but intangible attributes, when turned into nouns, become tangible and physical qualities that can be obtained when purchasing the product they are associated to. As an example, consider the "Spread the happy" slogan by Nutella: the concept of "happy" in this catchphrase is embodied by something that can be spread and consumed, a trait belonging also to the hazelnut cream being advertised.

Beside general linguistic strategies such as the ones mentioned so far, there are more specific devices related to co-text and linguistic environment that can be applied to advertising. Said devices can be of either phonological or semantic nature.

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[47] Ahluwalia R., Burnkrant R., 2004, *Answering Questions about Questions: A Persuasion Knowledge Perspective for Understanding the Effects of Rhetorical Questions*, Journal of Consumer Research, 31 (1), pp. 26–42.

[48] Kaur K. et al., 2013, *Beauty Product Advertisements: A Critical Discourse Analysis,* Asian Social Science, vol. 9.

[49] Harbeck J., 2014, *How advertisers trick your brain by turning adjectives into nouns*, The Week website, May 13th, accessed on February 18, 2020.

The main phonological advertising strategies are rhymes, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia – all endowed with mnemonic effects and advantages (Skorupa, Dubovičienė, 2015)[50]. These devices make use of the repetition of sounds, words or single letters (vowels for assonance and consonants for alliteration) in order to make slogans or catchphrases easier to be recalled and to associated to their related brands and products. Onomatopoeia, for example, also reinforces the meaning conveyed by reproducing sounds connected to what is being advertised: for instance, the Rice Crispies' slogan "Snap, Crackle, Pop", by imitating the sounds made by breakfast cereals when consumed, highlights a unique, specific and consistent attribute that is valuable and appealing to the target audience (namely, the crunchiness of the product)[51].

On the other hand, semantic advertising strategies are personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy, euphemism and apostrophe (Skorupa, Dubovičienė, 2015). These devices exploit meanings and interpretations to create positive associations and emotional appeal, making use of figures of speech often found in literature and poetry. Personification, for example, assigns human characteristics and qualities to the advertised object, making them more relatable and real for the target audience; or, metaphor suggests product attributes through an implicit comparison. An example of the latter linguistic device provided by Skorupa and Dubovičienė is the Esso slogan "Put a tiger in your tank": in this sense, fuel is implicitly compared and associated to a tiger in order to convey its attributes of reliability, durability and power.

Of course, semantic strategies often need some interpretation effort by the viewers coming into contact with them, as advertising making use of such devices do not have to be taken literally. In this case, context is the key to a correct decoding of the intended message: linguistic, visual, situational and cognitive cues can hint and explain the expressions used in the promotional effort at hand. In the Esso case previously mentioned, for example, the presence of the word "tank" in the slogan suggests that the sentence is referring to the specific semantic area of vehicles and fuel; this observation would be further reinforced by visual or extralinguistic aspects, such as the knowledge that the Esso logo once presented the cartoon of a tiger.

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[50] Skorupa P., Dubovičienė T., 2015, *Linguistic characteristics of commercial and Social advertising slogans*, Philology, Educology, 23 (2), pp. 108–118.
[51] Sims B., 2015, *Pleth's Choice: Top 10 Slogans*, Pleth website, July 2nd, accessed on February 19, 2020.

Included in the set of semantic strategies, we can also find puns based on polysemy and homonymy and, thus, the use of ambiguity and wordplay. Puns, indeed, can convey more than one meaning in the same sentence, leading to humorous effects that can positively impact the target audience of the advertisement in which they are used (Djafarova, 2008)[52]. Puns and wordplay are endowed with ambiguity, which may require the viewers to actively deduce the correct meaning; in Djafarova's research study, this active participation of the audience is compared to the solving of a (linguistic) puzzle, which can be perceived as an empowering and pleasurable experience. However, if the difficulty of interpretation of the pun is too high, it may lead to the misunderstanding of the advertisement, which would then be stripped of its persuasive power: this is why a certain degree of explanation of the wordplay should always be provided in the co-text of the ad at hand.

Consider, for example, the British Airways' slogan "Didn't sleep last flight?": it plays around the word "flight" having a similar sound to "night", thus referring to the difficulty of sleeping comfortably during plane trips. This wordplay is explained and referred to by the subheading "Fly Club World: more beds, more places, more sleep", which also clarifies the underlying message: British Airways is able to provide a comfortable environment for passengers wanting to sleep during their flight. Of course, just as in the case of other semantic devices, puns can be explained also by cues coming from context different from the linguistic one, as it will be analysed in the next chapters of this thesis.

The strategies and components of the linguistic context and environment of advertising described so far are applicable to all subgenres of advertising: from print to television or street billboards, the techniques that have been mentioned can be adapted to the needs and requirements of the chosen communication channel. The next section will provide a brief analysis of the linguistic aspects of a particular advertising subgenre (cited previously in this chapter), as it presents interesting implications relevant for brand communication in the present day: digital advertising.

[52] Djafarova E., 2008, *Why Do Advertisers Use Puns? A Linguistic Perspective*, Journal of Advertising Research, 48 (2), pp. 267-27.

1.3.3. Co-text and linguistic environment for digital advertising

Digital advertising is defined as every promotional action conducted on digital communication channels[53]. It can be classified into display advertising, which is located mainly on websites, social networks, blogs and so on, and search advertising, which is instead focused on promoting products and services on search engines such as Google.

Digital advertising today is mainly based on the use and research of keywords from internet users; thus, advertisements related to a specific word can be found both on search engine results pages (keyword advertising) or on website pages affiliated to the research engine itself (contextual advertising).

Concerning keyword advertising in particular, it consists in sponsored contents and website pages appearing beside organic results on SERPs (the previously mentioned search engine results pages). Focusing on the linguistic context of these kinds of advertisements is a fundamental step in a digital marketing strategy, as it is necessary to identify the research keywords that can be associated to the advertisement and that should then appear in the brief description of the sponsored result. The relevance of words and language in this case is significant: when keyword advertising is concerned, indeed, there is usually no visual support to the sponsored content being displayed on the SERP, as only a title, link and brief website snippet are presented. Thus, it is important to focus on the construction of an efficient advertising co-text, presenting clear and specific information summary in one or two lines, including the words that are most relevant to what is being researched. The aim, of course, is still that of persuasion: the advertisement should lead the user to click on it and visit the related website page.

Keywords are relevant also for contextual advertising: as a matter of fact, it consists in the placement of promotional contents on websites or online pages that are relevant to the product or service that is being advertised. For example, a user may be reading an online article or blog post about makeup and see an advert about a skincare brand right beside it, on the website page – a strategy applied by Olay in 2015. Co-text is relevant in this case because one of the main techniques used to develop a contextual advertising strategy is keywords targeting, often conducted by tools like Google's AdWords; such

[53] Definition adapted from the Glossario Marketing website, accessed on February 19, 2020 at www.glossariomarketing.it/significato/digital-advertising/.

tools employ web crawlers[54] that categorize pages according to semantics and context, so that relevant adverts appear on a website page once a user visits it, all thanks to the co-text and keywords present in the page's content[55].

However, the two SEO (Search Engine Optimization) strategies of keyword and contextual advertising could be improved by taking a more specific approach to the digital linguistic context: indeed, targeting applications and systems tend to consider words as mere "strings" or items, without including in their analysis their meaning in a particular linguistic or extralinguistic context (Rowntree, 2017)[56]. This causes data overload and difficulties in semantic classification, leading to mismatches when digital advertising is concerned; this gives rise to a lack of actionable insights, which is inefficient in terms of marketing. To avoid such issues, technologies making use of Artificial Intelligence are being developed to reintroduce the value of word meaning, which is fundamental to analyse the performance of digital advertising (for example through sentiment analysis[57]).

Digital advertising can, in addition, be conducted also on social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook through organic or sponsored posts. In this case, co-text is relevant not just for the previously mentioned implications concerning the creation of slogans and campaigns, but also for the copywriting process associated to the publication of the visual content that is part of the campaign itself. Posts on social media, indeed, are made up of a visual part (a video or photo that may, in turn, include some degree of text, such as a slogan, wordplay, rhetorical question and so on) and a textual part accompanying it, defined as the "copy". Such copy needs to be redacted by keeping in mind some linguistic strategies and devices that are relevant to and frequent in social media.

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[54] Computer programs retrieving data from websites to index web pages for search engines. Definition adapted from Dictionary.com, accessed on February 20, 2020 at www.dictionary.com/browse/web-crawler.

[55] Ho B., 2018, *Targeting 101: Contextual vs. Behavioral Targeting*, Criteo website, November 1st, accessed on February 20, 2020.

[56] Rowntree L., 2017, *What's in a Word? How Linguistics Can Trasform Digital Advertising*, ExchangeWire website, April 5th, accessed on February 22, 2020.

[57] Sentiment analysis is the "contextual mining of text which identifies and extracts subjective information in source material" and is aimed at identifying the "sentiment" of customers towards a brand through the analysis of online reviews, comments, posts etc. Source: Gupta S., 2018, *Sentiment Analysis: Concept, Analysis and Applications*, Towards Data Science website, January 7th, accessed on February 22, 2020.

First of all, it is important to consider that social media are a powerful tool for brands, as such platforms allow a company to engage into conversation with its current and future customers, thus establishing an emotional connection (Sheriff N. M. et al., 2018)[58]. The language used should then be informal and conversational, in order to decrease the distance between the brand and the target audience of the advertisement; humour, wordplay, addressing the viewer directly, rhetorical questions, provocations are some of the attention-getting strategies that can be used in the copywriting process and that can help in "closing the gap".

Then, it is important to identify the ultimate goal of the post or online advertising campaign in order to create an appropriate and efficient co-text. Such goals may consist in increasing brand awareness, build an online community, boost engagement or persuade people to visit the company's website, where a purchase may then occur. Each goal entails the use of *ad hoc* linguistic devices, such as emotional language or calls to action. Consider, for example, a brand wanting to increase its conversion rate through a social media advertising campaign: in order to achieve its goal through effective copywriting, it may leverage the phenomenon of FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) typical of social media. First appeared in 2011 and subsequently analysed in many studies on the consequences of social media usage, the Fear Of Missing Out is defined as a form of compulsive social anxiety that an individual feels when he believes he might miss an opportunity for a new experience or social interaction (Dossey, 2014)[59]; this need for constant connection is often satisfied by the frequent login into social media profiles in order to be updated on the latest posts shared. A brand may thus make use of words and expressions suggesting urgency, exclusivity and scarcity in its copywriting strategy[60] – a choice adopted by JetBlue Airways in a Twitter copy posted in October 2016, reciting "Thank goodness it's #JetBlueFlashFares day! Book super-low fares now – limited-time only!". In addition to the textual part, a link may be also integrated in the co-text in order to incentivize website visits.

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[58] Sheriff N. M. et al., 2018, *Salient features of customer engagement, visual presentation and copywriting for effective social media marketing: an exploratory perspective,* Journal of Academia UiTM Negeri Sembilan, 6 (2), pp. 28-37.

[59] Dossey L., 2014, *FOMO, Digital Dementia, and our Dangerous Experiment*, Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing, 10 (2).

[60] Naylor T. J., 2019, *4 Super Effective Strategies for Writing Copy for Social Media*, Social Media Today website, March 20th, accessed on February 20, 2020.

Finally, as can be seen also in the JetBlue Airways example above, hashtags may be incorporated in the co-text of the advertisement's copy, as they can be useful in stimulating conversations and discussions about the brand or to create a sense of community across the digital channels chosen for the strategy.

Up to now, co-text and linguistic environment have proven to be essential aspects to consider when creating an advertising strategy. The following point of this section will now focus on how these two elements can be influential and helpful in translating promotional content when approaching foreign markets.

1.3.4. The relevance of linguistic context for advertising translations

As it has been analysed in the branding section of this chapter, companies wanting to expand to foreign markets have to take into account also translation issues of their brand names and advertisements, as localization (with respect to standardization) is a strategy that is often chosen when new markets are approached.

The effectiveness of advertising localization is supported by several theoretical and empirical studies. For example, a 2008 research by Puntoni et al.[61] demonstrated, through an analysis of the role of emotional processes in bilingualism, how instructed (non-native) languages are associated with less intense emotional reactions with respect to mother tongues. As a consequence, marketing messages expressed in the same language of the target country tend to be perceived with a higher degree of emotionality, granting further involvement from the audience and a greater possibility of effective persuasion.

Moreover, different languages imply the presence of different mythological, historical, cultural and artistic references, which, if tapped into, are likely to charge the advertising content with more persuasive and convincing power (de Mooij, 2014)[62] and can help in avoiding counterproductive misunderstandings. Of course, when translation is concerned, all the elements mentioned above (which are part of the paralinguistic and

[61] Puntoni S. et al., 2008, *Bilingualism and the Emotional Intensity of Advertising Language,* Journal of Consumer Research, vol. 35.
[62] De Moij M., 2014, *Translating Advertising*, The Translator, 10 (2), pp. 179-198.

extralinguistic context) are intertwined with the co-text of the advertisement; however, in the current section, the focus will be only on the linguistic aspects of translation.

The first aspect that comes into the picture when advertising translations are concerned is that of analysing the language structure of the target country, in order to efficiently adapt any promotional effort directed towards it. A feature of language structure that may be useful to consider for advertising is the role of classifiers, which are typical of Asian languages and function as references for object categorization. Their relevance for an ad's co-text is represented by the fact that classifiers identify either the conceptual or physical attributes of an item and that, as a consequence, they affect mental representations of said items in the minds of individuals (which are, in this case, the audience of the advertisement). This observation, explored and analysed by Zhang et al. in a 2003 research study[63], is empirically demonstrated, for example, in the disposition of retail displays in China: there, department stores usually group items sharing the same classifier, creating associations that would not be observable in Western countries (like TVs and blow dryers). Concerning advertising, instead, the relevance of classifiers is reflected in which attributes of the advertised product are highlighted by the promotional effort. Zhang et al.'s study presents an experiment concerning this thesis: potential campaign photos concerning graspable objects associated to the Chinese classifier 'ba' (signalling graspability) were shown to a Chinese audience with the aim of detecting preferences related to said association. In order to achieve this goal, some pictures presented a hand holding the advertised object, a way to underline its relationship with the classifier and the quality of being graspable; indeed, it was found that this kind of promotional photos was preferred by the audience with respect to hand-absent pictures.

For advertising translations, this means that when a company is planning on displaying a current advertisement in a new country it may be useful to rethink its structure in order to put more or less focus on certain elements, according to the linguistic structure of the target language. In the case described above, the subject of the experiment was made up of campaign photos, which belong to the visual context of advertising; however, such an observation could be easily applied also to the textual part of the promotional

[63] Zhang S. et al., 2003, *Language and culture: Linguistic effects on consumer behavior in international marketing research,* Handbook of Research in International Marketing, pp. 228-242.

content, for example by using words underlining features more relevant to the classifier associated to the product being advertised.

Another factor to consider in a translation process is represented by the fact that, in many cases, a literal translation may not be efficient enough in conveying the desired message in the target tongue. Indeed, specific expressions, puns, wordplays, sayings and other peculiar linguistic constructions may end up being untranslatable or a literal translation of such contents could lead to misunderstandings or undesired reactions from the audience; thus, a process of transcreation may be required.

Transcreation is defined as "the re-building of the entire promotional text so that it sounds and reads both natural and creative in the target language and culture" (Torresi, 2014)[64]; thus, transcreation is a concept strongly related and connected to both linguistic and extralinguistic context. Concerning the former, as Eco (1992)[65] explains in a book about translation experiences, when transferring a word from a language to another there may be cases in which a mere translation may not be enough: definitions, paraphrases, empirical examples may be needed to fully convey the intended message and to "produce the same effect that the original [content] was aiming to obtain", as in respecting the text's intention.

A clear example of how (linguistic) transcreation in advertising should be applied is represented by the translation of the slogan of Haribo, a globally renowned candy and sweets brand. The original German version is "Haribo macht Kinder froh, und Erwachsene ebenso", whose literal English translation is "Haribo makes kids happy, and adults too"; this latter reformulation is not as effective as the original because it lacks the melody and rhyme that make it so memorable and distinctive. Thus, in order to maintain these unique features, the English version sounds like "Kids and grown-ups love it so – the happy world of Haribo"; in this case, the slogan transcreation allowed to communicate the relevant attributes and benefits of the brand and its products (happiness, age-wise likeability) while maintaining at the same time the sound peculiarities. Haribo applied this linguistic strategy also to other markets, like Italy

[64] Torresi I., 2014, *Translating Promotional and Advertising Texts,* Routledge, London.
[65] Eco U., *Dire Quasi La Stessa Cosa*, Bompiani, Firenze, 2019 edition.

("Haribo è la bontà – che si gusta ad ogni età)[66] and France ("Haribo, c'est beau la vie – pour les grands et les petits")[67].

Of course, in addition to considering the linguistic context of an advertisement, the transcreation process should take into account also its visual and sociocultural components; given that, however, these factors go beyond the scope of the current chapter, they will be analysed later on in this thesis.

Finally, it goes without saying that all the strategies and devices mentioned in section 1.2.4 ("The relevance of linguistic context for branding translations") apply here as well: making sure if a word or phrase already exists in the target language and, if so, what its meaning is; ensuring that phonetics and spelling characteristics of slogans and advertising texts do not include double meanings in the target tongue; exploiting, when advantageous, the country-of-origin effect, while making sure that it does not lead to mockery, offensive translations or language misuses.

In the next and final section of the current chapter, the topics analysed so far will be summed up thanks to two case studies concerning linguistic context and environment in branding and advertisement.

1.4. CASE STUDIES

In this final section of chapter 1, two case studies will be provided in order to better understand the practical implications of linguistic context for, respectively, branding and advertising; this way, it will be possible to analyse how the theoretical observations presented so far have been turned into actual strategies applied to real-life brands.

1.4.1. Linguistic context in branding: the case of Nike

The first brand that I believe presents some interesting insights in terms of branding-related linguistic strategies is Nike.

[66] Meaning: "Haribo is the goodness that can be tasted at any age".
[67] Meaning: "Haribo, life is good for adults and kids".

Nike is a globally renowned American sportswear company, which was founded in 1964 by Phil Knight and the Oregon university track-and-field coach Bill Bowerman. Initially, from 1964 to 1978, the company was known as Blue Ribbon Sports (BRS) and its focus was the distribution and sale of running shoes from the Japanese brand Asics, which was known as Onitsuka Tiger at the time. In 1971, Knight decided to try and launch BRS's own brand of shoes; the company already had a logo (the iconic Swoosh that makes Nike products immediately recognisable), but a new name was needed to approach the market.

The research for an appealing brand name started right then[68]. Knight firstly proposed the name "Dimension Six", apparently according to his appreciation for a pop band named The 5th Dimension, but it was not successful among the other employees; two other name proposals were "Peregrine" (a type of falcon) and "Bengal", which followed the naming idea behind the German shoe company Puma, but in spite of the positive associations that could arise by associating a sportswear brand to the powerful attributes of fast and wild animals, none of these proved to be particularly favoured.

The idea of the name Nike came from Jeff Johnson, BRS's first employee: he had recently read a magazine article about brand names and he had noticed how names such as Kleenex and Xerox were able to attract attention and aid brand recall thanks to their brevity (no more than two syllables) and to the presence of "exotic sounding" letters such as Z, X and K. Thus, Johnson decided to stick to these two requirements and he finally came up with the name that is known worldwide today.

Beside being particularly memorable and impactful because of its shortness and the presence of an "unusual" letter (two strategical features that have also been mentioned in the course of this chapter), the name Nike also carries a significant meaning. As a matter of fact, Nike is the name of the Greek winged goddess of victory, who, in mythology, art and sculpture, is associated with strength, speed and success; these three features are very similar to Nike's brand values and vision – which are portrayed, suggested and represented in many advertisements and throughout the brand's imagery.

[68] Source for the upcoming reconstruction of Nike's naming process: Levinson P., 2016, *How Nike almost ended up with a very different name*, Business Insider website, January 19th, accessed on June 24, 2020.

Thus, Nike's brand name is an appropriate example that sums up the theoretical observations on linguistic context provided in section 1.2 of the present chapter: its spelling presents unexpected, attention-getting letters that make it unique and impactful; it is brief and easily memorable and it can be easily pronounced; it carries positive and brand-consistent attributes and associations; finally, when needed, it has been correctly and appropriately translated to approach foreign markets, as it was the case with the Chinese version "nài kè", which signifies "endurance" – a meaning that suits well the brand's set of values.

The idea and strategy behind Nike's brand name have been maintained also in its famous payoff "Just Do It", which complements the brand name and adds further meaning to it while acting as co-text.

The short phrase "Just Do It" was coined in 1988 by Dan Wieden, head of the American advertising agency Wieden+Kennedy[69] in the occasion of Nike's first major tv campaign, which aimed at portraying people practicing different kinds of sports, such as running or basketball. According to Wieden, the idea for the slogan came from the last words of Gary Gilmore, a double-murderer convicted in Utah in 1976 and sentenced to the death penalty; the actual words that Gilmore uttered before his execution were "Let's do it", and it was the "do it" part in particular that inspired Wieden.

Of course, the source of the payoff was not publicly shared or advertised, as it obviously did not reflect any of the values and history of Nike; what Wieden wanted to highlight, instead, was the willingness to "tie up" the vision and core mission of the brand so that it could be communicated through a unifying message addressed to both sports beginners and professional athletes, in order to create a strong connection between them and the brand. Indeed, the company defined the meaning of "Just Do It" as being "universal and intensely personal" at the same time, while also concurring to the creation and the strengthening of the brand's identity.

Linguistically, Nike's "Just Do It" is coherent with the features of the brand name, even if it does not present any particular spelling or unusual letters, as it is concise, impactful and easy to understand, thus aiding brand recall. It also conveys a specific message and

[69] Source for the upcoming reconstruction of the "Just Do It" creation process: Bostock B., 2019, *The sinister story of Nike's 'Just Do It' slogan, which was inspired by the last words of a murderer before he was executed*, Business Insider website, August 10th, accessed on June 24, 2020.

meaning and arises positive and brand-consistent associations, especially thanks to the use of the imperative: indeed, it is intended as a call to action that advocates for the refusal of excuses and the "license to be eccentric, courageous and exceptional", no matter the circumstances (Von Borries, 2004)[70].

Concerning marketing strategies addressed to foreign countries, the "Just Do It" payoff has never been translated: due to its iconicity and meaning-charged nature, it has been difficult for Nike to translate (or transcreate) it into an equivalent, localised substitute. However, some form of meaning integration and enrichment has been conducted for the Chinese market: in 2011 the brand developed a tagline, approximately translating to "Use sports" or "Have sports", to use alongside the usual payoff and convey a more tailored and meaningful message[71]; moreover, in 2016, the brand created a 90-second spot aimed at describing the philosophy behind "Just Do It" to Chinese customers, explaining through a voice-over how "You don't have to do it for the glory" or "You don't have to do it for the boys"[72].

To sum this case study up, it could thus be argued that Nike's payoff acts as the co-text that is necessary to fully comprehend the meaning and associations conveyed by the brand name: in order to gain victory (literally, Nike), you need to act and "just do it".

1.4.2. Linguistic context in advertising: the case of IKEA

In section 1.3.3. of this chapter, the relevance of digital domains and social media platforms for advertising has been underlined and analysed: such channels, indeed, present a significant potential for brands to reach a wide audience with their promotional contents. The case study that I will present in relation to the impact of the linguistic context (or, as in this occurrence, the lack of it) in advertising concerns exactly this field and it relates to the unexpected success of a Facebook post published by mistake by IKEA Italia.

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[70] Von Borries F., 2004, *Who's Afraid of Niketown?: Nike Urbanism, Branding and the City of Tomorrow*, Episode Publishers, Rotterdam.
[71] Source: Anonymous, 2011, *Nike Uses Localization and Li Na to Connect in China*, Brandchannel website, August 1st, accessed on June 24, 2020.
[72] Source: General R., 2016, *Nike Reveals What 'Just Do It' Means in This Insane New Chinese Ad*, NextShark website, August 29th, accessed on June 24, 2020.

Firstly, it is necessary to understand the background of the Swedish furniture company[73]. IKEA was founded in 1943 by Ingvar Kamprad and, at first, it was focused on the sale of common everyday products (such as pens, wallets or stockings) at reduced prices. The first advertisements on local newspapers, together with a mail-order service, appeared in 1945 and in 1948 the first furniture line was introduced in the product range; this led to the creation of the renowned IKEA catalogues, which started to be distributed in 1951. The success of the brand and its home products allowed it to expand, leading to the opening of furniture showrooms (1953) and stores (1958); IKEA was also able to differentiate itself from its competitors by designing furniture for flat packaging and self-assembly, which became a significant part of the brand concept and vision.

Today, IKEA stores are present in 56 countries worldwide. Their products carry Swedish-sounding names, which is a sort of "trademark" for the brand, and they cover all needs and areas of the home, even expanding to technological devices related to domotics. Their advertising strategies range from print catalogues and ads to television commercials, billboards and social media campaigns and they maintain a coherent tone of voice and imagery across all channels.

Of course, Facebook is included in IKEA's digital advertising plan and, usually, the brand page follows all the common practices that have been listed and explained in section 1.3.3 of this chapter: the published posts employ both a visual and a textual part, the copy contains clear information and makes use of an informal and conversational tone, the CTAs (Calls To Action) are tailored to the goal of the post and, occasionally, paid campaigns are activated to sponsor certain content and reach a wider audience.

Thus, what was posted on February 8th of 2019 on the Facebook page of IKEA Italia was perceived as highly unusual[74]: indeed, a post containing only the letters "hhsdjh" appeared on the brand's profile, with no further explanation or visual content that could contextualise or clarify the meaning of the message. Theoretically, a message such as the one just mentioned is likely to be unsuccessful in terms of communication: indeed, it lacks an explanatory co-text, it does not contain any kind of useful information and it is

[73] Source for IKEA's history: *About the IKEA Group* page on the IKEA website, accessed at www.ikea.com/ms/en_JP/about_ikea/the_ikea_way/history/1940_1950.html on June 26, 2020.
[74] Source for the upcoming information: Gallucci A., 2019, *hhsdjh, l'indecifrabile post di IKEA che è diventato virale*, Ninja Marketing website, February 12th, accessed on June 26, 2020.

not easily readable or memorable, thus making brand recall more difficult while being potentially harmful in terms of brand image. However, the misspelling factor of the post attracted the attention of the audience and in a short time the post became viral, obtaining almost 22 thousand likes, more than 3700 comments and more than 10 thousand shares in just a few days – organically and with no further advertising whatsoever.

Apparently, it was exactly the lack of additional information that sparked the wave of engagement and interaction, as the followers of the page tried to make out the meaning of the message; some of them, consistently with the linguistic style and tone of voice of social media, commented the post with ironic references to the brand's key features, wondering for instance if they had to "assemble" the word themselves in order to understand it (clearly alluding to the self-assembly nature of the large majority of IKEA's products) or whether it was the name of a new product (thus referencing to the unusually spelled, Swedish-sounding product names).

The mysterious message became so viral and buzz-worthy that it even turned into a hashtag as people joined the discussion on Twitter, as well. In this case, it could be possible to say that the lack of linguistic context led the audience to create the co-text themselves, initiate an online conversation and thus act as substitutes for the advertisers, as creative reactions were triggered and connections with some of the brand's iconic features were made.

I believe this occurrence to be an exception, albeit powerful. As a matter of fact, as it has been demonstrated throughout this chapter concerning the linguistic context, advertisements usually need extended planning and preparation: it is fundamental to attract the attention of the target audience with surprising elements such as misspellings, but it is also crucial to maintain it through easily readable and understandable information; moreover, brand recall should be aided with the use of repetition and familiarity-based devices, while calling for customer action to sparkle the ad's selling power. If one or more of these elements are missing in a promotional content of any type, it is likely for it to fail in conveying the intended message and in ensuring its correct interpretation – unless, as in the IKEA case, the audience itself steps up and takes a hold of the conversation, creating its own (linguistic) context and interpretation.

CHAPTER 2
PARALINGUISTIC AND VISUAL CONTEXT

2.1. PARALINGUISTIC AND VISUAL CONTEXT EXPLAINED

2.1.1. Paralinguistic context

Words, their co-text and their linguistic environment, as demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis, have proven to be fundamental in both branding and advertising from a twofold perspective: on the one side, they play a relevant role in the construction and set-up of the intended brand image or promotional message, in order for these to be charged with the appropriate meaning and conveyed or communicated successfully; on the other side, these three linguistic elements support the audience, which is made up of current and possible future customers, in the correct understanding of the communicated message or brand image.

However, linguistic context and environment are not the sole players that can affect branding and advertising. As stated by Duranti and Goodwin (1992)[1] in their listing of the dimensions of context, the behavioural environment needs to be taken into consideration as well; Duranti and Goodwin define this concept as the way in which the participants to a conversation use their bodies and actions as tools to frame and organize their talk, thus considering face-to-face human interaction as a "primary exemplar of context".

The relevance of behaviour during conversation is highlighted also by Cook (1992)[2], who states that voice quality, gestures, touch, facial expressions and so on are all elements of context to be analysed for a better understanding of the communication process taking place; such factors are defined by Cook as paralanguage.

Paralanguage, indeed, is made up by all the deliberate or unconscious movements that we perform when speaking to someone; such actions contextualize the message that is being communicated because, whether they are intentional or not, they carry a specific, additional meaning that may reinforce, weaken or even contradict the linguistic one,

[1] Duranti A., Goodwin C., 1992, *Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon*, Cambridge University Press.
[2] Cook G., 1992, *The Discourse of Advertising*, Routledge, London.

which is conveyed by the words that are actually being uttered. Paralanguage, especially when unintended, is indeed very likely to display the speaker's real feelings, emotions, attitudes, interest or annoyance and so on; these are all examples of factors that may be left uncommunicated if one analyses and interprets only the linguistic meaning of the actual utterances.

To understand the weight that paralinguistic context has in a spoken conversation, Cook provides the example of an individual who is sobbing but who, at the same time, is saying "I am not upset"; of course, in this case, the paralinguistic message conveyed by the act of crying outweighs and contradicts the linguistic meaning of the words uttered by the individual.

Paralanguage, as it is easily deducible, can thus carry a great amount of implicit meanings: facial expressions and body movements can, indeed, present themselves in a variety of degrees and instances, which can be hard to paraphrase (Cook, 1992); this could give rise to cases of ambiguity and misunderstandings and the efficient communication of the intended message may be hindered. Paralinguistic instances may also be culture or country specific: the same gesture may be interpreted differently across diverse communities, an important aspect to take into account when translation (especially in advertising) is considered. An example is that of the "thumbs up" gesture, a recognized sign of approval in most Western countries, which is considered offensive in some areas of the Middle East like Iran or Afghanistan[3].

Gestures, in particular, have different specific functions when used during a conversation; Schandorf (2012)[4] provides a classification of such paralinguistic instances, which are defined as "co-speech" gestures and can be endowed with a deictic, imagistic, expressive, rhythmic or emblematic character. Deictic gestures function as indicative or pointing actions (which may be considered as a correspondent of linguistic indexicality[5]) which aim at representing by an implicit or explicit instance relations that can refer to hierarchy, time or space; in other words, deictic gestures physically "point

[3] Anderson D., Stuart M., 2017, *Hand gestures that mean different things*, Business Insider website, July 11th, accessed on February 28, 2020.
[4] Schandorf M., 2012, *Mediated gesture: Paralinguistic communication and phatic text*, The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 19 (3), pp. 319-344.
[5] In pragmatics, an indexical is a "linguistic expression whose reference can shift from context to context" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), as it "refers directly to the circumstances [...] in which an utterance takes place" (Nordquist, 2019).

at" the people, objects, places or time referred to in the conversation taking place. Imagistic gestures, instead, imitate or describe something by the use of hand movements – an example provided by Schandorf is that of mimicking the shape of an hourglass in reference to someone's body. Then, expressive gestures are defined as actions indication a certain emotion or state of mind, like pumping a fist in the air to signal anger or, in a different context, enthusiasm. Next, rhythmic gestures correspond to those motions referencing the "structural aspects of discourse", enhancing the "rhythm" of the speech; an example is that of signalling points of emphasis with the index finger, a practice often found in political oration. Finally, emblematic gestures are nonverbal expressions that are specific to a country; they are, in most cases, easily and directly translatable into verbal correspondents, like the previously mentioned "thumbs up".

Beside gestures, paralanguage can be embodied by speech utterances or sounds that carry no specific linguistic meaning when taken out of the spoken conversation; expressions like "eh", "hey", "uh" or sounds produced by snorts, dental clicks (often transcribed as "tsk tsk") or ejectives may also add meaning and significance to the conversation by acting as modifiers, exclamations, questions or by expressing interest or annoyance (Campbell, 2004)[6]. Schandorf (2012) defines such expressions as "vocal gestures" or "interjections", which are intended as more or less linguistic utterances that permeate "normal conversation in natural human languages". Three properties of interjection are delineated in his research study: the inclusion of items thought of as "non-words"; their independence from syntax; their conveyance of a feeling or state of mind. Of course, contextualization is essential for the sake of interpretation of such instances: the tone of voice adopted by the speaker uttering expressions like the ones just mentioned may be, for example, a useful tool for disambiguation.

Paralinguistic context, however, is not constrained merely to the sphere of spoken communication; instances of paralanguage are often found also in written texts and conversations. Cook (1992), for example, mentions page and letter sizes, handwriting styles, fonts, punctuation and layout as "written" elements of the paralinguistic context, as they participate in the creation of additional meaning.

[6] Campbell N., 2004, *Perception of Affect in Speech – towards an Automatic Processing of Paralinguistic Information in Spoken Conversation*, proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Spoken Language Processing, Jeju Island, Korea, October 4-8.

Concerning this topic, Bindi (2017)[7] states that texts may be also considered as "images" whose typographical components suggest and convey various meanings and contribute to the "sense-making" of the text itself. From this point of view, formatting is seen as a factor that actively contextualizes the content communicated in written form, whose value and meaning can change significantly according to alterations of the character dimensions, paragraph settings, the use of bold or italic, fonts and so on.

In Bindi's book, the concept of synsemia is here introduced: it is defined as the intentional placing of written signs in space, with the aim of communicating a message through the creation of significant configurations. Data tables are brought forward as an example of synsemic writing, since they play an active role in conveying relevant information through their graphical set up.

In addition to the relevance of text formatting, written instances of paralanguage are also represented by the writing style of an author or the "tone of voice" of a text, which may mimic face-to-face conversation and cover most of its purposes (Schandorf, 2012). This particular aspect is relevant for both branding and advertising: written or textual contents related to promotional efforts and brand image represent, indeed, precious occasions to "speak" directly to the company's target audience and, thus, build an enduring relationship. The choice of the tone of voice to be adopted by the brand should, as a consequence, be coherent with the intended relationship that is being set up.

As it will be analysed later in this chapter, textual paralanguage plays an active role in digital environments: from messaging chats to social media, a significant amount of conversations is nowadays conducted online and there exist many tools and devices that allow an accurate rendering of facial expressions, gestures and other instances of face-to-face paralanguage.

Of course, paralanguage is strictly connected to an additional type of context, which can be classified as an in-between category different from (but still correlated to) co-text and the extralinguistic context: the visual context.

[7] Bindi Y., 2017, *Language design*, pp. 8-15.

2.1.2. Visual context

As demonstrated up to this point, the meaning of a text can be enriched and further explained by the words and linguistical elements surrounding the text itself and, in the case of both spoken and written communication, by behavioural and paralinguistic factors. However, there are additional ways to load a message with significance and make its conveyance even more effective while, at the same time, ensuring that it is appropriately understood by the target audience; one of these tactics consists in interrelating words with pictures and visual elements such as shapes, colours, photographs, signs and symbols.

All these pictorial elements make up the visual context and constitute powerful tools of meaning delivering. As Wolf and Stoodley (2007)[8] provocatively state, indeed, we are "not born to read": our brain does not present any area specifically devoted to reading, as it is the case for seeing and speaking; we have been able to teach ourselves how to read because, starting from basic neurological processes, we have the capacity to create new connections between the structures that implement these processes. It is also possible that, in order to read, our brain has been exploiting pre-existent functions, like that of connecting our sight to linguistic concepts. Thus, the relevance of the visual context becomes pivotal in communication.

In particular, when referring to the conveyance of a message and the understanding of its meaning through the use of pictures and images, the correct term to use is that of visual literacy: this concept is defined as a set of vision-related skills and competences that are developed by individuals and that enable them to discriminate, understand and interpret visible cues[9]. As it will be explored and explained in the next section of the current chapter, visual literacy has undergone several developments over time, especially due to the increasing use of digital platforms and social media. In any case, it still constitutes a significant factor when considering visual context.

Including in promotional strategies a study of how visual factors may affect consumer behaviour is particularly important for the fields of branding and advertising because, as

[8] Wolf M., Stoodley C. J., 2007, *Proust and the squid: The story and science of the reading brain*, Harper Collins, New York.
[9] Adapted from the 1969 definition by Debes J.; found in Harrison K., n.d., *What is Visual Literacy?*, Visual Literacy Today website, accessed on March 8, 2020.

Chun and Jiang explain in their 1998 study[10], individuals are equipped with cognitive selection mechanisms that make them able to focus their attention only to a restricted part of the items and phenomena surrounding them. Given the enormous amount of data and stimuli targeting us today, we do not have the strength or the cognitive capability to consider each single piece of information; considering especially visual images and scenes, we cannot take in all their numerous details and features and, as a consequence, we focus only to those aspects that stand out from the rest.

A set of factors increasing the efficiency of attentional distribution have been identified and classified as bottom-up (image-driven) or top-down (volitional). Bottom-up factors may, for example, attract the attention of the viewer by displaying salient or unique characteristics, since the main attention-catching device is the image itself; top-down factors, instead, are more knowledge-based and they are represented in the individual by "search templates" relying on factors such as automaticity, salience or familiarity (Chun, Jiang, 1998).

All these observations can be exploited in a marketing strategy, as they can be helpful tools in directing the attention of the target customers towards the visual elements that the brand wants to highlight. Indeed, as Chun and Jiang explain, the visual context can function as a guide for the distribution of the viewer's attention and the properties of a picture or an image can play a relevant role in the prioritization of certain areas of the picture itself; this overall process is defined in their research as contextual cueing.

In addition, as it is explained by a 2003 study by Bar and Aminoff on cortical analysis[11], it is important to consider the role played by (visual) context in object recognition: as a matter of fact, we tend to cluster objects together into groups and categories whenever they share the same visual environment; moreover, objects that are strongly connected to their context tend to give rise to equally strong contextual associations, even when they are presented in isolation. This may be a relevant observation for advertising, as it could be exploited as a device to facilitate positive associations through the imagery surrounding the depicted product; or, on the contrary, it could be applied to the creation of visual contents that surprise and shock the viewer through the combination of

[10] Chun M., Jiang Y., 1998, *Contextual Cueing: Implicit Learning and Memory of Visual Context Guides Spatial Attention, Cognitive Psychology*, vol. 36, pp. 28-71.
[11] Bar M., Aminoff E., 2003, *Cortical Analysis of Visual Context*, Neuron, vol. 38, pp. 347-358.

contextually unrelated images, with the aim of standing out from the competition and maintaining the attention (and successive recall) of the target audience.

Beside the scientific and behavioural aspects of visual context, there are numerous theories related to visual communication, which is the area that most interests marketing. Such theories are plentiful and multidisciplinary: they cover topics that range from psychology to philosophy, including graphic design, fine and visual arts, semiotics, photography, cinema and so on. If one were to construct a conceptual map of visual communication, as attempted by Moriarty in her 1997 study[12], he or she should consider the basic model of communication as the common thread underlying all these studies; said model is made up by the sender, the message and the receiver and, as Moriarty states, it is encompassed in all its phases by the cultural context, as depicted in figure 2.1[13].

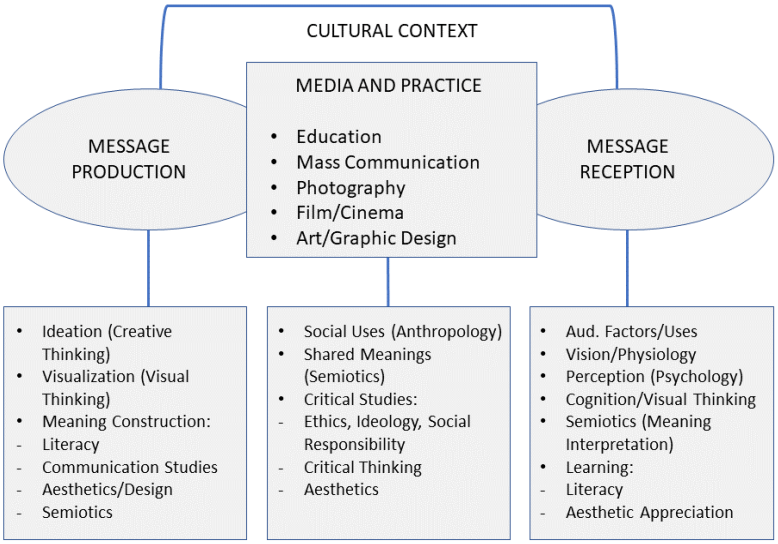

Figure 2.1. A Conceptual Map of Visual Communication (Morarty, 1997)

Of course, for the sake of the analysis conducted in the present thesis, this chapter will refer only to those aspects of visual communication that are relevant to branding and advertising, such as visual layout and disposition, colour associations and aesthetics. Of

[12] Moriarty S., 1997, *A conceptual map of visual communication,* Journal of Visual Literacy, 17 (2), pp. 9-24.
[13] Redone and adapted from Moriarty (1997).

course, these areas of interest refer to both "static" and "dynamic" content, as in, respectively, pictures and videos.

Concerning visual layout and disposition, there exist some techniques that can be adopted in order to attract the attention of the reader, to retain it and to provide cueing tools for a possible learning process. Such techniques are described by Green (1976)[14] in a study concerning the creation of instruction manuals for students, but they can be easily applicable also to other fields, such as advertising.

First, in order to attract the attention of the viewer, the main visual factors to take into account during the development of the content including the intended message are format, simplicity, balance, contrast and the proportion between margins and white space. The format of the page should be appealing, as it should match the patterns of the viewer's eye movement; a ratio that has proven to be particularly efficient in this case is 2:3 (also known as the "golden mean"), which is also found conspicuously in nature. Concerning simplicity and balance, Green mentions how studies on eyeball fixation have found that individuals tend to follow a clockwise viewing pattern, starting from a little above left centre; then, this path is strongly influenced by the disposition of the elements on the page, which should then be as little distracting as possible (hence the need of simplicity) and should accompany the viewer along the content through a balanced and symmetric layout. Contrast can be used to attract attention as well: it can be created by the application of different sizes, shapes, colour shades and textures, which can direct the focus of the viewers towards specific elements of the content. Finally, it is important to manage the amount of white space on the page: according to Green, it should be less than that of the margins, as an appropriately content-filled layout will provide unity and coherence.

The second set of techniques analysed by Green has the aim of holding the viewer's attention to the display. He mentions the Gestalt principles, which will be further analysed in the branding section of the current chapter and which explain how we tend to simplify and organize pictures and images made up my multiple, complex elements; this, as Green states, calls for the display of limited visual information when the goal is retaining the attention of the viewer. Moreover, similarly to the textual parts, the visual

[14] Green E., 1976, *Message design—graphic display strategies for instruction*, Proceedings of the 1976 annual conference of the Association for Computing Machinery, New York, pp. 144–148.

context should be readable and legible, for example in terms of typography; this is essential if we want to avoid distractions or focus loss in the target audience. Finally, the viewer should be guided along the visual content in terms of eye movements: the visual layout should facilitate the process of observation through implicit or explicit "lines", created for instance by an efficient disposition of the pictorial items of the content.

The third and final goal of visual communication as explained by Green is that of learning: of course, when visual devices are exploited, there is usually a message that needs to be delivered to the viewer who, in turn, needs to decode and understand it. This process can be facilitated, for example, by an efficient and appropriate use of cueing devices like colours, shapes and symbols. The former, in particular, can accomplish different functions, such as attracting attention, separating attributes, reinforcing retention, suggesting associations and being aesthetically appealing.

A particularly relevant element to consider for visual communication, in addition to layout and disposition of the message content, is colour. Colour is, indeed, a powerful tool: it is able to give rise to positive or negative associations, to stimulate feelings and emotions in the viewer, to communicate further information. All these functions are especially important for marketing-related strategies, such as those concerning branding (for instance, in the creation of a brand's logo) or advertisement.

Several studies on the theory of colour have been conducted and the overall results and findings of the most relevant researches appear to be consistent. Brengman summarized the main observations on colour theory in her 2002 doctorate dissertation[15]: among these findings, it may be interesting to note how, concerning colour preferences, extreme short wavelength hues such as green and blue appear to be the main favourites in terms of pleasantness, together with red (which is, instead, an extreme long wavelength colour). Differently, hues belonging to the yellow and orange colour set proved to be generally disliked (Brengman). In contrast with this observation, however, we find a 1957 research by Osgood et al.[16], which investigated on the relationship between colours and the object they are associated to: the main finding was that the acceptability of a colour is generally defined by it context in terms of object association. This reverses the previous observation as, empirically, intermediate wavelength hues

[15] Brengman M., 2002, *The Impact of Colour in the Store Environment: An Environmental Psychology Approach*, doctorate dissertation, Gent University.

(such as yellow) were rated as being more favourable when considered together with their associated item.

Thus, when facing a (marketing) decision concerning colour, it is important to make the choice not only on a base of mere hue options, but also considering what objects such colours will be attributed to. Other factors playing a role in colour preference and that should be taken into account in such a decision-making process are, for instance, brightness and saturation: brighter and lighter shades, for instance, seem to be preferred with respect to darker ones (Brengman).

In addition to colour preference, another aspect that is relevant for branding and advertisement concerns the feelings and associations that are connected to certain hues and shades. As Brengman explains, individuals can categorize objects according to colour, following a process based on prior knowledge: for instance, one may include in the set of "things that are green" items such as trees, leaves, grass; this, as a consequence, causes consumers to infer the attributes of a stimulus (object) according to its colour. The example provided by Brengman is that of a green toothpaste in a green package, which may be considered as being healthy, minty and refreshing. According to this reasoning, other common associations may be blue as a synonym for security, trust and wealth; grey as an indicator of success, strength and exclusivity; orange denotating cheapness or distress (Madden et al., 1999)[17]. Of course, such colour associations may vary across cultures: for example, the colour white is often associated with the concept of purity, innocence and also weddings in Western Countries, but in Asian territories it indicates death and mourning[18]; thus, similarly to the decisions concerning the linguistic context, it is necessary to consider the meaning of colours across cultures when developing a branding or advertising strategy.

An additional aspect that can play a significant role in visual communication is aesthetics. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, aesthetics is defined as the "formal study of art", in particular with respect to the idea of beauty[19]; this means that, besides being efficient in the delivery of a message or in the enrichment of the meaning of the

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[16] Osgood C. E. et al., 1957, *The Measurement of Meaning*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana (IL).
[17] Madden T. J. et al., 1999, *Managing Images in Different Cultures: A Cross-National Study of Color Meanings and Preferences,* Journal of International Marketing, 8 (4), pp. 90-107.
[18] Bourn J., 2010, *Colour Meaning: Meaning of the Colour White*, Bourncreative website, December 10th, accessed on March 8, 2020.
[19] Definition adapted from the Cambridge Dictionary website, accessed on March 12, 2020.

message itself, the visual context may also resonate with the viewer in terms of appeal, beauty, attraction. This consideration proves to be particularly relevant in digital domains, as it will be further explored in the following section; moreover, for companies developing a visual strategy, presenting an appealing and consistent image can represent an advantageous choice in order to stand out from competition and aid brand recall.

As previously mentioned, all these elements making up the visual context and concurring to the development of visual literacy have undergone a certain degree of evolution over time; in particular, the introduction of digital means of communication and online platforms such as social media has caused some major changes and adaptations in the application of the notions mentioned so far. The next section will thus focus on how visual context, together with the paralinguistic one, operates in the current digital era.

2.1.3. Paralinguistic and visual context in the digital era

With the introduction and diffusion of the internet and social media, nowadays a substantial amount of communication is conducted online and/or digitally. Text messages, Facebook posts, Instagram stories, tweets: these are just a few of the digital mediums used by people to communicate with each other in the era of smartphones and other technological devices. Thus, as our analysis focuses on the role played by different types of context in (marketing) communication, it is important to analyse how contextual factors have evolved and adapted to these new forms of digital interaction.

Firstly, in light of the observations conducted so far, one would reasonably wonder whether elements of the paralinguistic context can be transposed to the digital domain: in other words, is it possible to convey behavioural gestures, emotional or facial expressions and typographical choices through digital and online media?[20]

[20] When "digital communication" is mentioned in this section, it is intended as being of the textual type; of course, there are digital applications and platforms that allow people to communicate through audio and video (e.g. Skype or Apple's Facetime), but in these cases the instances of paralinguistic context are evident. Thus, this section will focus on written communication, as it presents more interesting and explicative cases of paralinguistic context evolution.

The answer is yes: there are many tools and devices that are used to enrich a conversation in a digital *locus* and to clarify or facilitate the decoding of its meaning – and, of course, these devices should be taken into account also when developing branding or advertising strategies.

Schandorf (2012) defines new multimodal media communication as being compressed, extensive and rather paralinguistic, which are attributes that he also assigns to gestures: in this sense, compression is expressed by the possibility of quick execution, corresponding for instance to the immediacy of sending a text or liking a Facebook post; extension is represented by the fact that digital gestures can be performed simultaneously with respect to the conversation taking place, as it happens with the addition of emojis to a text message; finally, the paralinguistic nature of digital communication refers to the capability of enriching a message through nonverbal devices.

Proceeding with this kind of comparative analysis, Schandorf associates digital and new media gestures to the "traditional" paralinguistic behaviours and actions mentioned in section 2.1.1 of the current chapter: namely, deictic, imagistic, expressive, rhythmic and emblematic gestures. According to Schandorf, instances of deictic digital gestures may be represented by hyperlinks, which "point" to an additional web page, or by "tagging" (mentioning a social media user by means of his username preceded by @); imagistic digital gestures are conveyed through ASCII art and emojis, which will be analysed further on; expressive actions can be expressed in new media communication by text styles, including for instance the use of italics, bold, all caps or punctuation; rhythmic gestures are best expressed in written digital conversation by the use of emphatic punctuation; finally, emblematic gestures can be digitally represented with the use of iconic hashtags and "internet slang" such as LOLs or #Fail.

A particularly interesting instance of digital paralanguage is represented by emojis. Emojis, indeed, have become relevant for the interpretation of linguistic content because they help identifying the meaning of a word or sentence by expressing its emotional significance and/or the communicator's intentions. This is a direct consequence of the previously mentioned evolution of language and communication in digital: the informal

and immediate language used on online platforms, as a matter of fact, tends to imitate spoken communication, thus calling for a surrogate of facial mimics (Bindi, 2017)[21].

Emojis, as a consequence, play a relevant role in disambiguating textual content, accomplishing their paralinguistic function in terms of message enrichment. However, given their openness of interpretation as "nuanced, visually-detailed graphics" (Miller et al., 2016)[22], emojis could be also lead to miscommunication or incorrect interpretation of the message by the receiver; this is also due to their different rendering and appearance according to the device they are displayed on (Miller et al., 2016). As a consequence, it is fundamental for the message sender to take into consideration their role in the co-text to avoid misunderstandings once the content has been published or posted.

Let's consider a quick example: when conducting a conversation via instant messaging applications like WhatsApp, misunderstandings may occur as written text does not always convey all the emotional nuances of a spoken dialogue. Facial expressions, physical gestures, tone of voice are absent, thus even a simple affirmative word like "okay" may be subject to different interpretations: for example, it could be perceived either as a positive confirmation or an annoyed response. In order to better convey its intended meaning, the sender can accompany the word, with respect to the previously mentioned meaning possibilities, with a smiling emoticon or an emoji rolling its eyes.

Another kind of digital paralinguistic gestures is represented by the actions that are performable on social media and platforms, such as liking posts on Facebook, which represent further instances of nonverbal communication. Maintaining the example of Facebook likes, the concept is explained by the fact that when a user clicks on the "like" button under a post he is communicating to the post creator that he appreciates the content without actually uttering a sentence. Hayes et al. (2016)[23] conducted a study highlighting the nature and function of such digital behaviours; they found that individuals tend to approach the possibility of performing this type of actions either faithfully or ironically. Faithful appropriation consists in "following the spirit of the

[21] Bindi Y., 2017, *Language design,* pp. 20-21.
[22] Miller H. et al., 2016, *"Blissfully happy" or "ready to fight": Varying Interpretations of Emoji*, Proceedings of ICWSM, pp. 259–268.
[23] Hayes R. et al., 2016, *One Click, Many Meanings: Interpreting Paralinguistic Digital Affordances in Social Media*, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 60 (1), pp. 171-187.

technology", making use of its functions in the way they were intended by the developers of the platform; ironic appropriation, instead, violates said spirit. In the latter case, as a consequence, a Facebook like may not actually be meant as a form of appreciation, but it may take on different meanings according to the users' intentions – an occurrence that clearly depicts the high level of adaptation and evolution that is peculiar of social media.

The results of the research study by Hayes et al. identified additional functions of Facebook likes, going beyond the literal interpretation of "content appreciation": for instance, likes could represent acknowledgement of viewing, social support, record keeping. These observations on such paralinguistic behaviours are meaningful from the point of view of branding and advertising because they provide fundamental insights on how to (digitally) approach customers in order to build a solid and worthwhile relationship with them: a brand or company appropriately interacting with its audience online may gain, indeed, some substantial competitive advantage.

Of course, instances of paralinguistic gestures and behaviours online are strictly correlated to the digital visual context they find themselves in; emojis, for example, represent a phenomenon that is clearly connected to the visual domain.

Indeed, one thing that all the websites and the digital platforms for sharing and communication mentioned so far have in common is that they highly rely on visual content – with some of them (such as Instagram or Pinterest) being exclusively dedicated to the publication of photos or images.

Similarly to the definition of "traditional" visual literacy mentioned in section 2.1.2 of this chapter, we speak of *digital* visual literacy as the capability of individuals to generate and understand visual materials and information created with digital tools or devices (computers, for instance). This definition, provided by Spalter and van Dam (2008)[24], includes the ability to perform a critical evaluation of such materials, to make decisions based on data and idea representation and to use computers effectively in order to produce said digital materials.

In their paper, Spalter and van Dam highlight the importance of the previously mentioned skills and capabilities by applying them to different domains related to the

[24] Spalter A. M., van Dam A., 2008, *Digital Visual Literacy*, Theory into Practice, vol. 47, pp. 93-101.

digital visual context, such as image economy, visual culture, art and design, computer graphics and vision science. The latter, for example, is particularly relevant from the point of view of advertising: indeed, it applies and adapts common visual communication notions such as those described by Green (1976) to the necessities and peculiarities of digital devices and online domains.

One example of visual literacy notions applied to digital *loci* is that of colours: for instance, web pages may present colour requirements or features that differ across devices or from hues that are meant to be printed. As a matter of fact, visual content that is produced for the web is usually saved in the RGB (red, green, blue) colour model, differently from made-for-print content produced in the CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, black) model[25]. It is important to take into account this fact when producing marketing-related visual items: companies should, indeed, choose for their own content colours and hues that can be correctly viewed both in print and online.

Another instance of a visual literacy notion that has been applied to the requirements of the web is that of page layout. Just as Green (1976) states, it is important to balance all the elements of the web page, including negative space, in order to accompany and guide the users along the content displayed and to address them towards what is most relevant – such as newsletter subscribing links or the shopping cart section. Indeed, the hypothesis that website layout and design have a great impact on the emotions and attitude of the user, especially in the case of online stores and ecommerce sites, has been supported by empirical studies such as that of Wu et al. (2014)[26]; this confirmation highlights the importance of the digital visual context, especially when consumer behaviour is concerned. As Wu et al. state, well-structured displays of content in the online catalogue, a large selection of items and helpful disposition of explicative signage are some of the layout elements that concur to the positive exploitation of the visual context for websites.

Moving on from websites and focusing on social networks, the relevance of the visual context for digital platforms is also represented by the more and more recurrent need

[25] Information found on the 2017 article *Why Don't They Match: Colors On Screen VS On Print*, b.iD website, May 5th, accessed on March 13, 2020.
[26] Wu W. et al., 2014, *How can online store layout design and atmosphere influence consumer shopping intention on a website?*, International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 42 (1).

for a consistent aesthetic image to present across different social media profiles and pages.

Indeed, as Highfield and Leaver state in their 2016 research paper[27], visual elements are critical and essential to story-telling and meaning-making on social media, which incorporate in their feed original images, modified and filtered versions of photos, collaged or photoshopped media and other alterations of pictorial nature. Concerning aesthetics, there are many instances of profiles and accounts that, especially on Instagram, dedicate particular care to maintaining a consistent choice of filters and colours so that their overall online image results attractive and polished; this phenomenon of consistent editing gave rise to the creation of personalised visual themes, filter and colour palettes and feed styles across many online profiles, which turned into a tool to attract many followers and gain popularity (Manovich, 2017)[28]. Of course, companies should consider such a structural digital phenomenon when developing their visual and social media strategy, as a consistent use of a brand's aesthetic imagery across its channels and advertisement efforts may prove to be fundamental in gaining competitive advantage.

Overall, it is possible to state that the paralinguistic and visual contexts are fundamental components of marketing strategies, both online and offline. In the next section, the fields of branding and advertising will be analysed from this point of view.

2.2. PARALINGUISTIC AND VISUAL CONTEXT IN BRANDING

2.2.1. Paralinguistic context in branding: brand tone of voice

In the analysis conducted so far, paralanguage has been defined as the set of nonverbal gestures and utterances that help contextualize, disambiguate, enrich verbal messages. At the same time, in Chapter 1, branding has been identified as the process of giving value to a brand through consistent and multifaceted strategies, conducted across the channels and touchpoints chosen by the company. In chapter 1, given the focus on linguistic context, I analysed brand names; in the current section, which concentrates on

[27] Highfield T., Leaver T., 2016, *Instagrammatics and digital methods: studying visual social media, from selfies and GIFs to memes and emoji*, Communcation Research and Practice, 2 (1), pp. 47-62.
[28] Manovich L., 2017, *The mobile generation and Instagram photography*, found in Serrano Tellería A., *Between the Public and Private in Mobile Communication*, Routledge, London.

the paralinguistic context, the branding activity that will be explored will be the brand tone of voice and style with respect to the company's interactions with customers.

This choice is due to the fact that paralanguage is expressed mainly in two types of conversation: spoken, face-to-face or written, textual communication. Of course, it is not possible for an intangible entity such as a brand to *physically* interact with its customers and target audience and, thus, make use of spoken or kinetic paralinguistic devices; however, when written or textual interactions (especially online) are concerned, brands are presented with numerous occasions to display and express their personality and identity to their customers – and, in such cases, paralanguage can prove to be a fundamental tool in order to convey what a brand is all about, beyond the mere content conveyed by textual communication.

Given that the attention of the present section is on how paralanguage influences the creation of customer relationships through reciprocal brand-audience interaction, promotional efforts and advertisements will not be presented here; they will be analysed further on, since they can be intended as a one-way sort of communication (the company presents the advert to the public in a "frontal" manner) and a stand-alone branding activity. For now, the focus will be on instances of written interactions that see the customer base and the brand contacting each other for occasions such as information research or communication (for instance, a customer wanting to pose questions or a company sending a newsletter or delivering a brochure), complaint management, online engagement (such as comments or chat messages) and so on.

In this context, the brand tone of voice has been defined as a tool to communicate "the distinctive nature of a brand" (Delin, 2005)[29]; the overall goal, indeed, is that of ensuring that the brand personality, values and essence become (and stay) the most important aspects whenever a customer encounters the brand itself at a touchpoint. Specifically, according to Delin, the brand tone of voice consists mainly in the "language styles or registers" employed by a company in order to convey a specific personality or value set that differentiate it from its competitors – and, just as mentioned above, it predominantly takes into consideration written language. Companies, for instance, can decide to adopt a friendly and familiar approach towards their audience and customers,

[29] Delin J., 2005, *Brand Tone of Voice: a linguistic analysis of brand positions*, Journal of Applied Linguistics, 2 (1), pp. 1-44.

thus making use of informal language and expressions in their promotional content; or, they could choose to employ a more formal and professional tone of voice, conveying it for example through trained salespeople or celebrity spokespersons.

There are multiple reasons why developing a strategic approach to the brand tone of voice matters. The conveyance and display of personality and identity has already been mentioned: portraying the attributes and values of a brand in a coherent and effective way is relevant in order to further inform customers on the nature of the brand itself and its products (Delin, 2005). Moreover, paralanguage may help the company reach a particular positioning in the mind of customers through the creation of intended associations; considering service brands, for example, a common goal is that of being perceived as human, friendly, professional or warm given the great importance of customer service and public relations of these types of companies (Delin, 2005). In addition to these observations, Delin also states that a further goal of the brand tone of voice is that of engaging the audience with messages and conversation, for instance concerning products or benefits; customer engagement is, indeed, a precious resource and evaluative tool for companies, especially when they are operating online.

Another study by Luangrath et al. (2017)[30] analyses further advantages of the brand tone of voice and use of paralinguistic devices. Focusing predominantly on online communication and interaction with customers, they state that successful conversational engagement with the audience fosters a "strong social presence" and the "perception of being real" and human; this is, of course, a positive outcome given its effects on lasting customer relationships and, in certain cases, it can be a powerful tool against negative word of mouth. Finally, using paralinguistic devices during customer interaction may influence positively the brand-consumer relationship thanks to, for example, the conveyance of closeness and intimacy via expressions like **hug** (the textual equivalent of the actual action of hugging – techniques that allow such a "transcription" of gestures will be explored further on).

Adding to this list of advantages, further positive effects of the use of paralanguage in branding are presented in a 2019 research study by Hayes et al.[31]: in terms of customer-

[30] Luangrath A. et al., 2017, *Textual Paralanguage and Its Implications for Marketing Communications*, Journal of Consumer Psychology, 27 (1), pp. 98-107.
[31] Hayes J. L. et al., 2019, *Leveraging Textual Paralanguage and Consumer–Brand Relationships for More Relatable Online Brand Communication: A Social Presence Approach,* Journal of Interactive Advertising.

brand relationships, the paralinguistic context may contribute to influence consumer affect, brand attachment and purchase intentions, due to the sense of familiarity and brand anthropomorphism that it can contribute to create. In the same fashion, brand loyalty and trust, engagement and satisfaction are further elements that can benefit from paralanguage, especially for those companies that want to get closer to a young audience and build a warm image and personality. Paralanguage, according to Hayes et al., may also help the brand in standing out with respect to competitors and it may contribute to the strengthening of the brand's social presence – which, in this sense, is also intended as allowing the public to engage with others.

There may be, however, some negative sides of the use of textual paralanguage, which are expressed by Luangrath et al.: a brand using it, as a matter of fact, may be perceived as "casual and unprofessional" and in some instances, for example with older audiences online, excessive use of it may lead to message misinterpretation.

Moreover, Luangrath et al. state that the use of a specific brand tone of voice or style, conveyed through specific paralinguistic devices, can vary according to different factors. For example, TPL (textual paralanguage) instances may depend on the "personality of the communicator" (which is, in this case, the brand) and its cognitive learning styles: visual-based individuals may prefer to convey a message through artefacts, auditory-based communicators may rely on vocal cues and kinesthetic individuals may prefer touch or tactile stimuli. Moreover, the platform where the conversation is taking place, especially considering online domains, may be a further discriminating criterion for the use of TPL: social media that are more professional and work-oriented like LinkedIn may require a more formal tone of voice, while microblogging platforms like Twitter may encourage the use of unique, informal, original typography, also due to the limited amount of characters per post. Finally, the target audience itself may represent a factor in this sense: a younger target may be more familiar with informal instances of TPL and may receive it more positively with respect to older audiences.

Synchronicity may also represent an additional factor in the choice of TPL devices, especially online: as Luangrath et al. explain, in synchronous communication responses should be immediate and quick, as it may be required by chat-based customer service; in asynchronous communication, instead, more time is required for interactions such as commenting or posting. With respect to TPL, this means that synchronous conversations

may require a message to have limited length for the sake of speed and, as a consequence, more textual and typographical instances of paralanguage may be present in the message. This concept is related to that of "response time" explored by Schandorf (2012), who states that the amount of time that it takes for a brand or a company to reply to a customer inquiry or comment "may be considered gestural" in the context of digital and online platforms and it can concur to the conveyance of the brand's personality and positioning.

In order to understand the effects of tone of voice and TPL in customer interactions, Delin (2005) provides four frameworks for analysis. The first is that of chains of reference, which examine how references evoking and hinting at the brand and its attributes are inserted and conveyed throughout the textual message; instances of such "links" are, for example, repetition, co-reference through non-fully descriptive cues, brand elements such as original, brand-related and recognizable colours or terminology, possessive adjectives. The empirical example provided by Delin is that of the telecommunication company Orange: it presented several instances of the previously mentioned factors, such as the repetition of its brand name, the presence of special terms like "Orange TalkShare", references to "we", "us", "our network", "the network" – devices that concur together to the creation of a brand-specific language and tone of voice.

The second framework proposed by Delin is that of participant roles, which are associated to material, mental, verbal or relational processes. The goal is that of identifying which process-related words, verbs or actions are associated, respectively, to customers and to the brand throughout textual interactions – words that, of course, are part of the brand language and tone of voice. Continuing with the explicative example of Orange, the processes that involve the customer base are identified with calling back or getting through to people (material), worrying or forgetting (mental), responding (verbal), being connected (relational); on the contrary, during conversational instances, the brand Orange is involved with losing a call (material), knowing (mental), offering (verbal), keeping people connected or taking care (relational), keeping promises (behavioural).

The third framework is that of analysing how presupposition and assumption[32] about participants affect audience positioning. Delin states that the use of such devices in reference to the brand's services and products can concur to the creation of shared knowledge between the brand and its audience, which is surely a positive outcome. On the side of customer-related assumptions and presuppositions, instead, these expedients connected to the tone of voice present facts as uncontroversial (e.g. Orange's implicative sentence "You need never forget a birthday […] ever again") and appeal as familiar to the customer; and example of the latter is the presence of asserted customer beliefs on Orange's brochures, expressed by phrases attributed to the audience such as "I want to stay in touch" or "I want to get through to people".

Finally, the fourth framework proposed by Delin is that of tenor, used to build social relations. This goal is achieved through the use of imposed authority or peer-like positions, the combination of institutional discourse with "everyday language", the "informalization and conversationalization" of textual messages or the use of impersonal, authoritative language. Orange is still an explicative example: it presents mainly informal structures and clauses, scattered with punctuation and dashes (e.g. "It happens. Phones get lost…"); it mimics question-answer interactions (e.g. "I want to get through to people" – "With Orange you will"); it uses rhetorical questions, sayings, language play, all to establish an aura of closeness and intimacy with its audience and a peer-like relationship with its customers.

Brands, as a consequence, should pay a great amount of attention to the devices and expressions they use to convey their tone of voice to the intended audience and target customers, as they are fundamental tools substituting face-to-face paralinguistic gestures.

Going back to Luangrath et al., it is also interesting to analyse other specific paralinguistic techniques and devices that brands can use in their written interactions with customers. In their research study, TPL is divided into three categories: auditory, tactile and visual; face-to-face instances of TPL are presented for all three, together with

[32] Presuppositions and assumptions derive from implicative statements; that is, they rely on information that is conveyed without being explicitly stated or uttered. This information can be deduced from specific words or expressions contained in the original sentence; for instance, in the phrase "You need never forget a birthday again" (an example that will come up in this section) the verb "forget" suggests that the addressee has not remembered one or more birthdays in the past.

written alternatives that can be employed both online (e.g. on social media) or offline (e.g. in brochures). Figure 2.2[33] sums up the following explanation.

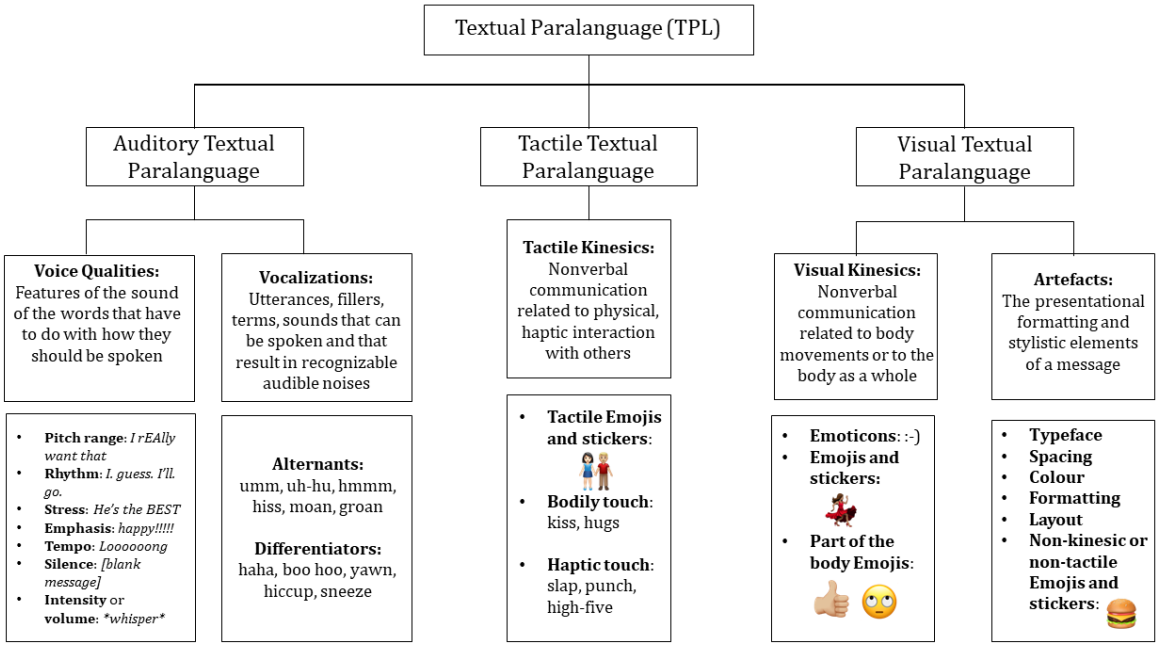

Figure 2.2. Typologies of Textual Paralanguage (adapted from Luangrath et al., 2017)

Auditory TPL is mainly identified with voice qualities, which are sound-related features, and noise-like, verbally meaningless vocalizations. On the one side, voice qualities can be textually conveyed thanks to spelling, punctuation and typography choices: one can, in this way, express pitch range, rhythm, stress, emphasis, tempo and other sound-like paralinguistic elements even in written communication. On the other side, vocalizations can be either alternants or differentiators: alternants can be altered by kinesics and paralinguistic "physical" gestures through emphasis or deemphasis (e.g. "Ugh!" accompanied by acts mimicking revulsion), while differentiators are represented by physiological, reflex reactions and psychological or emotional states like laughing or crying (Poyatos, 1993)[34]. Both types of vocalizations can be "transcribed" in written texts, as they often present a verbal correspondence: for example, the act of laughing is conveyed by the verb "laugh" and the expression "ahah", which can even vary across

[33] Adapted from Luangrath et al. (2017).

languages – in Spanish-speaking countries, for instance, it is transcribed as "jaja"[35]. In particular, differentiators identifying actions can be textually conveyed between asterisks, such as **laughs**; this practice is especially common online, when the need to express nonverbal behaviour arises and it is valid for all other "action"-related cases (Yus, 2001)[36].

Moving on, tactile TPL is mainly represented by kinesics and physical gestures. As previously mentioned, these paralinguistic instances can be substituted in written texts by "action asterisks" and their textual counterparts; moreover, emojis play a relevant role in expressing nonverbal behaviours.

Finally, visual TPL can present itself as either visual kinesics or artefacts; the former are identified by nonverbal movements of the body or its parts, such as smiles or eyerolls, while the latter are the presentational and stylistic elements of the conveyed message. On the one side, visual kinesics can be textually substituted by emoticons and emojis; on the other side, typography choices, colours, white space amount, layout and even emojis can be written alternatives for visual artefacts.

All the techniques and devices mentioned so far can be employed in a branding strategy in relation to interactions with customers, especially online; an explicative example of the effectiveness of such textual paralanguage in the creation and maintenance of a brand's personality and positioning is embodied by the Netflix social media accounts, which will be further explored at the end of this chapter as part of a case study on the globally renowned streaming platform's paralinguistic and visual context.

On a final note, it is important to consider the relevance attributed to TPL with respect to the creation of meaningful and worthwhile customer relationship online. Indeed, as previously mentioned in reference to the 2019 research study by Hayes et al., the social presence of a brand is a fundamental element when the goal of a company is that of appealing to the target audience and, in this sense, social networks and digital loci are present themselves as the ideal places where such a connection can be fostered. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter provide meaning-enriching tools that

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[34] Poyatos F., 1993, *Paralanguage: A linguistic and interdisciplinary approach to interactive speech and sounds*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1993.
[35] Source is Preti C. and Alvarez A., 2013, *What Does 'Jaja' Mean? Your Guide to Online Slang*, abc News website, March 20th, accessed on March 16, 2020.

can be applied to the creation of brand personality and the conveyance of brand messages and that, at the same time, can stimulate customer engagement and interaction, allowing marketers to connect with the audience in a direct fashion and thus foster trust, attachment and emotional investment (Hayes et al., 2019).

Beside the TPL mentioned so far, indeed, social media, chat services and digital platforms offer further ways of including paralanguage in communication and interaction: a short response time, likes and positive, endorsing comments from the brand to a customer post or UGC[37], companies or their spokespersons (or mascots) following a user profile are all examples of digital paralinguistic gestures that can positively influence the brand-customer relationship, as they provide emotional, status and social gratification to the targeted users (Hayes et al., 2016)[38], making them feel noticed by and close to the brand.

2.2.2. Visual context in branding: logos and imagery

Beside the paralinguistic instances previously mentioned, branding strategies should (and do) take into account also those considerations and tactics that can be applied to enhance, exploit and provide with meaning the visual context.

In the case of branding, considered as the value-creating process related to the set of features identifying specific products of a company, the visual context is of fundamental and primary importance. As a matter of fact, brand elements such as logo, associated symbols, packaging, brand imagery and aesthetic can all benefit from an accurate visual strategy; selecting and presenting consistent and evocative colours, shapes, symbols and other visual elements can indeed contribute to the conveyance of the intended brand message and can, on the side of the customer, ensure positive associations and correct interpretation of the brand values and attributes.

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[36] Yus F., 2011, *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-mediated Communication in Context*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.
[37] User Generated Content.
[38] Hayes R. et al., 2016, *One Click, Many Meanings: Interpreting Paralinguistic Digital Affordances in Social Media*, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 60 (1), pp. 171-187.

Underlining the importance and the role played by visual branding experts and designers, Poon (2016)[39] states that their main goals are stimulating cultural change, promoting the creation of emotional bonds and supporting the introduction and establishment of new norms, thus going beyond the mere "cosmetic" relevance that could be attributed to visual marketing strategies. Indeed, the visual image of a brand contributes not only to the improvement of performance by aiding brand recognition and recall and by giving rise to positive or company-intended associations (as it will be later explored and explained); but, according to Poon, the brand's visual appearance can also play an unexpectedly significant role in the fostering of long-lasting customer relationships.

Poon, indeed, defines visual communication as a "human-centred social activity" and brings forward the concept of lovemarks in support to his thesis. Lovemarks are those brands that have gained and maintained a particular emotional connection with their customers, creating a bond strengthened by loyalty and "intimacy, mystery and sensuality"; the fostering of such a "brand love", according to Poon, is due also to the ability of communicators to make use of visual storytelling, symbolism, subtexts and metanarratives during the creation of the brand's imagery.

Of course, a brand's visual context can be conveyed across multiple channels: packaging, advertisements, promotional materials, gadgets are some of the main instances of visual artefacts that can present the brand's colours, logo, imagery, symbols, typography and so on. The present section will focus mainly on logos, as they can be considered the quintessential representation of a brand's visual context – it goes without saying that, as a norm following the need for multichannel consistency, the graphical, design and typographical choices made for a brand logo are generally replicated also in other visual instances (e.g. the packaging will present the same colour palette).

In the literature review contained in their 2013 study[40], Girard et al. bring forward Schecter's definition of logo as "the official visual representation" of a company or brand name and as the essential component of their "identity programs"[41]. Indeed, logos are

[39] Poon S. T. F., 2016, *Visual Communication and Design's Role Drives Branding Innovation and Social Responsibility*, Journal of Visual Art & Design, 8 (1), pp. 1-15.
[40] Girard T. et al., 2013, *The role of logos in building brand awareness and performance: Implications for entrepreneurs,* Entrepreneurial Executive, vol. 18.
[41] Schechter A. H., 1993, *Measuring the Value of Corporate and Brand Logos*, Design Management Journal, 4 (1), pp. 33-39.

the graphic rendering of a brand name (either combined or not with a brand symbol), achieved through a specific design, colour palette and typography or font; these elements are chosen according to well-thought rationales concerning what the logo itself should communicate, which main aspects of the brand it should highlight and convey and which associations in should give rise to in the mind of customers.

In their 2011 study, Whan Park et al. [42] specify that logos employing the brand name may also be accompanied by a visual symbol, which can function as a further conveyor of "connection" with the customers; indeed, as the researchers explain, symbols effectively communicate information to people and they may also be perceived as "richer and more tangible" company representations, thus enhancing brand differentiation and memory retrieval.

As stated by Whan Park et al., logos are of fundamental importance to companies and brands because they accomplish multiple goals and functions: from resolving the issue of indistinguishability, to aiding the recognition of the brand and its differentiation from competitors, logos act as the main visual representation of a brand's meaning and image, going so far as shaping its reputation as well. These observations support Poon's thesis that a brand's visual context can go beyond its mere "cosmetic" function and that it can, indeed, affect consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions and brand loyalty (Whan Park, 2011).

Whan Park et al. also identify four main functions of logos that highlight their relevance in affecting firm performance and creating customer value. First of all, logos facilitate brand identification, especially in crowded situational contexts like supermarkets or shopping centres, thus allowing decision-making to be faster and easier. For example, the logo of Coca-Cola has been recently ranked third in a study concerning the most recognizable brand logos in the US[43]; characterized by its typical cursive font and bright red background, it is immediately identifiable amongst its competitors, e.g. in a supermarket aisle dedicated to soft drinks. This example also highlights the importance of visual salience for logos: as a matter of fact, in order to be recognised (especially in cluttered environments such as supermarkets or grocery stores) logos need to present

[42] Whan Park C. et al., 2011, *The role of brand logos in firm performance*, Journal of Business Research, vol. 66, pp. 180-187.
[43] SWNS, 2020, *These are the top 30 most recognizable logos in the USA*, New York Post website, January 23rd, accessed on March 22, 2020.

distinctive visual features that make them stand out from the surrounding context and obtain the attention of viewers.

In addition to the functions mentioned so far, given their function of brand values conveyors, logos have the potential to lead customers to create "associations between the brand and the self", thus appealing to the shared set of values and beliefs belonging to both the target audience and the firm; this newly arisen affinity can then reinforce and strengthen the customer emotional investment and loyalty towards the brand. The example brought forward by Whan Park et al. is that of the surf apparel brand Quicksilver, which is known as being representative of a "young-minded", casual and athletic style; its logo, composed of a rising wave beside a Japanese-inspired mountain (a clear reference to Hokusai's famous print *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*), clearly remarks the brand's core values revolving around surf and "fun, freedom and natural energy"[44], beliefs that are likely to appeal to and resonate with their target audience.

The third function of logos identified by Whan Park et al. consists in their potential to remind customers of the functional benefits of the brand and its products; for instance, the "swoosh" that is globally recognized as Nike's symbol suggests (and aids the recall of) the brand's dedication to ensuring superior athletic performance thanks to high quality products.

Finally, logos present an undeniable function related to aesthetic appeal, going back to the intrinsic interest of human beings towards pictorial and visual elements. As Whan Park et al. suggest, indeed, brand logos endowed with "aesthetic qualities" can provoke visual gratification to customers and foster an emotional bond arising from their attractiveness; that is, when customers come in contact with a picture, symbol or image that they consider attractive and that they appreciate in an aesthetic sense, they tend to perceive it as "near and dear to themselves". The researchers bring forward the example of Walt Disney's logo, which is made up by the brand name in its official font and the image of a fairy-tale, enchanted castle; when animated at the beginning of certain Disney movies it is coloured and depicted in even greater detail, presenting an objectively attractive and likeable imagery that immediately arises feelings of affection in its viewers.

[44] Brand values found on the company website of Boardriders Inc. (corporate group owning Quicksilver) at www.boardriders.com/quiksilver.

The brand logos mentioned so far are summed up in figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3. Logos of Coca-Cola, Quicksilver, Nike and Disney.

The four functions of brand logos, as Whan Park et al. explain, find a purpose also in the case of brand extensions. Indeed, expanding the range of production to new and/or different product categories can represent a positive occasion for a company to strengthen the meaning, associations and effects of brand logos. This occurs because of different reasons: logos, in this perspective, can function as "guarantees" of standards and quality and can exploit consumer loyalty towards the purchase of new products; they can also provide further connection points in the customers' daily life, as people can consume a variety of a brand's offers in different contexts and they can see the brand itself "helping" them with different issues; finally, logos attributed to a brand's new line of products can increase the salience and reinforce the positioning in the customers' mind because of their aesthetic pleasantness.

An example of how brand logos can be beneficial for brand extensions is that of FedEx: the company, focused on postage services, presents different branches with varied focuses, from FedEx Office to FedEx Trade Networks. The visual strategy adopted by the brand was that of retaining the same logo design across all its service, thus communicating coherence and exploiting the positive associations related to reliability and efficiency, while changing the colour of the "Ex" part to distinguish the various branches (cfr. Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. Logos of FedEx branches.

In addition to the just mentioned functions, Girard et al. (2016) attribute two main properties to brand logos. On the one side, logos present intrinsic features, which relate to their degree of graphical representativeness: this is conveyed by elements such as colour and design, which concur to give rise to the intended meanings and associations assigned by the firm. On the other side, logos are endowed with extrinsic features, that come from brand and company association: this means that the associations that arise in the mind of the consumers when they come in contact with a brand logo can be influenced by past behaviour and communication of the company or the brand themselves.

Now that the main functions of brand logos have been analysed, it is interesting to briefly explore how they can be designed in order to function as an effective visual context element, for the sake of both message conveyance on the side of the brand and meaning interpretation and association stimulation on the side of the customer base.

Henderson and Cote (1998)[45] identified several independent variables related to logo design that can be used to describe and understand brand logos and make sense of their effectiveness in achieving the intended company goals: among these we find naturality, representativeness, abstraction, harmony, balance, symmetry, complexity, repetition and proportion, which can all be exploited in different degrees to convey specific associations through the brand logo.

[45] Henderson P. W., Cote J. A., 1998, *Guidelines for selecting or Modifying Logos*, Journal of Marketing, 62 (2), pp. 14-30.

From these properties and characteristics, Henderson and Cote identified a few principal guidelines that can lead to the creation of different types of logos and three strategic examples are brought forward. First, high-recognition logos are mentioned: the guidelines state that they should present high degrees of naturality and harmony with moderate elaborateness and that they should be intended to be frequently exposed to the target audience in order to stimulate high company recall. With real-life logos, the objective of high recognition is achieved thanks to "above average" or "extremely natural" logos: the former present an optimal level of guideline application (e.g. the Chanel logo), while the latter are only fairly harmonic but present a high degree of elaboration (e.g. the Origins logo) .

The second example is that of low-investment logos, which are focused on reaching false recognition (the impression in the customer that he or she has seen the logo before when it is not the case) and positive affect, appreciation, familiarity. This can be achieved, according to the guidelines, thanks to low naturality, high harmony and proportions, moderate elaboration, use of parallel lines. An example of such a logo is that of the clothing brand Dolly Noire.

Finally, high image logos aimed at generating high positive affect should be highly harmonic and moderately elaborate and natural. An instance of such guidelines could be that of the Shell logo, which is pictured in figure 2.5 with all the logos previously mentioned as examples.

Figure 2.5. Logos of Chanel, Origins, Dolly Noire, Shell.

A 2016 study by van Grinsven and Das[46] goes further and focuses mainly on logo complexity, which can refer to either feature or design; in the case of feature complexity, basic visual concepts such as colour, luminosity and edges are concerned; design complexity, instead, is related to the elaborateness of the visual composition in terms of "shapes, objects and patterns". Van Grinsven and Das proceeded to identify six elements of complexity that should be kept under control when designing a brand logo and that refer to the designed objects: quantity, irregularity, dissimilarity, detail, asymmetry and arrangement.

Brand logo complexity has then been found as a significant factor affecting brand recognition over time. Van Grinsven and Das, indeed, explain that complex brand logos can better stand against the test of time and, given their peculiar characteristics and structured design, they are also less likely to be forgotten; these characteristics can be enhanced by repeatedly exposing the customer to the logo itself, for example through promotional efforts and advertisements. Concerning simpler designed logos, instead, recognition from customers is facilitated in short-term period, making them more memorable with respect to more complex designs; this is due to the fact that less visual elements make simple logo easy to process and memorize and this is particularly relevant for brands that are approaching the market for the first time or for products that require low involvement from the customer. Of course, deciding which degree of complexity should be adopted for a new logo highly depends on the intended goal the brand wants to achieve and on its positioning and entrance timing in the market. The example brought forward is that of Unilever, which is a long-established parent brand owning many different product lines. The Unilever logo is composed of many elements arranged in an uppercase "U" with the brand name underneath: these features characterize it as complex and the choice of such a design is justified by the fact that it is present on a great variety of products that people are likely to have in their homes. Indeed, as previously suggested, repeated exposure of a complex logo can enhance its memorability and positioning over time.

Beside general logo characteristics and degrees of complexity, a further tool that can be considered when designing a logo is the use of Gestalt principles. These notions refer to

[46] Van Grinsven B., Das E., 2016, *Logo design in marketing communications: Brand logo complexity moderates exposure effects on brand recognition and brand attitude*, Journal of Marketing Communications, 22 (3), pp. 256-270.

how individuals perceive and interpret images by automatically "putting into order" chaotic or complex pictures or visual arrangements. Four of the most renowned and recognized Gestalt principles, that have also been frequently adopted in logo design, are defined as figure-ground, proximity, similarity and closure[47]. The logos presented as examples in the following explanation are summed up in figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6. Logos of Toblerone, IBM, Moca, WWF.

The figure-ground principle is applicable when smaller shapes are surrounded by larger uniform areas; this leads the viewer to perceive the smaller item as being in the foreground and having a border, even if it is not necessarily the case. An example of such a principle, used to suggest the illusion of depth, is that of the chocolate brand Toblerone.

When the proximity principle is concerned, a set of items (such as lines or points) grouped together is perceived as a whole. A clear example of this Gestalt principle is that of the IBM logo: it is constituted of horizontal lines that, thanks to intended interruptions and shaping, create the visual impression of making up the brand's name.

The principle of similarity, instead, relies on the mental grouping up of objects and visual items that are similar to each other in terms of shade, shape, orientation or colour. The Los Angeles-based MOCA (Museum Of Contemporary Art) made use of this principle in designing its logo, which is composed by geometrical shapes that are easily associable

[47] The following explanations and examples have been found in the 2019 article *5 Gestalt Principles in Logo Design*, Neko Brand Studio Website, January 16th, accessed on March 23, 2020.

to the corresponding letters of the name: a square for the letter "M", a circle of the "O" and a triangle for the "A". The use of such shapes may also function as a hint towards the artistic nature of the location, proposing a creative and colorful alternative to a letter-based logo.

Finally, the closure principle states that a figure appears to be not completely closed or is left open in its design, our mind tends to "fill the gaps" and see it as a fully bordered picture. A classic example of the use of this Gestalt principle is that of the WWF panda logo, which does not present closed lines in its upper part.

The application of Gestalt principles to logo design can prove to be an effective strategy as it offers the chance to create attention-grabbing designs that can stick to the viewer's memory, making use of visual "illusions" and surprising shapes and colour contrasts. Moreover, the principles previously explained can help the brand convey its intended meaning in terms of visual context; considering for instance the FedEx logo, it is possible to notice between the second letter "E" and the "X" the shape of an arrow, which communicates the quickness and immediacy of the postal service through the Gestalt principle of closure.

On a final note on logo design, it is important also to consider the role played by colour. As mentioned in the first part of this chapter concerning the visual context, colour plays a fundamental role in terms of message conveyance and association creation: different shades and hues are associated to different concepts and emotions and these may even vary across different countries. Consider red, for instance: this colour usually evokes strong emotions such as power, passion, energy, intensity and it is said to increase heart rate and appetite while stimulating a sense of urgency; these features thus easily explain why it is often used in fast-food related brand logos (and general imagery) such as those of KFC, Coca-Cola and McDonald's. Green, instead, is considered organic, Earth-friendly and healthy; it is often associated with nature, so it is no surprise that brands operating in nature-related sectors like Animal Planet or Whole Foods have chosen this colour for their logos. Finally, take into account social media logos like those of Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter: they all present different shades and hues of blue, which communicates trustworthiness, security and dependability, characteristics that are surely relevant

when data and privacy are concerned – indeed, banking services like IBM also make use of blue in their brand logos and imagery[48].

The significance of colour for branding is also underlined and highlighted by Madden et al. (1999)[49], who even relate the desired self image of the customers to the colours of the brands they purchase in an either complementary or consistent fashion. Moreover, they also suggest that colour meaning might present implications for consumer association in terms of a firm's positioning in the market.

Given the design features and choices mentioned so far, brand logos can also undergo redesigns or modifications over time. As Girard et al. (2013) state, customers may grow to associate "aged" brand logos with "less desirable descriptions", perceiving the brand as old, outdated, not in line with their evolved needs and desires. The consequences are heavier than one may expect: such negative associations caused by un-updated logos may indeed result in loss of market share, distribution channels issues and exclusion from the consideration set located in the customers' mind. Consider, for example, Toyota's logo, which was updated in 2019: the old version, which was characterized by a shiny, 3D and chromatic effect in the symbol, was substituted by a flatter, more modern illustration, that makes use of a bright red square surrounding the symbol as the main attention-grabbing device; however, the symbol is smaller, so that the focus is on the black brand name. The update makes the logo look fresher, with better visual hierarchy bringing forward the brand name.

However, logo updates may not be always welcomed with positive feedbacks from the customers or the market. A clear example is that of the Zara logo update, which goes back to 2019 as well: the main change was the elongation of the name's letters, which resulted in a more elegant effect, but the company also brought them closer to each other. The finished product is a surely stylish logo that, however, is harder to read – and, considering that it also frequently appears on small clothing labels, this may not be a completely positive change after all. The logo update, indeed, gave rise to a lot of criticism in the design sector.

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[48] The examples of colour associations in logo design mentioned in this paragraph have been found in the article *The Hidden Meanings Behind Famous Logo Colors,* WebFx website, accessed on March 25, 2020.
[49] Madden T. J. et al., 1999, *Managing Images in Different Cultures: A Cross-National Study of Color Meanings and Preferences*, Journal of International Marketing, 8 (4), pp. 90-107.

Figure 2.7 presents the Toyota and Zara logo evolution for comparison's sake[50].

Figure 2.7. Logo evolution of Toyota and Zara.

As mentioned at the beginning of the current section on branding visual context, the choices made by a brand concerning its logo in terms of typography, design, colours and all the other visual elements may (and should) be proposed also whenever areas like imagery, packaging, advertisement, store display, website and social media are concerned – that is, whenever visual cues play a relevant and significant role in conveying the brand values and messages.

An example that can be useful in this case to support the thesis that a brand's visual context should be consistent is that of Flying Tiger Copenhagen, the Danish chain of variety stores. Across its online platforms, shopping bags, paper catalogue, packaging and products, for instance, it presents always the same recognizable font and black and white palette, which is also applied to its logo. Thanks to this strategical choice, it is always possible to recognize one of its products, bags or brochures even when they are out of their store context.

Of course, further deepening may be interesting in this sense. Specifically, the visual context in terms of advertising will be explored in the following section of this chapter; store display elements, instead, will be presented in chapter 3, which includes the analysis of situational context.

[50] The Toyota and Zara examples have been found in the 2019 article *The 10 Biggest Logo Redesigns of 2019 (So Far),* Looka website, July 30th, accessed on March 25, 2020.

2.3. PARALINGUISTIC AND VISUAL CONTEXT IN ADVERTISING

2.3.1. Paralinguistic context in advertising

In this chapter, a general idea and definition of paralanguage has been provided. Paralanguage has been characterised as the set of nonverbal cues and behaviour that occur during a conversation and, in the particular case of branding, its definition has been adapted so that it could include the features of a brand's tone of voice.

When advertising (considered as an extension of branding activities) is concerned, paralanguage occurs in the form of two main instances: on the one side we have the "traditional" paralinguistic expression of behaviours and gestures, which are present in both video and photo or print adverts; on the other side, paralanguage in print or photo advertisements can be represented also by typographical choices. In order to justify and understand the validity of this latter aspect, which may seem apparently unrelated to paralanguage intended as more or less conscious gestures, it may be useful to consider the previously mentioned work of Cook (1992)[51]. Indeed, Cook mentions in his book the presence of a "paralanguage of writing" that has been developed in order to substitute and apply the same meaning-enrichment function of the actions and gestures produced while speaking. Cook, as a matter of fact, considers "spoken" paralanguage in its usefulness – thus, as a way to express attitudes and feelings, to establish, maintain and regulate social relationships, to function as a medium between language and situational context and to simplify the communication process – and then finds that the same role can be successfully taken on by "paralinguistic paraphernalia of writing" of mainly typographical nature.

This section, then, will analyse how both behavioural and graphical instances of paralanguage can affect the context of an advertisement and how they are able to strengthen its meaning and arise associations in the mind of customers, starting from paralinguistic context in its "traditional" sense: gestures, actions, behaviours and the like.

First of all, it is important to identify more clearly what kinds of nonverbal cues will be taken into consideration in this first part of the analysis. In a 1987 research paper by

[51] Cook G., 1992, *The Discourse of Advertising*, Routledge, London.

Stewart et al.[52], the authors bring forward a classification including the most frequent nonverbal instances; among these we find paralinguistic phenomena (here intended as *how* something is uttered), facial expressions, body movements (as in kinesics), gestures, spacing and proximity (intended as the degree of physical distance between the interlocutors), eye movements, touch and finally pictures and symbolic artefacts. Given the structure of this dissertation, pictures and symbolic artefacts will be analysed in the next section, which concerns visual context in advertising; in addition, for the sake of brevity and inclusivity, the term "paralinguistic context" will be used as a synonym for "nonverbal context" and it will include all the categories just mentioned (except pictures and symbolic artefacts), in order to make its distinction from language and words even clearer.

Stewart et al. go further in the analysis of nonverbal components of an advertisement's paralinguistic context and report the different approaches and theories that have been developed concerning the use of such nonverbal devices in marketing. The theories, in particular, present some interesting points that can prove to be useful in the analysis of paralanguage in advertising: the first that Stewart et al. present is that developed by Birdwhistell in 1970, which focuses on the construction of a "nonverbal body code" model parallel to the structure of language; then the 1968-69 work of Ekman and Friesen is presented, which distinguished five main typologies of nonverbal behaviours – namely, intentional and shared-meaning signs (emblems), language-accompanying actions (illustrators), actions managing the conversation flow (regulators), feeling-related gestures (affect displays) and finally manipulation devices (adaptors); the authors also present Mehrabian's 1970-72 theory identifying nonverbal behaviours as revealing of the speaker's position on liking, potency, responsiveness; finally, Patterson's 1982 theory is presented, which focuses on the functionality of paralanguage.

These theories can surely be useful when applied in the field of advertising, as they all emphasize the importance of observational studies in order to understand how nonverbal communication works, what its effects are and how it can be exploited for commercial persuasion objectives; these theories also underline the need to study both the communication stimulus and the response that it causes in the receiver of the

[52] Stewart D. W. et al., 1987, *It's More Than What You Say: Assessing the Influence of Nonverbal Communication in Marketing*, Psychology and Marketing, 4 (4), pp. 303-322.

message in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis; finally, they want the focus to be also on the understanding of the complementary roles of verbal and nonverbal communication, as these two are inherently tied to each other. However, said theories are still general in their formulation and, as a consequence, advertising-related research questions may arise: beside their use and application in our daily interactions and conversations, how can we include poses, gestures, facial expressions and all the other paralinguistic instances in advertising? Why is it so important to choose accurately such factors and how do they influence the viewer in terms of persuasion? Pleše and Dlačic try to answer to these questions in their 2015 research paper on nonverbal communication in advertising[53].

First of all, Pleše and Dlačic make a distinction between iconic and symbolic paralinguistic signs. Respectively, iconic signs physically resemble their meaning, such as two hands with their fingers arranged in the shape of a heart; symbolic signs, instead, are associated to a meaning that is commonly understood and that is determined by arbitrary convention, such as the thumbs-up gesture signifying "ok". The case of iconic signs may be exemplified by a spot created by Xbox for its Xbox 360 console: in this advertisement, people in the middle of a public place that looks like the inside of a train station start pointing fingers at each other, mimicking guns and other firearms; then, a fake shooting takes place and everyone takes part in the simulation. The spot ends with a slogan, "Jump in", that clearly explains the sense of the segment: the 360 console, indeed, is compatible with online, multiplayer gaming and thus allows everyone to join in – a concept surely supported by the paralinguistic context of the advert, which focuses in particular on war and shooting videogames. The case of symbolic signs, instead, may be represented by a well-known Italian television spot for Ringo, a Pavesi cookie brand: towards the end of the segment, which illustrates a kids' football match, two players with different skin tones from the winning team perform the "high-five" gesture, which is commonly known as a representation of unity, success, celebration; this scene, focused on the hands of the kids, then fades into a picture of the product, a cookie made up by a darker (chocolate) layer and a lighter (vanilla) one that are kept together by a vanilla filling. The attributes of the gesture are thus conceptually and visually transferred to the product: the Ringo cookie is the result of a union of flavours and the

[53] Pleše M., Dlačic J., 2015, *Creating a promotional message: exploring the role of nonverbal communication in advertising*, Journal of the Polytechnic of Rijeka, 3 (1), pp. 41-54.

result is a success, just like the friendship and alliance between the two kids led to victory on the football field.

These two classes of paralinguistic, nonverbal signs and the categories identified by Stewart et al. assume in advertising the same functions that they would cover in our day-to-day interactions: as a matter of fact, as Pleše and Dlačic explain, this kind of communication can be employed to express emotions and relationship with respect to other people (also in terms of appreciation, domination, etc.), to represent oneself (or a brand) to the outside world, to enrich, emphasise and regulate speech and so on. It is extremely important to take these aspects into account during the creation of a promotional campaign or advertising content because, usually, nonverbal signals are trusted and relied on more than verbal ones and tend to carry and convey more information – a fact that has been demonstrated by several studies, such as that of Burgoon (1980)[54] mentioned by Pleše and Dlačic. Of course, given the importance attributed by marketing and advertising to persuasion and efficient message conveyance, advertisers need to make use of all the means that are available to them in order to produce meaningful, convincing and memorable content – paralanguage included.

Now that a clarification of the nature and functions of paralanguage in advertising has been made, an exploration of how it can be included into (promotional) communication can be conducted. According to Pleše and Dlačic, the nonverbal signs previously mentioned can be encoded into the communicative process in order to construct a paralinguistic context in three main fashions – that is, through an intrinsic, iconic or arbitrary coding system[55]. Intrinsic coding occurs whenever the difference between the code being applied to the message and the receiver is minimum, thus providing an instance of "non-verbal behaviour in its essence"; an example is that of pointing at something. Iconic coding, instead, is similar to the concept of iconic signs and it occurs when the some degree of similarity is still present between the person and the code; in this case, the authors bring forward the illustrative example of mimicking a sand-clock shape as a representation of a human body. Finally, arbitrary coding presents a high

[54] Burgoon J. K., 1980, *Nonverbal communication research in the 1970s: An overview*, Annals of the International Communication Association, 4 (1), pp. 179-197.

degree of difference between the code and the encoder; words with arbitrary meaning created by letters that are meaningless *per se* is an instance of this type of encoding process.

Moreover, the meaning conveyed by paralinguistic actions and poses in video and photo or print adverts can be supported and enriched by complementary factors, such as the appearance of and the clothes worn by the performer of the paralinguistic action. Consider any Nike advertisement, for instance: those featuring people practicing sport convey a sense of action, strength and willpower not only because of the powerful and intense stances, poses and gestures they perform, but also thanks to the athletic apparel they wear, the practical ways in which their hair is kept in place, the determination displayed by their facial expressions and other apparently small details enriching the paralinguistic context and concurring to the communication of the intended brand message.

The choice of the person (or persons) performing the paralinguistic act is also relevant: brands, indeed, often decide to present in their advertising campaigns famous people and celebrities that assume the role of advocates and endorsers for their products, so that the meaning and message conveyed by the promotional content are strengthened in their significance. In this way, the simple gesture of sipping a cup of Nespresso coffee with a satisfied expression becomes even more pregnant in its representation of good quality and taste when George Clooney is the one performing it – he is, indeed, the main brand ambassador for Nespresso, transferring to the products the qualities of class, refinement and elegance not only by means of sophisticated gestures but also through his own reputation and personal image.

So far, we have seen how to create and enrich the paralinguistic context in an advertisement; now it is useful to see what is the effect of such devices on the target audience of the promotional content created by a brand and, thus, why they are so important to consider.

First of all, Pleše and Dlačic explain that customers, thanks to the many components of an advertisement and its paralinguistic context, perceive the brand personality and

[55] In this case, the following definitions provide a comparison between the code chosen to communicate the message and the person delivering (or receiving) the coded message; this is due to the focus of the discussion on the importance of paralanguage and gestures for communication.

identity – just as it occurs with brand tone of voice when branding is concerned. Once the customers form an image of the brand in their minds according to the traits they have perceived by being exposed to product or service advertising, they make their final purchase decision according to the degree of similarity that this brand image has with their own values, identity and personality. Paralanguage, of course, helps conveying the identity and the personality of a brand by applying a process of humanization and personification to it; thus, for instance, a person valuing elegance and refinement in all the aspects of his or her life will be more likely to purchase Nespresso coffee capsules with respect to a more "casual" coffee brand.

Following this concept, a 2009 research paper by Kilyeni[56] brings forward also the idea that people relate to brands and their image as it is portrayed by the paralinguistic context in term of ideal self-image: that is, people prefer and relate better to those ads that portray individuals embodying their ideal personality, the person they would like to be and how they would like to be perceived by others. The example that the author brings forward in support of her thesis is that of female-oriented magazine ads representing "perfect" women, who usually have spotless skin, long and glossy hair, a slim physique; such an "ideal" appearance is often accompanied by an accurately chosen paralinguistic pose or gesture, that can be "aggressively seductive" for perfume ads or "relaxed, maternal" for moisturizer promotions. Regardless of the underlying message, the aim that is common to most (if not all) these kinds of advertisements is clear: brands want to appeal to their target audience by using the concept of "ideal self-image" (both in terms of appearance and behaviour) as leverage and by suggesting that their products can help people to attain that ideal.

Kilyeni also suggests that paralanguage in advertising can also be used in order to establish a social relationship with the target audience and, thus, to strengthen the persuasive power of the promotional content. Eye contact, smiles, proximity to the viewer, gestures of inclusivity breaking the fourth wall and addressing the audience directly are all instances of this kind of advertising paralanguage, which aims at gaining intimacy with the target customer in order to establish a "personal" (and thus more persuasive) relationship. An extraordinary example of this type of advertisement is

[56] Kilyeni A., 2009, *Nonverbal Communication in Print Ads*, Professional Communication and Translation Studies, 2 (1-2).

represented by Burger King's 2017 short tv spot promoting their Whopper burger: in this case, the video features a Burger King employee addressing the viewers directly, looking at them straight in the eyes. He explains that, being the ad only 15 seconds long, he cannot possibly describe "all the fresh ingredients" in the burger; in order to fix this issue, he leans in towards the audience (an efficient way to use paralanguage) and says "Okay Google, what is the Whopper burger?", thus interacting with the eventual presence of a Google Home device that will be prompted to describe the burger "in real life". In this way, the advertisement exploits nonverbal cues and the situational context to surprise and persuade the viewer.

Finally, further ways in which paralanguage can be incorporated functionally in advertising are described by communication and leadership author Van Edwards on her website[57]. According to her article, body language can be exploited in ads to show (more or less subtly) people where to look; in this sense, a person looking or pointing in a certain direction can direct the viewer towards, for instance, relevant information or, in the case of a website, a button that is meant to be clicked. In addition, she explains that people's eyes are the main focus of the viewer's attention, a fact confirmed by many eye-tracking studies; this concept can be applied by advertisers by making use of faces and eyes in the foreground in order to attract and maintain the interest and attention of the target audience. A similar concept is also applied to hands: research studies on the subject have found that hands are perceived as indicator of trust and this sensation of trustworthiness may be transferred to a brand if it displays people's hands in its ads, especially if they perform some kind of gesture.

So far, it has been shown how the paralinguistic context can positively influence the viewers of an advertisement and reinforce its persuasive effect. However, it must be also considered that, given that the promotional nature and the commercial goals of ads are well known to the audience, sometimes the scrutiny that such marketing instances undergo can undermine their overall efficacy. This has a direct effect on how nonverbal cues are perceived by the advertisement viewers: as Thomas and Soldow (1988)[58] explain in their research paper focused on television advertising, in an experimental

[57] Van Edwards V., n.d., *12 Ways Body Language Is Used in Advertising*, Science of People website, accessed on April 6, 2020.
[58] Thomas G. P., Soldow G. F., 1988, *Nonverbal Behaviour in Television Advertising: How Forceful is a Forceful Actor?*, Current Issues and Research in Advertising, 11 (1-2).

trial some individuals that expected to be deceived reacted differently to the paralinguistic signs performed by the actors and proved to be more vigilant and wary of product descriptions. This fact highlights how fundamental it is for brand to initiate, before the official release of the advertisement, a preliminary process of copy testing that takes into consideration not only the effects of the verbal message, but also the impression provided by the actor's appearance and paralinguistic performance.

Before moving on to the typographical aspects, it is also worth mentioning how the "physical" tone of voice is also part of the paralinguistic context; different pitches and accents, indeed, can communicate different messages and arise a wide range of feelings and associations in the mind of the customers. The tone of voice can be used as a conveying device in television and video-based advertisements, but it is especially crucial for radio ads: when these kinds of promotions are concerned, as a matter of fact, the lack of visual cues needs to be appropriately compensated by attention-grabbing speeches, performed by different actors and even by famous spokespersons with recognizable voices; in addition, audio effects can be applied to support the conveyance of the message by means of storytelling.

Up to this point, the paralinguistic context has been intended as the set of behaviours and gestures that accompany speech in both video and print or photo advertisements. However, there is an additional way in which nonverbal cues can be integrated into promotional content when print or photo ads are concerned: typographical choices.

As mentioned earlier, indeed, scholars like Cook (1992) include in their consideration of the nonverbal context also a form of "paralanguage of writing" that heavily relies on the creative and meaningful use of typographical devices. According to Cook, this kind of paralanguage can be applied and developed in different ways – for instance, by creating a sense of iconicity through words, letter shape, mixed icons and arbitrary signs, behaviour inducement and typeface.

These aspects will be now explored in detail, with examples of advertisements that have applied them. First of all, using words to create an iconic message means arranging the textual part so that it resembles an object whose meaning is relevant for the message; the example displaying this instance of written paralanguage provided by Cook is that of an old advertisement for Maxwell House instant coffee, where the slogan "Is yours a

Maxwell house?" is disposed in a way that imitates the shape of a roof – this clearly referring both to the brand name and to the homely, warm, familiar attributes of the product. This iconicity can also be recreated with the shape of the letters themselves, both in the process of logo creation[59] and slogan rendering; an example of the latter is represented by an advert created for Regaine's Hair Restorer, a product to contrast hair loss, which pictures the drawing of a woman's profile whose curly hair is made up by the text of the ad itself. Here, the cursive font used simulates the curls and waves of the woman's hair with large brush strokes, thus signifying the efficacy of the product.

Another way in which iconicity can be conveyed is represented by the use of mixed icons or arbitrary signs. Cook provides a great instance of this occurrence by reporting an advertisement for Lypsyl lip balm, which presents the slogan "LYPSYLed with a kiss" ending with an X (the symbol used by English speakers to signify a kiss) created by two crossing Lypsyl sticks.

The way in which an advertising text is disposed can also stimulate or induce in the viewer behaviours and gestures that carry an iconic value. Cook reports for this case a magazine advert for a Philips TV, reading "You haven't seen tennis on television until you've seen it on a Philips 41" screen"; in this case, the copy is divided into two columns across the space of a double-page, thus making the readers go back and forth as if they were at an actual tennis match. This example has been reproduced in figure 2.8.

You	haven't
seen	tennis
on	television
until	you've
seen	it
on	a
Philips 41''	screen.

Figure 2.8 – Reproduction of the Philips 41'' advertisement.

[59] As seen in the previous section of this chapter, concerning brand logos.

Finally, the creative and smart use of fonts can also create instances of written paralanguage: according to Cook, for instance, using typefaces that resemble handwriting could personify the addresser and suggest the presence of an individual rather than an impersonal brand – this technique was employed by the AA Insurance as reported in the example of figure 2.9. The use of foreign alphabets, such as Greek or Cyrillic, could be also used in advertising texts to suggest the exotic origins of a product; however, attention needs to be paid to the use of the letters and the correspondence to their actual sound and meaning, an issue that arises when, for instance, the Greek capital letter sigma (Σ) is used in place of an "E" due to their graphical similarity.

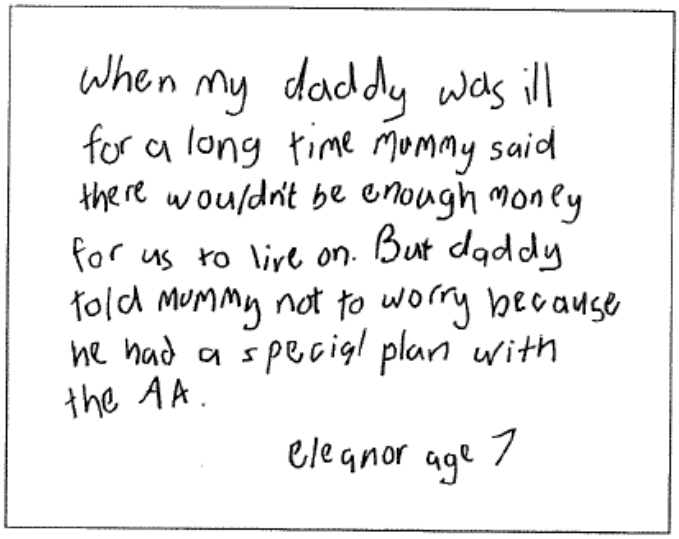

Figure 2.9. AA Insurance advertisement, source: Cook, 1992.

The graphological devices presented so far, according to Cook's definition, surely belong to the paralinguistic context; however, given their heavy reliance on visual elements and factors, the border between nonverbal and visual context can be quite narrow. Indeed, in the next section, the visual content of advertisements will be further explored and analysed.

2.3.2. Visual context in advertising

When analysing the relevance of the paralinguistic context for advertising, the boundary between this and the visual context is surely narrow and the two may even overlap in certain cases; however, there are some distinctions to be made. In the present section, an in-depth analysis will be conducted concerning the images, pictures, illustrations and visual cues that accompany advertising texts.

First of all, it is important to understand what kind of functions the visual context assumes when advertising is concerned. In my opinion, the visual context in this field goes beyond the simple function of product representation: I believe that, indeed, it can enrich the meaning of the overall promotional effort, while ensuring an effective (and persuasive) communication of the intended message.

This affirmation finds favourable arguments in the literature, even if there have also been some discordant theories. As Scott explains in her 1994 work on visual rhetoric[60], many studies on the topic have approached advertising images from the point of view of realism and iconicity: this means that promotional pictures were seen as mere reflections and representations of "objects in the real world", with no hidden or additional meaning. The studies conducted under this point of view are divided by Scott in two main groups: on the one side, classical conditioning/affective response approaches attribute to advertising images only a polarized (positive or negative) affective value, an iconic function and a passive viewer interpretation; on the other side, the information processing paradigm provides an approach more inclined to symbolic significance but that is still constrained by the idea that images function as sensory cues, rather than symbolic forms.

What Scott supports, in contrast with these approaches, is a theory seeing this kind of visual elements as carriers of symbolism and rhetoric, which can influence and affect the viewers; in the case of advertising, this turns into a substantial persuasive potential.

The characteristics that advertising images should have in Scott's approach are, thus, invention, arrangement and delivery. These three elements are part of the broader set of the five fundamental features (or canons) of classical rhetoric, as defined by Cicero –

[60] Scott L. M., 1994, *Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric*, Journal of Consumer Research, 21 (2), pp. 252-273.

namely, *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *actio* (delivery), *elocutio* (style) and *memoria* (memory). Pictures, as a matter of fact, should be able to adequately represent both tangible objects and intangible concepts, so that they can deliver a message through their *invention*; they should also guide the viewer through their *arrangement* in the advert, while carrying meaning in the way they are *delivered*.

By looking in detail at each of these features, we can see how invention is intended as the communication through visual metaphors or arguments for the benefit promised by the product being promoted, the support of such promise and a direct or indirect comparison with competitive offerings. The example brought forward by Scott to exemplify this process of visual message creation is that of a Curél advertisement depicting different knobs of hand lotions trailing down a vertical plane, with the exception of the Curél sample being still at the top: in this case, the promise is that of "superior emollience" and product richness, which is conveyed and confirmed through direct comparison with competitive lotions and their thinness (represented by the trail they have left behind while sliding down the background surface).

Concerning arrangement, Scott mentions how the composition of an advertisement's visual context is fundamental in the process of meaning construction and message delivery: the images should be indeed arranged in a manner that anticipates the act of reading – that is, when Western countries and cultures are considered, from top to bottom and from left to right. The author also mentions paralinguistic elements such as typeface and text size, which can surely be integrated with the advertising pictures in order to strengthen their efficacy.

Finally, the delivery of the visual context can be perfectioned through the point of view and the manner adopted to depict the object or product being represented. Camera angles and light effects, as well as text fonts and colour choices, can function as meaningful elements for an ad's visual context, as it is the case for the Martex bedsheets advert proposed by Scott as an example: here we see an unmade bed which is partially hidden in darkness on the right while also being illuminated by a source of natural light on the left, creating an effect of contrast that immediately reminds us of Dutch paintings; the picture is accompanied by the copy "The Art of Martex", explicitly associating the product to art.

In addition to these three factors and to complete the model of visual rhetoric she proposes, Scott also supports the use of symbol theory as a base for her approach, which sees visual elements as signifiers "by convention" rather than "by resemblance to nature".

Of course, in order for the audience to understand and interpret advertising images that carry a symbolic and figurative meaning, there must be a process of abstract thinking conducted on a common ground of conventional meanings – that is, the advertiser should communicate on the same "cognitive" level as the target viewer. This is especially the case of advertisements that present "unusual" images: Scott brings forward the example of a Clinique ad featuring two cosmetic products placed into a glass of soda with ice, a composition that should naturally be intended as a representation of the freshness of the make-up line; in this case, the advertiser takes for it granted that the viewers will interpret the image as a metaphor, given that make-up is not usually stored in glasses of soda. This idea of cognitive (and cultural) context will be further explored in the 3rd chapter of the present thesis.

The concept of visual rhetoric developed by Scott is supported also by others, like Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver. In their 2006 research paper on the topic[61], as a matter of fact, these two scholars state that pictures and visual elements in advertising "are not merely reflections of reality", but they are instead "arrangements of symbolic artefacts" that can go beyond the simple representation of a product and thus raise questions, create imaginary settings and stories, convey concepts through metaphors and so on. According to the authors, the advertiser uses the visual context of the message she is delivering to inform, remind and persuade the target audience and market, thus employing it as a form of rhetoric; images are used to create meaning or to construct and support an argument and they do so also thanks to their interrelation with other non-visual elements of the advertisement itself. Such elements can be surely textual, like the body copy or the title of the advert, but they can also relate to voice, sounds, music (especially in radio and television or video spots); the combination of visual, auditory and textual cues, according to Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver, adds complexity to the advertising and creates a sophisticated system of "interrelated signs and multiple levels

[61] Bulmer S., Buchanan-Oliver M., 2006, *Visual Rhetoric and Global Advertising Imagery*, Journal of Marketing Communications, 12 (1), pp. 49-61.

of meaning", which will be interpreted, as mentioned previously, according to each viewer's pre-existing knowledge and cultural lens.

Now that the function of the visual context in advertising has been clarified, it is possible to analyse why its role is relevant to the context of commercial promotion, what guidelines should be followed when creating pictures and images for ads and what are the effects of such visual cues on the attitude of the audience and viewers.

According to Rossiter (1982)[62], in general, visual content ensures relatively more attention with respect to verbal content, especially when learning is concerned; this becomes particularly relevant for those companies that want to use advertising in order to create brand awareness and communicate brand beliefs. Rossiter also mentions the dual-coding theory, which states that pictures can function as both visual and verbal representation; in addition, images and pictures can convey emotions and feelings more effectively and intuitively than texts.

Thus, we can argue that the visual context is relevant to advertisement because of the communicative power that it holds, because it attracts the attention of the viewer and finally because it facilitates information learning and retaining by the audience. In order to construct an effective visual context, however, it is necessary to follow some guidelines, which are reported by Rossiter himself.

First of all, concerning advertising in general, the author suggests the use of concrete, realistic, "high imagery" visuals rather than abstract, intangible representations: the former, indeed, are capable of arising further associations and mental pictures that can thus support the delivery of the intended message while increasing the learning potential of the advertisement; abstract visuals, instead, are more open to subjective and personal interpretation and cannot be easily experienced by the senses. Moreover, the visuals selected for the advertisement should be reinforced by appropriate colours; as previously mentioned in this dissertation, each colour is often associated with specific feelings and emotions, with a motivational effect; of course, it is important to adapt the choice of the colour palette to the different interpretations of the countries targeted by the promotional effort.

[62] Rossiter J. R., 1982, *Visual Imagery: Applications to Advertising*, Advances in Consumer Research, vol. 9, pp. 101-106.

Another suggestion provided by Rossiter is that of "juxtaposing" the product depicted in the ad's visual context with the user or an example of usage situation: this creates a sort of "interactive picture" that promotes associative learning and brand recall. An example might be that of a lipstick spot showing a spokeswoman applying the product on her lips, as it was the case for a 2010 ad for L'Oréal's INFALLIBLE lipstick: the product was here endorsed by the world famous singer Beyoncé, who is seen applying the two formulas included in the lipstick package to show the correct sequence of use.

Following these first guidelines, Rossiter turns to the specific genre of print advertising: in this case, he advocates for large, possibly full-page images, which can enhance learning and recall. This choice should be supported by the use of "attention-holding illustrations" that go beyond simple "attention-getting" goals: in order to do retain the attention of the reader for at least 2 seconds, the pictures should balance and combine the familiar and the novel, a challenge defined as the "first dilemma of message construction" by Crane (1972)[63]. Furthermore, the illustration arrangement should be such that the image is seen before the headline and copy, both for single-page and multi-page print advertisements: this suggestion by Rossiter is based on a 1981 experiment by Brainerd et al. that demonstrated the facilitation of learning thanks to picture-then-word visual arrangements[64]; in the specific case of multi-page ads, this could represent a powerful technique to arise suspense and teasing, making the reader more interested in the ad itself. Finally, in order to keep the audience's attention in the long run, Rossiter suggests a variation in print advertising themes as to avoid a potential "wearout" effect (i.e. the viewer growing tired of the ad), even if these are more typical of "intrusive" TV ads.

Concerning TV advertising specifically, Rossiter suggests holding key scenes on the screen with few or no changes in their visual context for at least 2 seconds, alternating them with redundant sequences; furthermore, following the picture-then-word theory, the audio related to a specific key scene should be delivered *after* the key scene has been shown, in what is defined as a "TV commercial pause". The advice concerning theme variation is valid in TV ads and spots as well, in order to avoid "wearout" and tiredness in the viewer. Finally, concerning superimposed written messages in TV ads, Rossiter

[63] Crane E., 1972, *Marketing Communications*, Wiley, New York.
[64] Brainerd C. J. et al., 1981, *Stages-of-Learning Analysis of Picture-Word Effects in Associative Memory*, Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory, vol. 7, pp. 1-14.

suggests using high imagery, positive words and sentences that are endowed with visual potential; an exception to this final piece of advice is represented by warnings and disclaimers, which should make use of low imagery words or, conversely, high imagery nouns in negative sentences.

The guidelines mentioned so far present a generic nature and do not include more "creative" uses of the visual context of advertisements. Of course, images and pictures in ads can also be used to arise visual wordplay, positively impact the viewer through rhetorical figures, convey subliminal message; it may thus be interesting to explore this creative, original side of advertising imagery a bit further.

Regarding wordplay, which has been already explored in the first chapter of the present thesis, it can be enhanced and combined with visual elements in order to reinforce the pun and the conveyance and the persuasive power of the intended message. In a 2005 paper by Laviosa[65], the author provides the example of a 1997 Ford ad featuring Naomi Guy, a famous rock climber: here, the athlete is going up a cliff with her safety rope tied to the latest Ford Escort model and the photograph is accompanied by the slogan "Naomi Guy is very attached to hers". The wordplay, in this case, is related to the double meaning of the word "attached", which can be intended both physically or emotionally: the visual context of this ad clarifies that the correct meaning is the "physical" one, thus associating the product to concepts such as strength, stability and safety; however, the ambiguity around the "emotional" meaning is still present and it can convey the positive endorsement of the spokesperson towards the product.

Concerning visual rhetorical figures, instead, McQuarrie and Mick explain in their 2003 research paper[66] that multiple findings in controlled environments have demonstrated how rhetorical figures in advertising can enhance and reinforce brand and ad recall while creating also positive attitudes in the audience. According to the authors, this is due to the fact that rhetorical figures stimulate elaboration, processing and reflection in the viewers, creating "multiple cognitive pathways" to the message being delivered. The devices through which such figures can be conveyed through advertising images, as explained in the paper, are tropes and schemes: tropes are represented by rhetorical

[65] Laviosa S., 2005, *Wordplay in Advertising*, Scripta Manent – Journal of the Slovene Association of LSP Teachers, 1 (1), p. 25.
[66] McQuarrie E., Mick D. G., 2003, *Visual and Verbal Rhetorical Figures under Directed Processing versus Incidental Exposure to Advertising*, Journal of Consumer Research, 29 (4), pp. 579-587.

figures such as metaphors or puns, relying on irregular, rule-breaking associations; schemes, instead, deviate from rationality thanks to "excessive regularity" or order.

McQuarrie and Mick elaborated some mock advertisements using both tropes and schemes in order to measure the reactions of the viewers during their experiment. An example ad using a trope, for instance, pictured a car seat with a motion sickness remedy pack substituting the seat belt buckle, in order to associate feelings of security and protection to the product by means of a metaphor; a visual rhyme scheme, instead, was used for a mascara ad portraying a woman wearing a fur hat whose ends clearly resembled her own eyelashes. The results stemming from the study demonstrated how rhetorical figures positively impacted the response of the audience, enhancing and aiding recall and attitude towards the promotional content and stimulating additional mental processing on the ad itself; the study also proved the previously stated "superiority" of visual figures over verbal figures, especially in terms of impact.

Finally, concerning subliminal messages conveyed by the visual context of advertisements, Messaris explains in his 1994 study[67] that this kind of promotional efforts can take place in two ways: on the one side, objects or words are embedded and camouflaged in the ad so that a process of covert persuasion takes place by stimulating unconscious perception – however, this practice has proven to deliver negative and ineffective results; on the other side, explicit image representation in advertisements can instead be endowed with implicit meanings in order to arise quality associations. This latter subliminal technique, that makes use of visual juxtaposition of the product with other objects expressing additional meanings, is very similar to the concept of visual metaphor and, more generally, of the idea of visual context as a symbolic communication means.

Messaris also advocates for the use of camera angle and subjective camera in order to deliver specific feelings or atmospheres – for example, if the camera angle portrays the subject from the bottom-up, the audience will feel a sense of "inferiority", conveyed by the apparent subordinated position of the point of view. These techniques, as the author specifies, have proved to affect the response and reaction of the viewers towards the

[67] Messaris P., 1994, *Visual Literacy vs. Visual Manipulation*, Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 11 (2), pp. 181-203.

persuasive power advertisement's visual context, while operating outside of their conscious domain – hence the label of "subliminal" advertisements.

The effect of images and pictures of ads on the memory and attitude of the target consumer is worth exploring further. We have previously mentioned the superiority of pictures with respect to texts in terms of memory and recall facilitation; a 1987 study by Houston et al.[68] supports this theory and elaborates it by analysing how visual cues in advertisement can affect the memory of the audience they are presented to.

In particular, the authors base their analysis on the differences between interactive/noninteractive and framed/unframed pictures. On the one hand, interactive images present both the brand name and product class in visual form, while noninteractive images present the visual representation of either one or the other; on the other hand, framed pictures present a textual part combined with the visual context of the ad, while unframed pictures convey the intended message only through visual cues. These represent different ways in which pictures can be intertwined with text in an advertisement, given their capability of inducing "superior recall", especially when stimuli are processed at a sensory rather than semantic level.

The authors focus in particular on interactive pictures, which have proven to be the most effective device when brand recall and customer memory are concerned; basing their statements on previous research, Houston et al. explain that interactive images, when seen and examined before the text accompanying them, can function as advance organizers[69], which create expectation in the viewers by cueing them "to the content or importance of the subsequent messages". The authors then proceed to conduct an experiment aimed at figuring out whether the discrepancy between the pictures presented in the ads and the corresponding copy text[70] increases or reduces recall in the audience: the surprising results proved that recall improves with said discrepancy, due to the higher effort needed to process the contrasting information. It can thus be said that the impact that an advertisement's visual context has on the memory of the audience is influenced also by the presence or lack of correspondence with the copy text.

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[68] Houston et al., 1987, *Picture-Word Consistency and the Elaborative Processing of Advertisements*, Journal of Marketing Research, 24 (4), pp. 359-369.

[69] A definition, as Houston et al. specify, brought forward by Alesandrini in her 1982 study "Strategies that Influence Memory for Advertising Communications".

[70] The copy text of an advertisement is the written component accompanying the visual content. The term "copy" is used also to indicate the written part or caption of social media posts.

The effect of visual context in promotional materials, however, influences not only the memory of the target customers, but also their attitude towards the products and the brand. This argument is supported by Mitchell in his 1986 study[71] concerning brand and advertisement attitudes: the author, indeed, states that individuals form or change their beliefs about a brand also thanks to the visual information that is presented and communicated in the advertising content; moreover, the attitude towards the ad itself, arising from the audience's positive or negative opinion on the visual context, can influence and affect also the attitude towards the brand. These two statements, referring not only to the visual information contained in the advertisements, but also to their textual elements, make up the Dual Component Model.

Mitchell, in order to support this argument and the related framework, conducted a study whose results proved how visual components have the potential to affect "both the formation of product attribute beliefs and the attribute towards the advertisement"; in addition, he also found out how individuals may develop different brand attitudes in spite of having the same attribute belief.

Of course, the impact on customer attitudes can arise also from different types of context, such as the situational or cognitive ones; in these case, the elements making up these fields fall under the category of extralinguistic context, which will be explored in the upcoming chapter of the present dissertation.

2.4. CASE STUDIES

In this section, I will present two case studies that put into practice the theoretical observations conducted in the current chapter. The chosen case studies, which relate respectively to branding and advertising, put together both the paralinguistic and the visual context.

[71] Mitchell A. A., 1986, *The Effect of Verbal and Visual Components of Advertisements on Brand Attitudes and Attitude Toward the Advertisement*, Journal of Consumer Research, 13 (1), pp. 12-24.

2.4.1. Paralinguistic and visual context in branding: the case of Netflix

The first case study, which focuses on branding, is that of Netflix, a globally renowned, American streaming platform founded in 1997 by Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph. In terms of brand tone of voice (paralinguistic context) and logo (visual context), this company presents some interesting features that may further exemplify the theories and concepts presented so far.

The business history of Netflix took off in 1999[72], when the brand introduced the offering of an online subscription service available through the Internet; by accessing the Netflix website upon a monthly fee, the first users of the platform were able to rent movies and tv shows available in the company's catalogue and receive them via postal mail along with prepaid return envelopes. The streaming service as we know it today started in 2007, when Netflix began to offer the streaming option for some of its titles; then, in 2010, the subscription plan turned streaming-only and all the movies and shows in the brand's catalogue became available online. In addition, Netflix started producing its own original content in 2013, which then became the major focus of the platform; the popularity of the service and its own productions increased up to the point of being nominated (and winning) at the Academy Awards.

Concerning its paralinguistic choices and strategies, Netflix has adopted an informal tone of voice, which is conveyed mostly through the brand's content on social media. As a matter of fact, Netflix is present on three social networks (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) and it owns several profiles, such as Netflix Italia or Netflix UK & Ireland, that target the main countries in which it is present, in order to create and publish linguistically tailored posts that are also coherent with each market's streaming catalogue.

In spite of the many different social media profiles and languages employed online by Netflix, the tone of voice adopted by the brand is consistent across each channel: it is direct, playful, informal and ironic, thus fully reflecting the modes of expression that are commonly used on social media and digital environments. The goal of such a strategy is that of stimulating engagement (a crucial resource for digital marketing), sparking a conversation with the brand's followers and closing the gap between them and the

brand itself in order to build and maintain a long-lasting relationship – and thus earning customer loyalty. To do so, Netflix has conducted an in-depth analysis of its target audience and users, so that it could understand how they express themselves online and what kind of content they like; this way, it is possible for the brand to join the conversation and mirror the users' tone of voice to make them feel part of a community sharing the same language and attitudes.

Let's see some examples. A post published on Instagram by Netflix's US profile on June 27th, 2020 consists of a collage of two stills with subtitles from one of the brand's latest productions; here, two characters are engaged in a dialogue, with one of them saying "That was amazing! It is not our best, but it was very good". Netflix's copy text that accompanies the photo is the following: "me and my best friend after pretending to be siblings for absolutely no reason when we're out in public. did anyone else do this??? anyway…Eurovision Song Contest: The Story Of The Fire Saga is out now, only on Netflix!!!".

The copy chosen by the brand in this case presents some features that may be perceived as unprofessional at first, but that perfectly reflect the style and tone of voice adopted by Netflix: first of all, it follows the social media practice of posting a photo or a meme and associating it with an uncorrelated but relatable context or situation for ironic purposes – in this case, the characters have not just stopped "pretending to be siblings" in the depicted scene, but their interaction could be applied in the case described by the copy text. Beside the ironic factor, the copy presents some irregular typography, such as the lack of capital letters at the beginning of sentences or the missing space between the ellipsis and the word "Eurovision"; in addition, the use of multiple exclamation points and question marks is clearly informal and not usually adopted by official brand channels to communicate. However, all these features reflect the style adopted by online and digital users in social media and chat messages and this is the tone of voice that Netflix wants to replicate in its strategy.

Another example comes from Netflix's UK & Ireland Twitter page: on June 26th, 2020 a tweet was posted to announce the movies and shows coming to the platform in July and the beginning of the copy reads as follows: "Just ***some*** of the series arriving in the UK/IE

[72] Source for the upcoming information on Netflix's history: Netflix page on the Encyclopædia Britannica website, accessed at www.britannica.com/topic/Netflix-Inc on June 27, 2020.

this July: […]”. In this case, the word “some” is formatted in bold and cursive in order to simulate the intonation of the sentence, which is meant to emphasise that particular word while implying that the list is not complete through the linguistic technique of foregrounding; the same strategy is adopted for a similar post on Instagram, where, due to the lack of formatting possibilities, the bold and cursive are substituted by two tildes for emphasis (“~some~”).

Of course, such a digital-oriented tone of voice also makes use of emojis and hashtags. Emojis, as it has been explained throughout the present chapter, can also act as substitutes for paralinguistic gestures: in a tweet by the Netflix UK & Ireland profile, for instance, the emoji “✌️” is used after the sentence “We’ll keep you updated as and when [the new titles] are added, and will bring you the series list tomorrow” with the goal of conveying a feeling of joy and excitement. Finally, as it has been already discussed, hashtags present the chance to create a “digital location” for a specific conversation and concur to the creation of a sense of community.

Of course, the tone of voice adopted by Netflix is applied also throughout the interactions that the brand has with the users in the comments underneath their posts or UGC (User Generated Content); this allows the brand to be consistent in its image and to strengthen the relationship that it has created with its customers, putting itself on their same level.

Netflix is also a great example in terms of visual context, as the logo and its relative evolutions sum up many of the features and requirements that have been mentioned in section 2.2.2.

Initially, from 1997 to 2000, Netflix’s logo presented a simple, thin font and the brand name was divided in half (Net – Flix) by a stylised film roll that clearly referred to the type of business the company was into; moreover, the graphical division of the name in the logo further clarified that the brand operated online (“net”) and that it was related to the rental of movies and tv shows (as “flix” sounds like “flicks”, the informal term for cinema films).

The logo was then updated in 2000 and it adopted a new, more modern form that is more similar to the one we know today. This iteration simply presents the brand name in black and white with no graphical illustrations or interruptions whatsoever; the

letters are long and narrow and they are framed with black shadows that are oriented towards the right side; the overall design is also arranged in an arc, which hints at the idea of a "vintage CinemaScope"[73]. This basic logo, which resisted until 2014, was slightly updated with the addition of a red background, a clear reference to the "red carpets" of movie premières.

In 2014 the brand logo underwent a rebranding, which mainly consisted in the removal of the background and of the black frames and shadows from the brand name; the new font became bolder, simpler and it kept both the arching structure and the "cinematic" red as the main colour. Finally, in 2016, a final iteration was developed, also due to the necessity of having a more "compressed" logo to use for social media profile pictures and app icons: indeed, Netflix introduced the new logo as a simple, red capital N on a black background. The arc is maintained on the lower sides of the letter, while its vertical lines are darker in colour with respect to the diagonal one: this creates the effect of a dynamic "ribbon" that hints, once again, at the cinematic concepts of red carpets and celluloid film.

All the iterations of the Netflix logo are represented in figure 2.10.

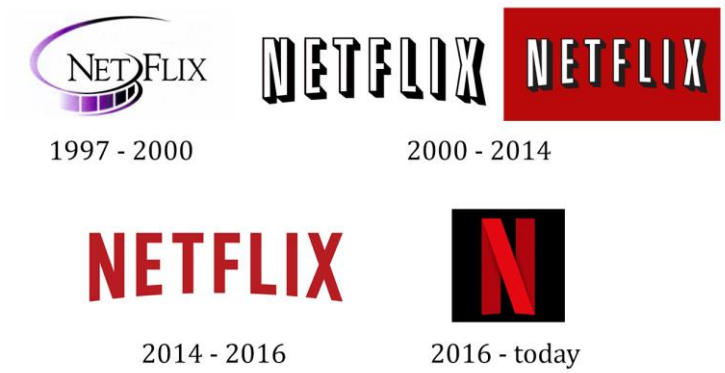

Figure 2.10. Netflix logos over time

[73] Source: Netflix brand site, accessed at www.brand.netflix.com/en/assets/ on June 27, 2020.

Overall, the design of Netflix's logo can be said to be effective in the communication of the brand identity and image: it is simple and clear, with no excessive details that could arise confusion; it is easily recognisable and identifiable, even throughout its various iterations, thus providing an idea of consistency; it arises positive and coherent associations with the business field in which the company operates, never failing to provide a cinematic feel and concept; it makes an excellent use of colour, which is maintained also across the communication channels (such as in the website layout, on merchandising and on social media profile pictures); finally, it has been adapted to fit the current needs of the industry and to the latest technological developments, as it occurred with the latest innovation.

All these features endowed the Netflix's logo with a great representative power, especially in terms of brand image; for this reason, the brand has created a dedicated page on its website with a downloadable version of the logo and instructions on how to correctly employ it. Background contrast ratios, clearing space measures and chromatic coordinates and codes for the iconic "Netflix Red" are also provided; moreover, considerations on logo misuse are indicated, such as the need to avoid printing it on disposable or edible products.

2.4.2. Paralinguistic and visual context in advertising: the case of Coca-Cola

The second case study relates to Coca-Cola, one of the most famous beverage brands worldwide. In terms of advertising, Coca-Cola has always adopted a consistent use of physical paralanguage to communicate its brand image and vision; moreover, it has employed creative and impactful visual devices to promote its products across the different markets in which it is present.

Concerning its background and business history[74], the Coca-Cola Company was founded as a corporation in 1892 with a focus on the manufacture and sale of a soda syrup and concentrate; the origins of the drink itself, however, date back to 1886 and are due to the idea of John S. Pemberton, an Atlanta pharmacist. At first, Coca-Cola was sold at local soda fountains and was marketed as a tonic, but over time the brand became so famous

[74] Source: The Coca-Cola Company page on the Encyclopædia Britannica website, accessed at www.britannica.com/topic/The-Coca-Cola-Company on June 28, 2020.

and iconic that it is now considered a cultural institution and symbol of the United States. The product line also expanded and numerous variations of the basic Coca-Cola drink were introduced, such as Diet Coke or Coca-Cola Zero; the company also created new, additional beverages and acquired numerous brands, also from foreign firms (such as Inca Kola in Peru).

The brand image and identity of Coca-Cola, besides being based on the idea of offering a "delicious and refreshing" drink as the brand slogan states, revolve around happiness: from the association with Christmas and Santa Claus to the concept of "sharing a Coke" and getting together, happiness and joy are a recurring theme that has been conveyed multiple times through the many advertisements and promotional campaigns that the firm developed over time. In particular, the idea of experiencing positive emotions in association with the consumption of one of Coca-Cola's products has been communicated also (and especially) through actions, gestures and the paralinguistic context of the brand's ads.

By looking at the first instances of advertising from as early as the 1900s and 1910s, it is possible to observe how almost all the people, celebrities and ambassadors appearing in Coca-Cola's advertisements (such as the music hall performer Hilda Clark) are shown smiling while holding the drink in their hands; the goal is clearly that of communicating how Coke is a drink that does not only provide refreshment, but happiness and a pleasurable experience as well. This is confirmed also by the first instances of Coca-Cola ads featuring the figure of Santa Claus, who is commonly intended as the joyful and playful representative of "the most wonderful time of the year": indeed, in the brand's promotional contents, he is usually shown with a wide smile or even mid-laugh – and in most recent years, such visual contents have also been accompanied by slogans openly referring to happiness (such as "share the happiness", "give a little happiness" or "shake up the happiness"). This theme has been proposed repeatedly over time by the company, as laughs and smiles are often shown also in the brand's television and video advertisements.

Another paralinguistic gesture employed in Coca-Cola's ads is that of people offering a glass or one of the iconic Coke bottles to others, which clearly refers to the idea of sharing and community. For example, in 2011 the Australian branch of the brand developed and launched the "Share A Coke" campaign, which was presented also in

other countries (such as the US or the UK) in the following years; the promotional initiative, as the slogan suggests, highlighted the power of Coca-Cola drinks in connecting people. The main gesture that was proposed in different ways in the video commercials that were filmed for the occasion was that of people offering a bottle of Coke to a friend, a relative or an acquaintance, with a particular focus on the hand gesture and on the customised labels with different names on them instead of the logo. This gesture has been presented also in other campaigns, as the idea of sharing has become a sort of trademark for the brand.

Finally, another recurrent action often displayed in Coca-Cola commercials and print ads is that of people drinking from the brand's iconic glass bottle, while gulping sounds can occasionally be heard in the background. In many instances, the people who perform the drinking action are clearly sweating, tired or thirsty, a state emphasised through gestures such as yawning or wiping sweat away from their forehead; once they have drunk Coca-Cola, however, they become energised, more active and clearly refreshed – a feeling that is often communicated and highlighted by a sigh of satisfaction.

Overall, it can be said that physical paralanguage is a key communicative device for Coca-Cola ads, as it is used to convey the different aspects of the brand's image and identity (and of the products' benefits). In this sense, it can be said that Coca-Cola greatly relies on the power of imagery and visual cues for its promotional contents; of course, these factors also go beyond the display of paralinguistic gestures, as creative visual campaigns have often been developed for the brand.

In particular, concerning the importance of the visual context for Coca-Cola, I believe The Invisible Bottle campaign to be especially interesting, as it is based on the iconic and immediately identifiable design of the brand's glass bottles and on the Gestalt principles that have been mentioned in the present chapter. Indeed, in February 2020, the advertising agency Publicis Italia and Coca-Cola launched a new campaign that involved billboards featuring a red background (using the specific "Coca-Cola" red shade) with the white brand logo and, above it, the slogan "Feel it"; the peculiarity of the apparently simple ads lies in the disposition of the logo and slogan themselves, as their curvature and vertical distance respectively suggests the idea of an "invisible" Coke bottle (see figure 2.11).

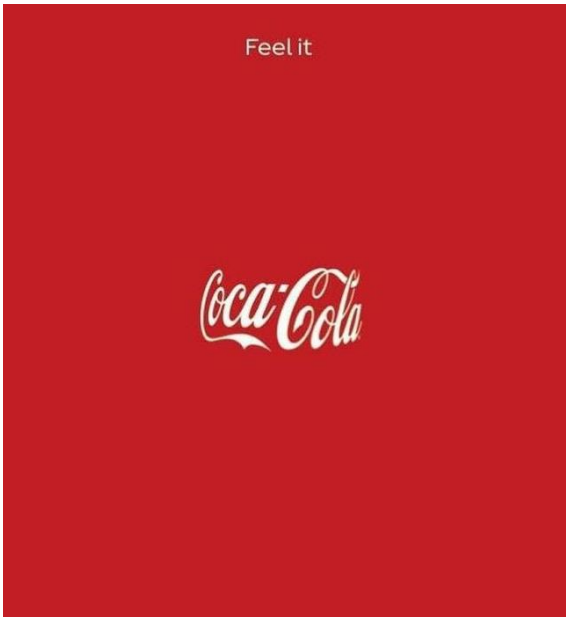

Figure 2.11. Coca-Cola "The Invisible Bottle" advertisement, 2020.

The goal of the campaign was that of exploiting the recognisability and memorability of the classic Coca-Cola *Contour* bottle (the latest of the many glass bottle designs adopted by the brand over the years) to increase brand awareness. The design makes use of the Gestalt visual theory, according to which we can perceive a whole figure independently from the completeness of its parts: indeed, the logo is positioned exactly where the label would be, while the slogan is placed at the usual height of the bottle cap. The result is a visually impactful image that is endowed with the brand's power and strength.

Coca-Cola has employed the Contour bottle design and the concept of optical illusions also in other occasions: for instance, for the 2015 International Day of Happiness, the brand recreated a smile (consistently with its reliance on the idea of happiness and joy) using the white silhouettes of multiple bottles arranged in an arc on a red background. Surely, this is an effective visual strategy that both reinforces the brand image and identity and increases the awareness and familiarity levels in the target audience.

CHAPTER 3
EXTRALINGUISTIC CONTEXT

3.1. EXTRALINGUISTIC CONTEXT EXPLAINED

So far, the present dissertation has analysed the composition of the linguistic, paralinguistic and visual contexts: in this sense, it has been presented how messages are composed and communicated through language, how they are emphasised through paralinguistic behaviours and devices and how they can be alternatively conveyed through images and pictures. In addition to these types of contextualisation, pragmatics takes into account a further context category: extralinguistic context.

The extralinguistic context is a set of elements and factors that go beyond language and how it is expressed or uttered by identifying further contextualizing indicators thanks to situational cues and pre-existent knowledge; such extralinguistic components, as a matter of fact, are divided into two categories, namely situational and cognitive (or cultural) context.

3.1.1. Situational context

Up to this point, it has been frequently demonstrated how context is a dynamic construct that is subject to many different factors. Context and its many and variable components, when the meaning of a sentence or utterance is concerned, play a fundamental role in the formulation and subsequent interpretation of the message that is being communicated and their influence can go beyond the words used and how they are used: the process of meaning construction, indeed, relies also on the situation and the environment in which the message is uttered or read.

The presence of a situational context is pivotal for interpretation because it can help us to make sense of unclear statements, to disambiguate confusing conversations and to identify what is being referred to when indexicals[1] are used. An example of the impact

[1] Indexicals are linguistic expressions that codify distinctive traits of the context, varying from situation to situation; they can refer to individuals (e.g. he, her), objects (e.g. it, that), place (e.g. here, there), time (e.g. now, later).

of situational context in this sense can be represented by the interpretation of the sentence "the police are coming": supposing that these words are whispered by a bank clerk to a colleague during a robbery, their significance is positive; however, if you see an alert with this sentence popping up on your screen while playing a videogame with the aim of avoiding law enforcement officers, the meaning is probably negative.

To sum up, the situational context is the physical location and/or circumstances in which a conversation takes place. It can be the parking lot outside a supermarket, a bedroom or a classroom; thanks to the developments of technology, the location can even be less physical and more digital, like a social media platform or a blog on the internet.

The situational context, when meaning interpretation is concerned, may also interact with the paralinguistic context, especially when demonstratives are used in a conversation: demonstratives, indeed, are a type of indexicals that refer to the objects or individuals that are part of the (situational) context and that can be designated or indicated by the speaker to clarify a reference. In this sense, according to Kaplan (one of the main theorists on the topic), indexicals are words whose referent "is dependent on the context of use", as in the referent and thus the meaning change from context to context; demonstratives, then, are indexical expressions that require an associated "visual presentation of a local object discriminated by a pointing" (1989)[2].

An example may make this concept clearer: suppose that two men are having lunch and one suddenly says to the other: "Can you pass me that?". The situational context indicates that the speaker is referring to one of the many objects on the table, but the interlocutor is not sure: does the speaker mean the bread, the salt or something else? Here, the situational context is not enough to understand the meaning of the utterance; thus, to clarify what he is referring to, the speaker may accompany his request with a paralinguistic gesture (pointing the finger, for instance, or nodding in a certain direction) to indicate exactly what he is talking about.

In the previous example, the situational context is not enough to ensure full comprehension of the intended message; however, there may be cases in which the ambiguity that arises in a conversation is solved by *salience*; salience, here, is intended

as a condition of uniqueness that enables us to recognize the object which an indexical is referring to. Suppose for instance that, in the middle of a crowd, someone shouts "Stop him!"; the situational context tells us that the speaker is referring to one of the people in the street, but we would need a paralinguistic indication of whom exactly he is talking about. Imagine now that, when the exclamation is uttered, you see a man running away (while everyone else is simply walking): in this case, you know that the speaker is referring to the running individual, as he presents a unique feature that makes him stand out.

Of course, theoretical studies have been conducted to analyse and understand the structure and functions of the situational context and how it functions with respect to cognitive and meaning factors. Kecskes (2007)[3], for instance, states that meaning is the result of the encounter and interaction of prior experience (also defined as the cognitive context, which will be described in the next section) and current experience; the latter, according to the author, is represented by the actual situation in which the act of communication or the conversation is taking place, an environment which could lead the interlocutors to even interpret the message differently.

In order to highlight the relevance of such a type of context, Kecskes brings forward a framework, the Dynamic Model of Meaning (DMM), which considers the process of communication as a structure analysable from different points of view. As a matter of fact, the author advocates the need of considering both the internalist and externalist perspectives on meaning and context: on the one side, the internalist view states that our interpretation and understanding of a certain context relies only on our knowledge of previous, recurring experiences; on the other side, the externalist view claims that meaning is defined entirely by its context and that individuals make sense of situations by finding patterns in them. Kecskes, instead, due to its will to avoid a one-sided approach, wants to emphasize both the constitutive and selective role of context, respectively.

The Dynamic Model of Meaning is constructed so that it considers not only these two points of view, but also both prior and present experience – which are defined by

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[2] Kaplan D., 1989, *Demonstratives*, in Almog J et al., *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 481-563.
[3] Kecskes I., 2007, *Dueling contexts: A dynamic model of meaning*, Journal of Pragmatics, vol. 40, pp. 385-406.

Kecskes as, respectively, encoded private context and actual situational context. The result is an overall dynamism built on two assumptions: first, human speech implies co-construction of meaning through "a reciprocal process between language (message) and actual situational context", so that language "is never context-free"; second, a multilingual process of meaning construction and understanding is required, due to the increasingly intercultural nature of communication.

In particular, Kecskes focuses on notion of *situational meaning*, which he distinguishes from the individual meaning values of lexical units. He states that the creation of situational meaning is made up by two stages: first, there is the need to "unpack", as in expressing stored private contexts that are expressed in meaning values; then, the "construction" stage takes place, as in the interaction of prior experience with the current situational experience of the interlocutors. The relevance of the situational context is here highlighted, as it is deemed necessary for comprehension (together with the cognitive context).

Figure 3.1 represents the Dynamic Model of Meaning and it identifies two further concepts of meaning brought forward by Kecskes: coresense and consense.

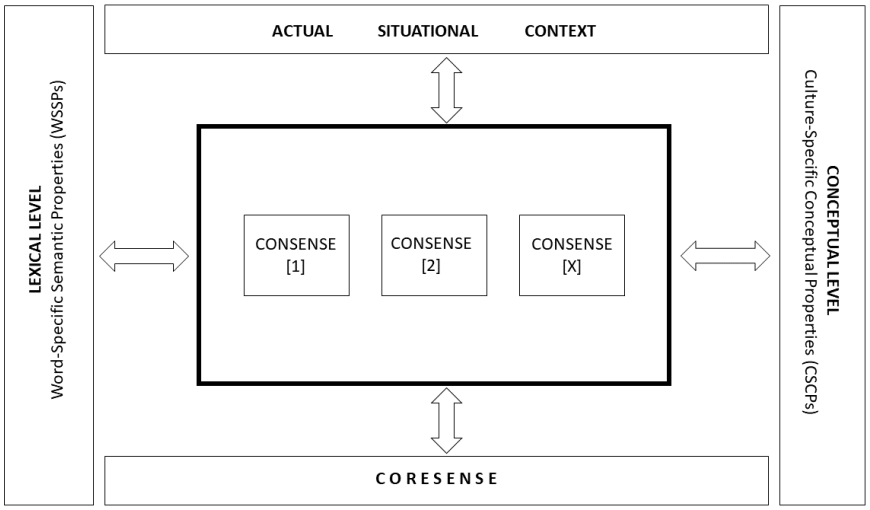

Figure 3.1. The Dynamic Model of Meaning (adapted from Kecskes, 2007)

Coresense is defined by the author as feature relevant to the cognitive context endowed with an objective, denotational and relatively constant nature, as it reflects and

represents the changes and developments occurring in a given speech community. Consense, instead, is relevant to the situational context and it is of opposite nature with respect to coresense: it is "actual, subjective, referential and connotational" and varies according to the actual environment in which the conversation takes place.

So far, Kecskes has advocated and demonstrated the dynamism and flexibility of the situational context; in addition to this idea, he also introduces the concept of situation-bound utterances, which are conventional and commonly known "pragmatic units" standardised to a number of communicative situations. An example brought up by the author is that of "What's going on here?", uttered by a policeman arriving at the scene of a car accident. Situation-bound utterances, then, underline how relevant the situational context is when interpretation and meaning construction are concerned: the same "standardised" sentence can indeed refer to many different occurrences and in order to be understood it needs to be contextualised.

The concept of situation-bound utterances is analysed also by Mitchell et al. (2015)[4], who identify three types of SBUs – namely, plain, loaded and charged. Plain situation-bound utterances are defined as expressions carrying a compositional structure and presenting transparency in terms of semantics; their situational meaning presents just a few minor changes with respect to their propositional interpretation, as they have little to no pragmatic function. This means that plain SBUs are easily understandable even when they are uncontextualized. Loaded SBUs, instead, are closely tied to semantic idioms and are located on the opposite side of the continuum in terms of transparency; Mitchell et al. explain that their "pragmatic function is more important than their original literal meaning", which is hardly understandable when they are presented without a situational context. Between plain and loaded SBUs we find, finally, charged situation-bound utterances, which display pragmatic ambiguity as their original meaning is partly extended to cover also other significances.

This analysis further exemplifies the different levels on which the situational environment can act in order to influence the meaning of a certain utterance. This type of context also plays a role in affecting cognitive complexity when it interacts with

[4] Mitchell L. et al., 2015, *The Role of Actual Situational Contexts in the Interpretation of Situation-Bound Utterances*, XXVI Annual International Academic Conference, Language and Culture.

individuals from different cultures, as Conway et al. (2001)[5] explain: indeed, the cognitive and cultural spheres, when different situations occur, can lead people to think (and subsequently act) in different, more or less complex ways, according to pre-existent experiences and values.

But what does the cognitive and cultural context consist in? The answer to this question is presented in the upcoming section.

3.1.2. Cognitive and cultural context

As it has been anticipated, the extralinguistic context does not only rely on the features and factors that are part of the environment and situation in which the communication act takes place, but it also includes a form of "encoded private context" (as Kecskes defines it). This personal sphere is made up by the cognitive and cultural processing devices that we have assimilated in our life through prior experience and social conditions; it also includes systems of beliefs, wants, wishes, preferences, norms, values and conventional knowledge, as Van Dijk (1977)[6] explains.

Concerning the cognitive side of the extralinguistic context, Van Dijk also underlines the importance of investigating the cognitive processes that underlie our acts of language in order to make sense of our meaning-understanding processes; in order to do this, he highlights the importance of all the types of contexts mentioned so far in this dissertation, while also adding the necessity of comprehending general concepts, rules and strategies that make up the general knowledge of individuals. This general knowledge, according to Van Dijk, is organized in conceptual systems that can be accounted for in terms of frames: these are, indeed, knowledge units that surround a certain concept, containing its essential, possible and typical information and being conventional in nature.

Frames are cognitively connected with speech acts and how we interpret them for different reasons: first, there are instances of many "typical speech act sequences" that, as Van Dijk explains, present a conventional or even ritual structure easily associable to

[5] Conway L. G. et al., 2001, *The complexity of thinking across cultures: interactions between culture and situational context*, Social Cognition, 19 (3), pp. 228-250.
[6] Van Dijk T.A., 1977, *Context and cognition: Knowledge frames and speech act comprehension,* Journal of Pragmatics, 1 (3), pp. 211-231.

that of frames (such as greetings or introductive formulas); second, we usually interpret and understand speech acts while relying on world knowledge that is frame-like, in particular when institutional speech acts (such as convicting or marrying formulas) are concerned; finally, interpretation is tied to the understanding of the conditions that determine the success or failure of actions and to a more general kind of knowledge about what is actually plausible or possible. This proves the relevance of a cognitive system and/or structure such as frames in the process of understanding communication.

Two further cognitive processing device that Van Dijk mentions are strategies and schemata, which allow us to create "fast assumptions" about the meaning of the message we are decoding; schemata, in particular, pertain to the "initial context" of the communication process, which includes three types of information: the set of events and actions that immediately precede the conversation taking place ("final state information"), cumulated, global information gained through prior experience and general semantic information such as frames and memory.

The cognitive sphere of the extralinguistic context, according to Van Dijk, does not rely just on frames, schemata and the "initial context", but it also includes a hierarchical structure; such organization is defined in terms of social structure, as social interaction is closely tied to speech acts. As a matter of fact, the author underlines the relevance of the role played by the social context in which a conversation occurs: usually, individuals adapt their communication contents and styles to the social situation in which they find themselves. In terms of structure, Van Dijk identifies four main social categories – namely, private, public, institutional or formal, informal – defining the type of situation or environment surrounding the interlocutors; he also illustrates the features that characterize the interlocutors themselves, namely positions (e.g. hierarchical status or role), properties (e.g. age, sex), relations (e.g. authority) and functions (e.g. mother, clerk, officer). According to these factors, the cognitive context may change and adapt to fit each unique situation.

Van Dijk also underlines the relevance of the internal structure of the interlocutors, which may in turn affect their cognitive processes as well: knowledge, beliefs, wants, desires, preferences, attitudes, feelings and emotions are all the elements that characterise the reactions and responses of a speaker involved in a conversation and that affect his or her understanding of the message being communicated.

The author elaborates further on this structure in another article published in 1997[7], where he theorises the creation of cognitive context models to be organized according to event-defining categories which, together with their corresponding modifiers, affect and determine the mental and subjective input of a conversation. Such categories, according to Van Dijk, are setting, as in space and time; social circumstances and previous acts; institutional environment; interaction goals; social roles of the speakers and their current (situational) and global (non-situational) relationship; characteristics (e.g. gender and age) of the interlocutors. All these factors shape the cognitive context of the interlocutor and the way he or she communicates and interprets a message; moreover, they make up the cognitive models that are subjective and unique to each individual and that constantly undergo change and update.

Here, Van Dijk adopts an approach that was advocated also by Kecskes; namely, that both text (or talk) and context interact and co-create each other: what the speakers utter is based on the context and on their own cognitive models, but it also concurs to the creation of the context itself. On the basis of this point of view, the author also brings up the concept of relevance, in the sense that only what is relevant to the present context in the subjective model must be expressed and included in the present discourse.

The idea of relevance in the cognitive context sphere originates from Sperber and Wilson's work (1995)[8], who support the existence of a crucial psychological "property of mental processes" approximated by the notion of relevance; thus, their goal is to study and describe such property and investigate how it is related to context. The result is a first definition of relevance: "an assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context" – with the condition that "relevance is a matter of degree" and that an investigation has to be conducted in order to define "how the context is determined".

This concept is analysed also by Carston (2002)[9], who brings forward the relevance-theoretic approach as a basis of current cognitive science: as the author explains, this

[7] Van Dijk T. A., 1997, *Cognitive Context Models and Discourse*, in *Language Structure, Discourse and the Access to Consciousness* published by Benjamins (Amsterdam), pp. 11-52.
[8] Sperber D., Wilson D., 1995, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, second edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
[9] Carston R., 2002, *Linguistic Meaning, Communicated Meaning and Cognitive Pragmatics*, Mind and Language, vol. 17, pp. 127-148.

approach is connected to our comprehension system (seen as a mental module) as it enables a fast, automatic and domain-precision process of information understanding.

Beside all the factors and modifiers mentioned so far, a further phenomenon plays an interesting part in the cognitive context of communication: intertextuality. Indeed, we have included in the definition of cognitive context also prior experiences and events, which may also include knowledge of information obtained from books, movies, popular culture and so on; intertextuality, then, is the referencing of such information in other sources (e.g. advertisements, as it will be displayed later on).

Ott and Walter (2000)[10] describe two approaches to the concept of intertextuality: on the one side, intertextuality can be intended as "the way audiences unconsciously create meaning" by making use of their knowledge of cultural codes and textual information (decoding); on the other side, intertextuality can be also approached as a textual strategy used by authors, who incorporate existing information in their productions in order to create associations in the minds of the audience (encoding).

It may be interesting to explore a bit further how intertextuality works, in order to understand how it can be used to construct a message and, consequently, to interpret it. Ott and Walter state that intertextual relations can be developed on two dimensions, horizontal and vertical: horizontal relations are built between primary texts, which are more or less directly linked; vertical relations, instead, are constructed between a primary text and other sources of a different genre that explicitly quote it.

In addition, the authors explain that intertextuality can accomplish one of three functions. First, we have parodic allusion, which is a stylistic device incorporating in one text a caricature of another through exaggeration or imitation; second, in creative appropriation or inclusion a text appropriates or integrates a section or a quote of another text by reproducing it with no parodic intent, but with eventual visual or audio alterations; finally, self-reflexive reference is a sort of meta-intertextuality device, as it occurs whenever a text brings up its own fictional nature.

Of course, our intertextuality knowledge, just as well as our cognitive systems, depends not only on the information that we have encountered throughout our life, but also on

[10] Ott B., Walter C., 2000, *Intertextuality: Interpretive practice and textual strategy,* Critical Studies in Media Communication, 17 (4), pp. 429-446.

our cultural background: indeed, each culture relies on different literary references and sources and knowledge of such information may facilitate the construction and the interpretation of certain intertextuality occurrences.

As a matter of fact, the cultural context is strictly connected to the cognitive context, as it has been anticipated; we have also already seen the relevance of culture as a determinant of the linguistic, paralinguistic and visual context in terms of, for instance, language and translation, gestures and interpretation of colours.

Concerning the cognitive sphere of context in terms of pragmatics, culture also plays a relevant role. Before briefly analysing how this factor influences individual, it is important to provide its definition, especially because culture can be intended in different ways. As the Merriam-Webster Dictionary reports[11], when referring to individuals, culture is defined on the one side as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial religious, or social group", thus including shared practices, attitudes and values; on the other side, culture is also defined in a more "geographical" sense, as in "the characteristic features of everyday existence [...] shared by people in a place or time". As a matter of fact, it can be argued that both the place and community in which an individual is brought up or with which one comes in (relevant and continuous) contact can have a certain degree of influence – and this is valid also when pragmatics and communication are concerned.

Indeed, culture can affect individuals from two points of view, as Boxer explains in her 2002 research study[12]: on the one side, there is interlanguage pragmatics, which focuses on second language acquisition and, thus, on the learner's task to acquire the norms of the community he's approaching; on the other side, cross-cultural pragmatics is intended as applied sociolinguistics, which supports the idea that individuals coming from different cultures interact on the basis of their own pragmatic rules and norms.

For the sake of the current dissertation, cross-cultural pragmatics is the field that is most interesting and relevant when the cultural sphere of context is concerned. Boxer, when analysing this phenomenon, underlines how it is observable in our day-to-day activities, actions and interactions; in addition, she states how these activities can be

[11] Definition found on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary website at www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture.

categorised into "domains", namely family, friendship, religion, education and employment. In particular, Boxer refers to social, educational and work interactions as the most relevant domains to cross-cultural pragmatics.

3.2. EXTRALINGUISTIC CONTEXT IN BRANDING

3.2.1. Situational context in branding

In the previous section, a general definition of the situational context has been provided from the point of view of pragmatics; in the field of marketing, this type of context has powerful effects on the mind and on the attitude of consumers and can, more or less directly, influence the purchasing process and its final outcome.

Considering branding and brand image, I would distinguish between two main types of situational contexts: the consumption moment or occasion and the purchase "location", as in the point of sale. The first refers to the moment or social situation in which individuals intend to consume or use a specific product, which can influence their purchase and their brand choice according to different factors; the second, instead, indicates the actual place in which the purchase occurs (which can be offline or online), whose characteristics are usually created and selected in order to convey a specific brand image and to stimulate purchase.

Let's first consider the case of the consumption moment. As Batra and Homer (2004)[13] explain, consumers create schemes and clusters in their mind that interconnect rational and irrational beliefs, emotions, perceptions and other cognitive factors; these, in turn, affect the associations, beliefs and perceived benefits that they assign to specific products and product categories, also relating to the moment or social situation in which they will consume them. An example may be that of champagne: this, indeed, is often intended as a celebratory, expensive kind of drink to be consumed in special occasions; thus, champagne brands that present an image related to exclusivity, celebration and uniqueness may obtain competitive advantage by exploiting the situational context related to the consumption moment.

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[12] Boxer D., 2002, *Discourse issues in cross-cultural pragmatics*, Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, vol. 22, pp. 150-167.

[13] Batra R, Homer P. M., 2004, *The Situational Impact of Brand Image Beliefs*, Journal of Consumer Psychology, 14 (3), pp. 318-330.

As a matter of fact, as Batra and Homer report, there have been instances of research that demonstrated the importance of image-relevant attributes of a brand when the consumption moment is considered, especially when the consumption itself occurs publicly. Indeed, self-presentation, impression management and self-definition enhancement are all factors that strongly impact brand choice, as it is renowned in branding: individuals choose (and are loyal to) those brands that enable them to display their desired self-image and status to others. Thus, a branding strategy needs to take into account also the consumption-related situational context in order to create an appropriate brand image and gain competitive advantage.

To sum this first consideration up, the study conducted by Batra and Homer demonstrated how brand image beliefs greatly affect brand purchase intentions in the case of a consumption context including "high social consequences", also considering the importance of product categories according to the occasion of use. This theory has been supported also by other studies, such as that conducted by Miller and Ginter (1979)[14].

The authors, in this case, managed to demonstrate through an experiment how brands presenting situational variation and situation-specific attributes are able to obtain competitive advantage; following this theory, it resulted from the study that it may be beneficial for brands to promote and highlight those product features that appear to be more important in specific situations. Miller and Ginter then conclude by stating how a strategy including a "set of situation-specific messages" may be the most effective choice for brands in a competitive environment.

The situational approach to branding has also been adopted by other scholars to explain customer loyalty to brands; Dubois and Laurent (1999)[15], for instance, explain how consumers can be defined as more or less loyal in terms of brand purchase depending on "the number and nature of situations" in which they choose a specific brand. The example brought forward by the author in this case is that of Tropicana fruit juices: supposing that a customer not only purchases this brand for a family reception or a party with friends, but also moves to another store if Tropicana is out of stock where she is currently shopping, we can define her as loyal to the brand.

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[14] Miller K. E., Ginter J. L., 1979, *An Investigation of Situational Variation in Brand Choice Behavior and Attitude*, Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 16, pp. 111-123.

[15] Dubois B., Laurent G., 1999, *A Situational Approach to Brand Loyalty*, Advances in Consumer Research, vol. 26, pp. 657-663.

According to this view, Dubois and Laurent formulate the definition of "situational scale" – namely, "a scale made of situations" that can be used to measure brand loyalty, to understand the criteria and circumstances that lead consumers to maintain or terminate their loyalty towards a brand and to improve segmentation and targeting strategies. As the authors explain, three steps are needed in order to develop such a situational scale: the first is the selection of specific brand and related product categories; the second is the identification of specific purchase and consumption situations; the third is the selection of customers. An exploration of the physical context, the social environment, the time perspective, the role context and the psychological states preceding the purchase moment is also suggested by Dubois and Laurent, who in this case refer to the five dimensions of situations identified by Belk (1975)[16].

The point of view of situation-related brand loyalty is adopted also by Lim and Razzaque (1997)[17], who also developed a framework considering both the "personologist" approach and the "situationist" approach. The first point of view sees personality traits, attitudes, etc. as the main determinants of human behaviour, while the second identifies situations as the fundamental drivers of actions; according to the authors, given the limits that both these approaches include, it may indeed be necessary to consider the potential of the interaction between person and situation in order to understand the sources and causes of human behaviour, especially when the customer journey and final purchasing decision are concerned. The outcome of this deepened analysis is thus the so-called "interactionalist" framework, a perspective that sees motivations, intentions and behaviour as the result of the interaction between the personality of an individual and the situation; in addition, this view also advocates a reciprocal person-situation influence.

So far, it has been displayed how the situational context can influence the purchase choices and loyalty of individuals when the consumption occasion is concerned; however, as it has been previously anticipated, the situational context can also be intended as the actual location where the purchase is taking place – in other words, the point of sale.

[16] Belk R., 1975, *Situational Variables in Consumer Behavior*, Journal of Consumer Research, pp. 157-164.
[17] Lim K. S., Razzaque M. A., 1997, *Brand Loyalty and Situational Effects*, Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 9 (4), pp. 95-115.

When branding is concerned, indeed, the point of sale is one of the many channels through which the company can convey the brand image and intended associations, factors that should be communicated consistently in order to be sustained and strengthened. Before analysing the relevance of points of sales as situational contexts for branding, I believe it is important to make a distinction between direct and indirect selling strategies: a company can, as a matter of fact, employ a direct selling strategy by presenting mono-brand and flagship stores, which are entirely dedicated to one brand, and/or it can rely on multi-brand retailers and resellers that can function as "mediators" with the customers. In both these cases, the situational context is relevant, but some differences may arise – as it will be described next.

First of all, it is important to consider the difference between online and offline points of sale. As a matter of fact, thanks to the development of digital and internet-related technologies and the diffusion of e-commerce platforms, points of sale are not exclusively located offline anymore, but products can be purchased online as well. In this case, all the considerations concerning the visual context of a website, which have been already presented in the previous chapter of this thesis, can be considered valid also when the situational context is concerned: indeed, maintaining consistent colour schemes, appropriate site layouts, brand-related fonts, visible logos and an overall congruous brand imagery on online e-shops will provide a sense of consistency coherent with the rest of the channels exploited by the branding strategy in use.

In this sense, consider for example the Rolex website. The homepage, with the logo clearly visible at the top, displays videos and photos with high resolution; the products are portrayed in environments that highlight their high quality and that represent an exclusive imagery (as in designer houses, sailing races, polished surfaces); the menu presents a dark background, consistent with the idea of luxury; the font used in the titles is immediately recognisable as belonging to the brand; finally, there are many references to the precision and accuracy of the watches' construction and internal functioning. All these elements concur to the conveyance of a specific brand image, characterized by uniqueness, exclusivity, precision and luxury.

However, if a brand's products are being hosted and sold on a multi-brand retailer website, the control over such situational and visual factors is likely to be reduced; in this case, it may be important to make sure that the products are not presented in a way

that is strongly inconsistent with the overall branding strategy. Most multi-brand fashion sites, for example, adopt simple layouts with little to no personalisation, often making use of black text on white background – for example, Asos and Matches Fashion are two different sites that have adopted this strategy. Moreover, in online multi-brand retail, products from various brands are usually displayed in a "neutral" way that does not alter significantly nor refer specifically to the brand image of each of them: the item of clothing is usually presented on a white background and/or it is pictured while worn by a model in an equally bland environment. Of course, when single items and products are concerned, such a visual strategy is adopted also by many mono-brand e-commerce sites, as it allows the customer to easily browse through the offerings and to clearly identify each product; however, in contrast with the simple and neutral site layouts of multi-brand retailers and in addition to the higher level of site personalisation, products on mono-brand websites can be presented in a more contextualised environment – like Zara does by making the atmosphere and environment of its photoshoots consistent with the brand image.

Finally, in addition to "traditional" e-commerce sites, social media like Instagram and Pinterest are currently developing e-commerce features and purchasing options; thus, additional care should be dedicated to how the brand is presented on these platforms, which are growing to be more and more important in their role of touchpoints in the customer journey.

Concerning offline, physical points of sale, instead, there are numerous additional factors that can help the development and efficacy of the branding strategy by influencing the situational context of the brand itself; such factors relate not only to sight (and thus the visual context), but also to all the other senses that can be involved by the physical environment. Most of the strategies and techniques used in this sense fall under the category of visual merchandising, which is defined as "the use of attractive displays and floor plans to increase customer numbers and sales volumes"[18]; more specifically, visual merchandising can also include point of sale marketing, which consists of those

[18] Definition from the Collins dictionary found at www.collinsdictionary.com/it/dizionario/inglese/visual-merchandising.

marketing efforts aimed at increasing sales where the purchase actually occurs – namely, at the store checkout[19].

Starting the analysis from mono-brand and flagship stores, the brand image can here be conveyed through multiple situational channels and devices that are present throughout the whole environment of the point of sale. As Cant and Hefer (2014)[20] explain in relation to the fashion sector, visual merchandising devices include suggestive store décor in brand-related colours, props and fixtures, overall store design and layout, graphics and posters and atmospherics; the latter, in particular, includes also "non-visual" factors such as music, lighting effects or scent.

The overall goal of visual merchandising is thus to "enhance the appeal of the products" and to stimulate attention and pleasure during the customer's shopping experience, as Cant and Hefer state. As a matter of fact, they highlight how the store atmosphere affects the consumers' perception and how it can even lead them to "positive buying behaviour", thus playing a significant role throughout the final phases of the customer journey.

In order to provide a clearer overview of the factors endowed with this potential, the authors present a framework which includes two different groups of the visual merchandising components affecting consumer perception. The first group is made up by three elements that are strictly related to salespeople, namely proxemics, kinesics and paralanguage[21]: these three concepts belong to the paralinguistic context that has been presented in the previous chapter of this thesis and, inevitably, they are now analysed with respect to the situational context. Indeed, proxemics, kinesics and paralanguage can play a relevant role in the definition of a store's atmosphere and in the conveyance of the brand image: for instance, sales personnel behaving in a way that is perceived as rushed, insistent, rude or with no respect for the client's personal space may act as a deterrent against the final purchase; instead, salespeople who listen to the

[19] Definition adapted from Ahmed A., 2019, *Definition of Point of Sale Marketing*, Bizfluent website, July 24th, accessed on June 3, 2020.
[20] Cant M. C., Hefer Y., 2014, *Visual merchandising displays effect – or not – on consumers: The predicament faced by apparel retailers*, Journal of Business and Retail Management Research, 8 (2), pp. 95-104.
[21] Proxemics is here intended as "the use of physical space in conveying a perceptual stimulus"; kinesics refers to "the reading of body language" and "non-verbal behavior"; paralanguage is defined as "the way words are used" (Cant, Hefer, 2014).

customer and who offer their assistance when it is needed (but without excessive zeal) may lead the client towards a positive, purchase-oriented attitude.

The second group of perception-affecting devices described by Cant and Hefer, instead, refers to décor, music, salespeople behaviour, other consumers present in the point of sale and store layout – factors that should work in synergy and with coherency to convey the intended brand image. For instance, in this sense, a records and music store focused on independent labels may benefit from the broadcasting of original music from niche artists; at the same time, a shop selling exotic or foreign jewellery may make use of incense or similar scents to create a specific atmosphere.

Taken together, the elements of the first and second group concur to the creation of the overall store atmosphere and the subsequent consumer perception and associations; this general impression then interacts with the customers' shopping goals and intentions, as the authors explain. For instance, previous research indicated that when individuals are shopping for an "unfulfilling mission", they would rather find themselves in a "comforting and relaxing environment"; however, when the main goal of shopping is that of enjoyment and fun, customers prefer a "thrilling environment". In both these cases, the situational context embodied by visual merchandising can play a significant role in the shopping experience. In addition to this consideration, Cant and Hefer found that consumers notice and appreciate when specific themes are conveyed through visual merchandising, thus confirming the relevance of such a marketing technique.

Of course, visual merchandising is relevant also for multi-brand retailers; in this case, however, the control that each brand has on the store's situational context is significantly more limited. In order to convey the brand image in these types of shops, brands can use personalised materials (such as posters with marketing campaign photos on them), props and product displays; they can also acquire corners or areas of the store to personalise and dedicate only to their products, as it may happen at fashion stores selling different brands like Urban Outfitters or Topshop. In this case, however, the dominant atmosphere will always be that chosen by the retailer.

Of course, the situational context, intended as both the consumption and the purchase moment, strictly interacts with the cognitive and cultural mindset of the consumers themselves; these two factors will be presented and analysed in the upcoming section.

3.2.2. Cognitive and cultural context in branding

As it has been described in the general section of the current chapter concerning the cognitive context, there are several aspects and factors that influence individuals' behaviour: we have mental models, schemata, frames and other thought structures and processes on one side, with the presence of emotions, beliefs, feelings, values etc. on the other side. The way in which we process the world and the reality that surround us is impactful also when we come in contact with brands and the meanings and associations that are connected to them.

One of the aspects of branding that is particularly relevant in this case is positioning: this concept is defined by Ries and Trout (1981)[22] as "[…] what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect". More specifically, positioning is a process that aims at defining the image and/or identity of brands and products so that they are perceived in a specific manner by consumers in relation to their competitors. In branding, this process includes the creation of associations, the highlighting of peculiar benefits of attitudes, the use of pricing strategies and other different techniques that act on the way in which prospects see the brand or the product.

The connection between brand positioning and the cognitive context is now clearer, but there are theories that can be used to explore this relationship even more in depth. One of these is the theory of the Four Cognitive Modes developed by Kosslyn and Miller[23], which can also be connected to neuroscience and neuromarketing; indeed, this framework advocates that, according to the brain areas that are more active in each individual, there can be four different cognitive and thought modes. This theory can prove to be helpful for developing a branding strategy as it leads to four different categories of consumers that can be targeted by using appropriate positioning and branding techniques.

The first type of these Cognitive Modes is the Mover Mode: the distinctive characteristics of this kind of consumers are dynamism, long-term planning, leadership, constant and continuous strength and efforts. To appeal to these individuals, brands should focus

[22] Ries A., Trout J., 1981, *Positioning: the battle of your mind,* McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York.
[23] Kosslyn S. M., Miller G. W., 2015, *Top Brain, Bottom Brain: Harnessing the Power of the Four Cognitive Modes*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

their positioning on success, action and long-term achievements – an example, in my opinion, might be represented by high-end automotive brands like Audi or BMW. Then, we have the Perceiver Mode, which identifies consumers that are introspective, thoughtful, reserved, with clear goals and objectives; I believe that brands from the luxury fashion sector like Bottega Veneta, which focus their positioning on emotions and experiences, may be successful in targeting this kind of consumer. Then, the third Cognitive Mode is the Stimulator Mode, identifying creative individuals who are able to accomplish complex projects thanks to their strong emotional drives; these consumers, however, find it difficult to adapt and change. If this type of Mode is the one targeted by a brand, the focus of the positioning strategy should be on recklessness, fun, self-expression and creativity – an example fitting this case may be that of GoPro. Finally, we have the Adaptor Mode, typically associated with individuals who are focused on the present and on the short-run and who are capable of quickly adapting to sudden changes. Brands like Google, which is positioned as flexible and innovative, may appeal more effectively to these individuals.

This kind of approach to positioning (and to branding in general) is connected to cognitive marketing, a strategy focused on analysing human emotions, mental processes and behaviours in order to understand them and exploit them to develop effective branding and advertising strategies. As we have seen with the theory of the Four Cognitive Modes, cognitive marketing can be useful for branding as it enables a company to find new ways to segment the audience and to identify buyer personas or consumer profiles; this type of marketing and branding, however, can prove to be effective in creating and strengthening the relationship with (and the appeal to) the consumer in many different ways. For instance, cognitive branding can be used to exert leverage on the emotional benefits of the brand and its products, so that positive associations arise in the mind of the audience; or, it can help in developing a storytelling strategy that makes the customers feel involved and interested; cognitive branding can also be exploited to make a brand appear as part of the consumers' community, through the communication of sharable values and beliefs; finally, it may also aid the positioning of

luxury products by making the customer feel special and unique through multi-channel experiences that can be developed also in-store[24].

There are also different theoretical studies that explore more in depth the influence of cognitive branding. A research article by Thellefsen et al. (2013)[25], for instance, defines cognitive branding as a theory concerning the influence of brand on the customers' minds through three dimensions of cognition: meaning creation and interpretation, memory patterns referring to how brands can act as symbols to communicate certain values and, finally, attention activation through "emotional forms". The authors also suggest that, when intended in this sense, branding can stimulate the emergence of brand communities that create, maintain and develop brand-related "emotionally positive images" – a process that leads brands and products to turn into a "cognitive-symbolic habit of interpretation".

Thellefsen et al. then connect the cognitive sphere of branding to the idea of values, which are communicated through brand image and identity; these values are also to be interpreted by the customer base, a process that could sometimes result in the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance, indeed, occurs when contradictions arise between the values displayed and advocated by a brand and the actual actions and behaviours perpetrated by the company; this phenomenon, which is experienced by the customers, could lead some of them to abandon the brand and lose their loyalty towards it.

The concept of cognitive dissonance is explored also by Sahgal and Elfering (2011)[26], who explain how it leads consumers to avoid situations and information that may intensify the internal conflict that occurs when cognitions (such as attitudes, desires and intentions) are discordant. In particular, in relation to branding and consumption, the authors state that cognitive dissonance can be present also when individuals make a purchasing decision, which implies acquiring the negative features of the chosen product brand while renouncing to the benefits of the neglected one. To contrast this cognitive phenomenon, companies should be aware of the possibility of its occurrence

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[24] Source: *Engaging your target market through cognitive branding*, Jpd. Agency website, accessed at www.jpd.agency/engaging-your-target-market-through-cognitive-branding/ on June 8th, 2020.
[25] Thellefsen T. et al., 2013, *A note on cognitive branding and the value profile*, Social Semiotics, 23 (4), pp. 561-569.
[26] Sahgal A., Elfering A., 2011, *Relevance of cognitive dissonance, activation and involvement to branding: An overview*, Escritos de Psicología, 4 (3), pp. 15-26.

and reinforce their branding strategy through the highlighting of positive brand characteristics and benefits and the offering of efficient post-purchase customer services.

Sahgal and Elfering do not limit their analysis of the cognitive context for branding only to the final steps of the purchasing process and the possibility of cognitive dissonance, but they also provide a framework that explores the four phases of the purchase-related cognitive process. Starting with the first phase, namely that of perception and attention, they explain how brands try to occupy their desired positioning in the mind of the customer. It is also important to note that during this phase the audience has a limited amount of processing capacity (which is also often due to information overload), which leads them to adopt simple cognitive processes during brand selection; in addition, subjectivity and past experiences also play a role in the final purchase decision. Thus, in this phase, brands should exploit all these factors to attract and maintain the attention of the consumers (e.g. through the reduction of the content to the core message or through the use of Gestalt-based, eye-catching logo designs) while also "manipulating" their perception to obtain the desired positioning.

The second phase of the purchase-related cognitive process is that of information processing: here, the information obtained by consumers from the environment is turned into "quantitative psychological values" and some distortions may arise. As a matter of fact, beside the previously mentioned information overload and limited cognitive capacity, individuals in this phase may be subject to interferences, unconscious modifications or omissions. In order to tackle these issues, branding strategists should focus on making the marketing content "emotionally relevant to the target audience", as emotions can be endowed with an "activating effect" that attracts attention and stimulates cognitive capacities.

The third phase described by Sahgal and Elfering is that of information storage, which involves the learning and retaining of the information collected and elaborated by the customers. Here, the memory of brand meanings is fundamental, together with the knowledge of the main attributes and benefits of the products; thus, to aid this process, the branding strategy should focus on repetition, which can be employed also in advertising. Finally, the fourth phase is that of information structuring, which refers to "the lasting configuration of buyers' knowledge": this implies that consumers create and

adopt mental structures containing the information and knowledge they have previously stored and that additional stimuli or pieces of information or will be interpreted according to these same structures – a fact that should lead companies to be consistent throughout their branding efforts.

All the factors, systems and frameworks that we have analysed so far have proven to influence the relationship and interaction between brands and their customers; in addition to this cognitive sphere, culture also plays a relevant role in creating brand meaning and in affecting its interpretation from the point of view of the customer base.

As a matter of fact, scholars like Schroeder (2009)[27] advocate for the necessity of a "brand culture perspective" that includes cultural, sociological and theoretical investigation in order to better contextualise the interaction of branding with society and consumers; Schroeder, in particular, states that brands have become "ideological referents" shaping cultural rituals and social norms in addition to economic activities, influencing how audiences talk, think and behave – thus creating a connection between culture and cognition.

To better understand the impact of culture on branding, different theoretical models have been developed. In a 2005 article[28], for instance, O'Reilly illustrates Du Gay's Circuit of Culture framework in relation to branding; here, culture is seen as "the production and circulation of meaning" concerning products in general (and not just art-related items). The Circuit of Culture is characterised by five main processes to which attention must be paid: production, consumption, representation, regulation and identity. Figure 3.2 depicts the model; however, for the sake of relevance to the subject matter, O'Reilly discards regulation from its explanation of the framework's functioning.

[27] Schroeder J. E., 2009, *The cultural codes of branding*, Marketing Theory, 9 (1), pp. 123-126.
[28] O'Reilly D., 2005, *Cultural Brands/Branding Cultures*, Journal of Marketing Management, vol. 21, pp. 573-588.

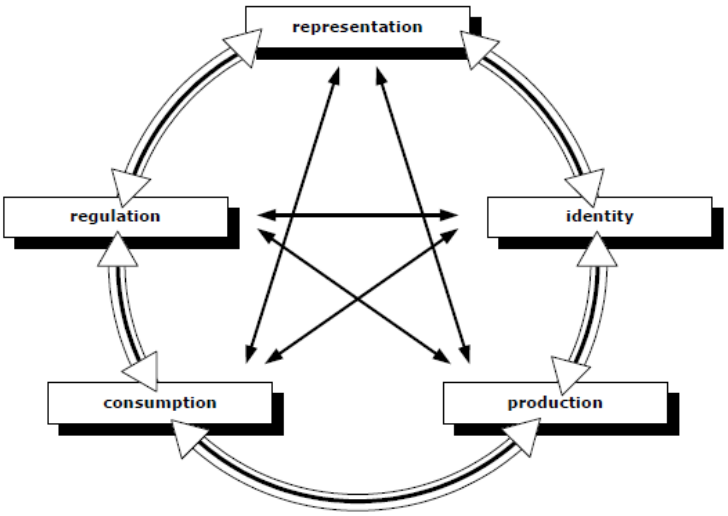

Figure 3.2. The Circuit of Culture model (O'Reilly, 2005)

The first two phases of the process are production and consumption, seen as "mutually constitutive". In production, cultural meaning is encoded into products through design activities; during consumption, instead, meanings are created through social usage and they are affected in terms of culture. This twofold process is valid for brands as well.

The third phase is that of (brand) identity development: indeed, identity is created by figures such as marketers, designers and advertisers, who are endowed with symbolic expertise, through the connection of production and consumption with signifying practices. Then, representation is employed to construct meaning with the help of signs and language, two elements that are fundamental for culture: as a matter of fact, as it has been demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis, language is a crucial medium used to share meanings and cultural values.

From this theoretical model, O'Reilly derives three types of cultural brands: cultrepreneurs, commercial corporates and cultural corporates. First, cultrepreneurs are defined as "artists who act like businesspeople" – examples like the singer Madonna or the contemporary artist Damien Hirst are brought up by the author; these individuals adopt strategies of "intensive media management" with the aim of promoting themselves and their commercial success in terms of "cultural or art brands". In order to achieve this goal, cultrepreneurs employ shock and "outrageous identities and innovations" in their strategy.

Then, commercial corporates are defined by O'Reilly as "mainstream commercial businesses" (such as global multinationals) that "appropriate culture and art-cultural offerings" during brand creation processes. This "cultural engineering" makes use of co-branding projects, advertising, celebrity spokespersons, product placement and many more branding techniques; in this way, marketing messages are embedded into cultural media (e.g. movies) and highly frequented areas (e.g. streets) so that their presence is "naturalised", allowing the brand to "become the culture". This process is also employed to create iconic and mythical brands such as Coca-Cola: as we read in the previously mentioned article by Thellefsen (2013), this globally renowned brand became a staple of "diner culture" in the 1920s thanks to a placement strategy that saw its distinctive and immediately recognizable logo imprinted on drinking glasses that were then distributed to diners and similar establishments.

Finally, O'Reilly describes cultural corporates as culture-related organizations acting like businesses in response to their operating environment; in other words, some museums, dance companies or universities with a strong cultural nature may adopt corporate business models and thus become "marketised".

In addition to the theoretical points of view that have been mentioned so far, it is important to note that culture does not relate only to the sociological sphere of brands and their target consumers, but that it is also affected by geography. Throughout this dissertation, the importance of taking into account the local market in which a brand is present (or in which it aims to be present or expand) has been underlined several times; from the choice of the brand name to the selection of the colours of the logo, it is indeed fundamental to consider the habits, values, beliefs, uses and traditions of the target geographical area, in order to avoid unpleasant misunderstandings that may negatively affect the reputation of the brand. However, it is also necessary to take into account the widespread phenomenon of globalization.

Concerning this topic, Cayla and Arnould (2008)[29] explore the concept of brand globalization, suggesting to approach branding practices as cultural practices. With this aim in mind, the authors advocate for the study of three main areas: how culturally different brands globalize; how branding activities affect cultural systems; how brands,

[29] Cayla J., Arnould E. J., 2008, *A Cultural Approach to Branding in the Global Marketplace*, Journal of International Marketing, 16 (4), pp. 86-112.

when intended as "evolving narratives", are constructed and interpreted in a "geographically polycentric world". Indeed, brands that have a global target market undergo a "collective process" of brand creation that involves numerous different "authors" contributing with unique and culturally diverse interpretations.

3.3. EXTRALINGUISTIC CONTEXT IN ADVERTISING

3.3.1. Situational context in advertising

So far, the extralinguistic context has been approached from the point of view of branding; however, it can relevantly affect advertising as well – as in the way in which the brand, after it has been created and endowed with meaning, is communicated to the audience, along with its products.

Considering the situational context first, I will approach this topic from two different points of view: first, I will describe how the purchase-related situational context can affect the role of advertising, especially according to theories related to the level of consumer involvement; then, I will provide a brief analysis on how, conversely, advertising can affect and exploit the situational context to attract and retain the attention of the audience, both offline and online.

Starting from the way in which the purchase situation can affect the definition of the advertising role, it is important to clarify the role played by customer involvement. As Reed and Ewing (2004)[30] explain, starting from the 1970s many advertising models started to include the level of involvement as a determining dimension of advertising; indeed, this factor concurs to the definition of different types of purchase situations according to the relative importance of the purchase itself to the consumer. Involvement ranges from high to low level on a continuum (rather than only on two extremes, like it was theorised at first) and it can vary according to whether the purchase situation is a first-time or a repeated occurrence. Concerning this last "situational distinction" in particular, Reed and Ewing already provide a description of two different advertising campaigns: those aimed at first-time users are defined as "conquest" marketing strategies, as they have to compete with similar brands to gain the attention and

[30] Reed P. W., Ewing M. T., 2004, *How advertising works: Alternative situational and attitudinal explanations*, Marketing Theory, 4 (1/2), pp. 91-112.

preference of the audience, while those aimed at customers who have already bought a brand in the product category are defined as “defensive” or “brand-switching”.

Thus, it can be said that the level of involvement gives rise to different situational contexts and each of these calls for a different advertising strategy. From this theory, Reed and Ewing derive seven different models referring respectively high, medium-low and low levels of customer involvement.

The first four frameworks relate to high involvement. The first concerns products or items that are expensive and long lasting, with no possibility of pre-purchase trial; here, advertising needs to strengthen the experiential attitudes of current consumers and act as a reminder of the reasons why they appreciate the brand, thus leading to repurchase and confirmed satisfaction. The second model refers to items that are expensive and long lasting, too, but with the possibility of a pre-purchase trial (such as automobiles or television sets); in this case, advertising needs to fortify purchase satisfaction or, alternatively, decrease post-purchase cognitive dissonance while also reinforcing experiential attitudes.

The third and fourth models of this list refer to two phenomena that can occur when high involvement is concerned – namely, emotional distortion and information overload. Emotional distortion is due to “excessive arousal” stimulated by persistent and intense emotion-creating factors; this leads the customer to adopt a non-adaptive approach and behaviour. In this model, the rational processes are distorted due to the high level of personal importance and emotion; thus, advertising needs to fix this imbalance by explaining to the customer the rational benefits of choosing a brand over another. Information overload, instead, occurs when the consumer is submerged in technical information; this overload leads him or her to become frustrated and to make an impulsive and quick purchase decision. In this fourth model, conversely with respect to the third, the rational and technical features are dominant and little brand differentiation is perceived by the customer, causing confusion; advertising thus needs to give rise to positive brand awareness and lead the customer towards the purchase, maybe also through the help of customer support.

The fifth model proposed by Reed and Ewing refers to medium-low involvement situations. Medium involvement items are usually replaced once every few years (e.g.

automobile insurance or expensive clothes); lower involvement products, instead, are *una tantum* purchases with a relatively low cost. In this instance, advertising needs to arise brand awareness for first-time buyers, while reinforcing positive attitudes and pushing towards repeated purchases in the case of loyal customers.

Finally, the last two models concern low involvement situational contexts. The sixth framework relates to frequently and/or regularly purchased products (e.g. grocery shopping); for first-time buyers, advertising needs to arise brand awareness and stimulate purchase through trial and/or sampling; this awareness and preference must be maintained over time by advertising campaigns, which need to strengthen positive brand attitudes and associations in order to induce repeated buys. The seventh and last model, instead, is referred to impulse purchases of low-cost items. For first-time consumers, the role of advertising is undefined: it may help in the creation of brand awareness, but it may not be completely influential for this kind of unplanned, impulsive buys. Instead, advertising for this category of situations is relevant in the post-purchase phase of the customer journey, as it helps reinforcing satisfaction and reminding the consumer of the brand.

As it has been demonstrated, Reed and Ewing strongly advocate for the role of involvement in defining purchase situations; however, they also state that it is important to consider also the influence and level of emotion, rationality, past experience, and consumer attitudes, especially those developed prior to the purchase (namely, conceptual attitude).

The relevance of involvement for advertising is supported also by other authors. In a 2013 article by Tsiotsou[31], for instance, this concept is used to investigate the specific sector of television programs and the related ad breaks. The proposed model, as a matter of fact, states that "enduring involvement" with respect to the "program context" (the central stimuli) can lead the audience to memorise the embedded advertisements (the peripheral stimuli); in other words, the tv program acts as a sort of "bridge" that helps transferring specific associations, attitudes, emotions and excitation to the commercials that interrupt it, increasing ad memory and brand recognition as well. As such, "situational involvement" can be defined as "an intervening variable" mediating

[31] Tsiotsou R. H., 2013, *Investigating the role of enduring and situational involvement with the program context on advertising effectiveness,* Journal of Marketing Communications, 19 (2), pp. 114-135.

between "enduring involvement and advertising effectiveness". In order for this model to actually be effective, Tsiotsou states that media planning and pre-testing of advertisements are key factors; indeed, the ads need to be relevant to the program being broadcasted and they should be directed at the appropriate target audience.

From this first "situation-affecting-advertising" approach, the relevance of the situational context (intended as the customer or audience cognitive and emotional status and attitude towards the purchase) has been demonstrated. However, I believe it may be relevant to cite in this chapter's section also the way in which advertisers can "take advantage" of the situational context to produce creative and impactful promotional contents. In this approach, I will consider two main types of situational context: "abstract" and physical.

First of all, when using the adjective "abstract" to refer to the situational context, I mean to define and include all those situations that do not depend on the physical environment of a specific (advertising-related) communication instance, but that are rather made up by events, holidays, trends and similar occurrences. As a matter of fact, marketers can exploit such publicly known situations in order to develop related advertising campaigns – this kind of strategy is defined as situational marketing[32] and it is usually aimed at mass communication.

Let's consider, for instance, festivities like Halloween or Christmas: during the weeks preceding these times of the year, many different brands create and adapt their advertising content around these themes. Department stores brand John Lewis, for instance, has produced Christmas television ads every year since 2007, creating a sort of annual tradition in the UK; since 2019, the company has teamed up for the occasion with the supermarket chain Waitrose & Partners, thus beginning a yearly co-branding promotional campaign. The same rationale of situational marketing is applied also to pop culture events such as the Academy Awards or to sporting events like the NFL Super Bowl; concerning the Super Bowl in particular, which is one of the most watched tv broadcasts in the US, brands usually engage in a sort of "unofficial competition" revolving around creative and buzz-generating commercials – which, in time, have earned the definition of "Super Bowl ads". For instance, one of the best ads for the 2019

edition of the Super Bowl, as listed by Time[33], was the one by Pepsi, which featured cameos from actor Steve Carell and singers Lil Jon and Cardi B.

There are several other types of "abstract" situational contexts than can be taken into consideration for situational marketing: news events or relevant trends (such as discussions happening on social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook), for instance, provide the basis for real-time marketing, which leads companies to quickly create unplanned promotional content in order to join the conversation. Social or environmental causes are another source of situational marketing; they also provide the brand with a chance to take a stance on issues that reflect the company's values and beliefs.

Concerning this kind of strategies, it is also important to note that the increased (and still increasing) diffusion of digital platforms and social media makes situational marketing even more relevant today, as it gives creative content the possibility to generate buzz, become viral and exponentially increase brand awareness – with a higher chance of an increase in sales, as well. Viral advertisements can also provide a growth in a brand's social media following, customer and user engagement and organic reach. In addition, companies being active and responsive online have more chances of catching up with the latest trends and discussions.

In addition to this kind of "abstract" situations, companies and brands can also exploit the physical environment when developing offline advertising campaigns. One of the most effective strategies in this case is that of outdoor (or out-of-home) advertising.

Outdoor advertising, as its own name suggests, is defined as the set of promotional contents created and positioned outdoors and/or in open-air environments and it is particularly effective to promote products or brands locally and in specific geographic areas. There are several kinds of devices that can be used to develop an OA campaign: billboards, bus benches and waiting areas, the interior and exterior of public transport, wall painting and so on. Each presents different levels of visibility and reach: for

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[32] Source for the definition and the following information on situational marketing: Simova a., 2019, *Situational Marketing: How Brands Use It and How You Should Too*, Amplifr website, November 4th, accessed on June 16, 2020.

[33] Fitzpatrick A., Law T., 2019, *These Are the Best Super Bowl 2019 Commercials*, Time website, February 4th, accessed on June 16, 2020.

instance, ads placed on buses or trains can reach different areas and many people in the same day, while billboards are usually static but can be seen from a greater distance.

Developments in technology have allowed outdoor advertising to become more and more digitalised and interactive over time[34]. Times Square in New York City and Piccadilly Circus in London, for instance, are two urban areas that are filled with digital billboards, which can display multiple advertisements and video commercials from different brands – allowing companies to get access to a large and diverse audience. Interactive forms of outdoor advertising are even more engaging for possible customers, especially if they make use of their surroundings to "blend in" with the environment. In 2016, for example, Reebok installed an interactive billboard with a built-in speed camera in a Stockholm mall to promote their ZPump 2.0 shoes; passers-by were invited to run beside the display to test their speed and those who reached 10.5 miles per hour were awarded with a pair of the new sneakers.

Augmented reality (AR) is an additional technology that can be used to make the audience interact with the outdoor advertisement; it can even transform the promotional content into an immersive, game-like experience that connects the brand to the customer through emotion. AR, as a matter of fact, requires the viewers to use point their smartphone cameras at the advertisement (a billboard, for instance) and watch new, extra content on their screens[35]. This strategy was adopted by Pepsi in London, where they installed AR billboards on bus shelters; the billboards looked like transparent glass walls, but once a commuter's smartphone camera was aimed at them, surprising content like moving tigers and robots appeared on the phone screen.

Another form of outdoor advertising that is particularly relevant in terms of "physical" situational context is guerrilla marketing. Guerrilla marketing is defined as an advertising strategy making use of low-cost promotional efforts with an unconventional, unexpected, surprising and/or shocking nature; this marketing strategy has also been defined as disruptive, unauthorised and "sticky" (due to its high levels of memorability) and it is inspired by tactics of irregular warfare[36]. The main goal of guerrilla marketing is

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[34] Source for the upcoming examples: Nguyen G., 2020, *8 Types of Effective Outdoor Advertising*, Penji website, March 2nd, accessed on June 17, 2020.
[35] Source: Gleb B., 2020, *How Augmented Reality Makes Advertising Interactive,* RubyGarage website, January 5th, accessed on June 17, 2020.
[36] Definition source: 2010, *How to Pull Off a Guerrilla Marketing Campaign,* Entrepreneur website, April 19th, accessed on June 17, 2020.

that of surprising the audience, presenting the promotional content in unexpected places or situations, thus creating buzz and becoming viral.

Guerrilla marketing also makes use of outdoor advertising. A great example is that of Bic's 2008 campaign in Japan: the brand placed white billboards (on which only the logo was visible) near small fields or grass areas; leaning against these billboards, giant Bic razors were placed with the blade side on the ground, exactly at the end on a strip of mowed grass that contrasted with the rest of the outgrown field. The final effect made it seem like the razor had literally shaved part of the grass, providing passers-by with a sense of surprise and amusement. Another instance of well-done guerrilla marketing stunt that was strongly related to physical surroundings was a 2007 campaign by Jeep in Copenhagen: in this case, the brand placed parking spot outlines in unexpected locations, such as over steps or elevated areas, with the goal of showing how their cars can be parked almost everywhere thanks to their performative features.

As it has been demonstrated, outdoor advertising is particularly relevant in terms of situational context. However, this is not the only promotional strategy relying on physical environments and audience location: as a matter of fact, recent developments in the area of digital marketing have led to the so-called location-based advertising (LBA). This strategy is focused especially on mobile technologies and it relies on the integration and interaction of digital advertising with location-based services; the goal is that of identifying the location of the target audience and, consequently, providing location-related ads. There are many different types of LBA strategies (such as geo-fencing, hyper contextual targeting or beacons), but the core idea is the same: reaching prospects and customers when they are close to a possible point of sale and targeting them with appropriate adverts, thus exploiting their "physical" situational context.

Of course, the situation-based advertising strategies and devices mentioned so far are particularly effective because they also impact the cognitive processes of the target customers; indeed, a relevant part of the advertising-related extralinguistic context is represented also by the cognitive sphere and responses of the ads' audience. This particular topic will be explored in the upcoming section of this chapter.

3.3.2. Cognitive and cultural context in advertising

The effect of surprise and amusement that is provoked by both involvement-based and environment-based advertisements is relevant also in terms of the cognitive processes and elaboration it stimulates in the mind of the customers; this is due to the high level of importance that cognition has with respect to advertising in general and how it affects the audience's response and attitude towards promotional content.

Indeed, as Wright theorises in a 1973 research paper[37], (advertising-related) message receivers can be considered as active information processors who compare new, external information to existing structures of values and beliefs, giving rise to "spontaneous cognitive responses, or critical thoughts" that function as "primary mediators of message acceptance". Thus, applying this cognitive process to advertising reception and interpretation as Wright does, customers respond to promotional content according to three variables (the previously mentioned mediators) that will, subsequently, lead to the refusal or acceptance of the advertisement: counterargument, source derogation and support argument.

Counterargument is defined as a response phenomenon taking place when a discrepancy is noticed between the incoming information and the compared belief system, thus leading the receiver to "go against" the evidence proposed by the promotional message – a process that is very similar to that of cognitive dissonance. A substitute for counterarguments that also constitutes a "resistive response" to advertisements is source derogation, which occurs when the message source is seen as biased by the audience. Finally, when the reaction to commercial content is positive, it is possible to witness a case of support argument: here, the receiver notes "congruent associations" between his beliefs and the new information – a situation that will likely lead to advertisement acceptance.

The study conducted by Wright also takes notice of two situational factors that play a relevant role in the cognitive process of acceptance – namely, content-processing involvement (a factor that has already been analysed in section 3.3.1) and message modality (such as, for instance, print, radio or television); the mention of such factors in the analysis of advertising-related cognitive processes is a proof of the fact that different

types of context can easily intertwine and jointly affect the reception and interpretation of a message. As a matter of fact, the final results of Wright's research demonstrate that both these situational factors influence advertising acceptance together with cognitive response mediators.

In support of this thesis, I believe it is worth to briefly mention the cognitive response model developed by Buchholz and Smith (1991)[38], which is based on the two previously cited situational factors: this framework, indeed, examines the role of involvement with respect to two different message modalities used for advertising communication – radio and television. As the results of the related study demonstrated, on the one side consumers with a low involvement level process advertisements superficially and conduct few personal connections; thus, the most effective broadcasting media to target them is television, as it exploits two different input modes (audio and video stimuli) to attract attention and enhance brand recognition. On the other side, consumers with a high level of involvement are more effectively targeted by radio commercials, as it allows for the production of a greater amount of personal elaborations due to the lack of visual stimuli. To sum it up, it can be said that consumer involvement can be seen as both a situational and cognitive variable in the analysis of advertising-related responses.

Cognitive responses to advertising are also influenced by different consumer processing styles, a topic that has been investigated also by Ruiz and Sicilia: in a 2004 article[39], the authors support the necessity of a Need For Cognition (NFC) scale to classify customer personalities according to their cognitive style, in order to allow researchers to identify individuals on the basis of their low or high placement on the scale itself. Indeed, customers that are high on the NFC scale are more likely to enjoy thinking and thus "process and evaluate advertising information more thoroughly" with respect to those placed on the lower end.

The implication of such an observation allows marketers to choose the most appropriate persuasion route for their target audience, also following the elaboration likelihood

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[37] Wright P. L., 1973, *The Cognitive Processes Mediating Acceptance of Advertising*, Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 10, pp. 53-62.
[38] Buchholz L. M., Smith R. E., 1991, *The Role of Consumer Involvement in Determining Cognitive Response to Broadcast Advertising,* Journal of Advertising, 20 (1), pp. 4-17.
[39] Ruiz S., Sicilia M., 2004, *The impact of cognitive and/or affective processing styles on consumer response to advertising appeals*, Journal of Business Research, vol. 57, pp. 657-664.

model developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986)[40]. According to this latter model, indeed, consumers can either follow the central or the peripheral route to persuasion: the central route processing style occurs when individuals actively research product related information to make their purchase choice; the peripheral route processing style, instead, occurs when consumers are not motivated enough to pay close attention to product information, thus relying on incidental or affective factors for their decision. Going back to Ruiz and Sicilia's framework, low NFC individuals are more likely to follow a peripheral route to persuasion with respect to high NFC consumers – who, instead, may prefer to follow the central one.

Thus, the strategical path that marketers should follow according to these observations is the following: first, they should identify the placement of the ad's target audience on the NFC scale; then, they should determine the corresponding persuasion route; finally, they should design the advertisement accordingly – that is, making it more informational for high NFC, central-route following individuals and more emotional for low NFC, peripheral-route following consumers[41].

Another type of cognitive scale mentioned by Ruiz and Sicilia is the Preference for Affection (PFA) scale, which is used to measure the level of emotional intensity applied by individuals in their response processes: following this reasoning, the authors demonstrated that advertisements with a highly emotional nature are more effective in persuading high PFA consumers, while no differences between high and low PFA individuals appear when ads are mainly informational.

The NFC and PFA scale thus identify two main processing styles – namely, affective and cognitive; consequently, the combination of the high and low levels of these two measuring devices give rise, as Ruiz and Sicilia explain, to four different types of "cognitive" individuals. First, feeling processors present high affect and low cognition levels and they should be targeted by advertisements characterised by emotionally charged appeals and messages; conversely, thinking processors present low affect and high cognition and they should be addressed through rational and informational ads;

[40] Petty R. E., Cacioppo J. T., 1986, *The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion*, Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, vol. 19, pp. 123-205.

[41] It is important to note that, the cited study, Ruiz and Sicilia found that emotionality-based advertisements present the same level of effectiveness on both high and low NFC individuals; in this case, I mentioned emotion as a particularly relevant factor for low NFC consumers given the scarce effectiveness of information-filled commercials for this audience category.

then, combination processors present high affect and high cognition, so commercials presenting significant levels of both emotion and rationality should prove to be effective; finally, passive processors present low affect and low cognition, causing their behaviour and ad response to be unpredictable.

To sum up the observations conducted so far, it can be said that, in order for advertisements to be effective, their content and nature should match the cognitive processing style of the target customers; in this way, the response to the promotional effort and the possibility of its acceptance by the audience can be predicted more easily by marketers and advertisers. In addition to this strategy, a further cognitive device could be applied to ads in order to make them even more effective and to further engage the viewers (or listeners): intertextuality.

Intertextuality and its functioning have already been defined in section 3.1.2. of the present chapter; however, it may be useful to recall that this concept is described as "the way one text can point to or base itself on another" (Goddard, 2001)[42]. The reason why intertextuality can prove to be useful when it is used to reference an old advertisement with a new one is twofold: on the one side, as Goddard explains, it allows the main advertisement to use and elaborate on a pre-existent message, taking for granted its underlying meaning and thus channelling less effort in the development process; on the other side, it makes the audience feel "clever" and part of a sort of "exclusive group" if they understand the reference and the connection between the two commercials.

In addition, intertextuality can be exploited to stimulate specific reactions from the target audience: for instance, as Goddard suggests, by using an old jingle to address with a new commercial a segment of older people, advertisers will create "a sense of nostalgia" while making the audience feel "special" for understanding a code that is not comprehensible to everyone. Or, conversely, younger audiences might be targeted by adapting old slogans in new, unusual ways to stimulate rebellion or to turn "older generations' nice sentiments into in-your-face statements".

Intertextual references in advertisements can also include connections with non-commercial texts, such as popular sayings, literary texts, movies, songs and so on: the

[42] Goddard A., 2001, *The Language of Advertising*, Routledge, London, p. 7.

end result is usually the same – as well as the risk: that is, people might not be able to make out the reference and thus the promotional effort might end up being unsuccessful.

To better contextualise intertextuality with respect to cognition, I would go as far as to state that it stimulates active cognitive processing in the target customers, as they need to reflect on the content of the advertisement to understand and recall where they have heard a certain jingle, seen a certain photo or read a certain slogan before; in this way, they create a connection between the advertisement at hand and their past experience, increasing their involvement with the content – and, hopefully, with the product being advertised.

Of course, the cognitive sphere of the extralinguistic context is also strictly tied to the cultural sphere, as our belief and value systems are influenced by the social and geographical environment we have been brought up in. Thus, throughout this thesis, the importance of finding a balance between maintaining global consistency and adapting the intended message to each local target market has been repeatedly highlighted – and this consideration is valid for branding as well as for advertising.

As a matter of fact, a study by Mikhailitchenko et al. (2009)[43] relates different cultural backgrounds to different information processing patterns. For instance, on the basis of previous literature, the authors compare U.S. and Russian culture and media habits: the former present higher levels of individualism, masculinity and long-term orientation, while consuming more image-based content, for example through television and print; the latter, instead, rely more on power distance and uncertainty avoidance and it consumes mostly text-based and written media, such as books or newspapers. The hypothesised (and then confirmed) consequence is that, with respect to a Russian customer base, a U.S. audience would be more likely to recall a brand if it was promoted by an imagery-based advertisement; at the same time, the "moderating role" of visual imagery would be higher for a U.S. audience with respect to a Russian one when the relationship between brand familiarity and recall is concerned.

[43] Mikhailitchenko A. et al., 2009, *Cross-cultural advertising communication: Visual imagery, brand familiarity, and brand recall*, Journall of Business Research, vol. 62, pp. 931-938.

Thus, advertisements should be developed according to the processing style of the cultural target customer base; in addition, as Burgos (2008)[44] suggests, particular attention must be paid to the cultural elements included in the advertisement in order to avoid not only lack of sufficient adaptation, but also misuse and abuse of such factors – which might lead multicultural promotional efforts to be unsuccessful and ineffective. Indeed, according to the author, proposing culturally adapted commercial content makes it easier for a company to generate the intended brand associations, to engage audiences and to motivate consumers through specific CTAs (Calls to Action). However, a particularly intense focus on adapting cultural advertising elements may lead marketers to neglect the actual content of the promotional message, which is still the most relevant part of the advertisement: it is indeed important to remember, as Burgos states, that the cultural target audience at hand is primarily made up by consumers looking for information on product benefits and advantages – and, thus, the advertisement should, first of all, provide an appropriate and convincing answer.

According to Burgos, another factor to consider when developing a multicultural advertising strategy is the risk presented by stereotypes: each culture and minority presents peculiar traits, habits and beliefs which should be taken into account, but it is crucial not to generalise, mock or overemphasise on such characteristics, as this could lead to an unrealistic or biased representation and, consequently, to negative reactions among the audience.

Finally, it is important address the internal differences that characterise each cultural segment. The example brought up by Burgos is that of the "Asian-American" market, which is made up by consumers with sometimes radically different countries of origin: this category, for instance, includes Japanese, Indian, Filipino, Chinese and Korean individuals, whom should be addressed differently according to their cultural background and even by taking into account demographical criteria such as age or gender.

An additional way in which the impact of the cultural context on advertising can be managed is making use of cross-cultural content analysis, as suggested by Lerman and

[44] Burgos D., 2008, *Use and Abuse of Cultural Elements in Multicultural Advertising*, Journal of Advertising Research, 48 (2), pp. 177-178.

Callow (2004)[45]. Employing cross-cultural content analysis requires the interpretation of promotional material generated "within two or more languages and/or cultural systems", a process that should be conducted by not only linguistically but also culturally bilingual judges. In this way, it is possible to determine whether a consistent standard has been applied to the classification and coding of the advertising material from across the involved countries.

Of course, as it has been mentioned previously, maintaining a sufficient level of consistency across locally tailored communication messages in a multicultural advertising strategy is also relevant; indeed, this ensures that a brand is recognisable and that its image and values are clearly and correctly interpreted in any target market in which it is present. Achieving a balance between a standardised and a localised approach is not easy, but it is surely possible – especially if the cultural minorities and target audiences are involved in the process and tests are made to ensure that no abuse or misuse of cultural peculiarities is taking place.

3.4. CASE STUDIES

The following case studies explore how the features of the extralinguistic context have been applied to the marketing strategies of real-life brands. Both the chosen brands present interesting insights in terms of the situational sphere of the extralinguistic context; then, in particular, the first one offers an example of a well-implemented cognitive advertising strategy, while the second provides an instance of effective cultural adaptation of a video commercial.

3.4.1. Extralinguistic context in branding: the case of LUSH

LUSH Fresh Handmade Cosmetics is a beauty and make-up company with a strong and clear brand identity: founded in 1995 in England, LUSH is focused on creating and distributing vegetarian, cruelty-free, handmade products with fresh ingredients and as little preservatives as possible, thus establishing itself as an environmentally-friendly, ethical and mostly organic brand.

[45] Lerman D., Callow M., 2004, *Content analysis in cross-cultural advertising research: insightful or*

In terms of situational context, LUSH's retail stores distinguish themselves from their competitors thanks to their offering of an enhanced shopping experience. As a matter of fact, it is possible for customers to try the displayed products in-store, going beyond the mere use of make-up or beauty testers: the renowned LUSH bath bombs are put into basins filled with water by the sales advisors to show their colour and scent, hand creams are applied to customers with a hand massage, products can be smelled and touched and small samples are given to each buyer at the check-out. Recently, also thanks to the latest digital and technological developments, it is possible to use the LUSH smartphone app to see how certain products are used by pointing the camera at the items in store.

Moreover, the design of the store spaces and the visual merchandising techniques adopted by LUSH make the brand immediately recognisable, even in busy, high street locations: the shop windows are usually decorated with colourful and bright product displays that easily attract the gaze and the attention of passers-by; similarly, inside the stores the products are presented in wooden crates (that hint at fresh produce boxes, such as those used for vegetables and fruit) without packages, following the limited waste policy of the brand, and they are grouped by colour in order to create a motley and inviting environment. Another typical feature of LUSH stores is that they are characterised by a strong scent, coming from the unpackaged and natural products: this way, it is often possible to "smell" a LUSH store before having it into sight, a strategy that makes brand recall and recognition stronger.

All these situational characteristics enhance the relationship between the customer and the brand and help convey LUSH's image and identity in a physical, experienceable way. Of course, such a strategy also has a strong impact in terms of cognition: similarly to other brands who offer the chance to try and test the products in store (such as IKEA), LUSH offers its store visitors multiple sensory stimuli (from smell to touch and even taste for some specific products) that lead the potential customers to get engaged in processing the information they receive; by getting personally involved in products try-outs and tests, which are routinely organised by the store staff, customers are more likely to develop and maintain positive memories associated with the shopping experience and their involvement in the purchase decision is also likely to increase. In

superficial?, International Journal of Advertising, 23 (4), pp. 507-521.

addition, LUSH sales advisors are trained to convey significant information about the products and their properties and ingredients to the customers, so that they can understand the process behind their production and use; this way, the customers are thoroughly informed and their purchase decision process is aided and facilitated, as they can easily identify the product that best fits their needs.

Finally, the ethical and environmental values and beliefs that LUSH conveys through its brand image also play a significant role in terms of cognitive branding: as a matter of fact, by supporting ecological and ethical causes, LUSH shows its "human" and emotional side, thus closing the gap between itself as an abstract brand and its target customers; thus, individuals who buy LUSH products and use the brand's merchandise in public (such as the renowned canvas bags displaying the slogan "Fighting animal testing") feel as part of a movement, taking a stance on issues that matter to them through their purchase choices – a factor that may also prove to be particularly relevant in reducing post-purchase dissonance.

3.4.2. Extralinguistic context in advertising: the case of Toyota

This second case study concerns the use of extralinguistic factors in advertising strategies; I have found that, in its promotional efforts and contents, the Japanese automotive brand Toyota presents some interesting applications of situational and cultural elements.

Toyota Motor Corporation was founded in 1933 by Toyoda Kiichiro[46], who also owns several related companies related to the automotive field. Toyota has been able to establish itself as one of the most known and diffused car brands also thanks to its thorough study of US automobile producers such as Ford, a research strategy implemented with the aim of earning back the brand's competitive advantage after the economic stall due to the consequences of World War II. This study allowed Toyota to increase the efficiency of its production systems and to start the successful expansion towards foreign markets; this move, in 1986, even led to the set up of a dual-brand manufacturing plant in California in collaboration with General Motors. In 1989, Toyota

[46] Source for Toyota's history: Toyota Motor Corporation page on the Encyclopaedia Britannica website, accessed at www.britannica.com/topic/Toyota-Motor-Corporation on June 30, 2020.

expanded its range to the luxury sector with the introduction of a new brand, Lexus, and in 1997 it presented the first mass-produced and hybrid-powered car, the Prius – making ecological innovation one of its main research fields.

In terms of situational context, Toyota has developed multiple advertisements that are especially impactful in the way they are integrated with their physical surroundings. For instance, to promote the just mentioned Prius in 2014, the company created some peculiar billboards made with natural materials found on the selected location: if the advertisement was placed on a beach, the "billboard" was made of sand, while if it was located up a hill on a field it was made of grass and mud. The goal was clearly that of underlining the eco-friendly nature and low environmental impact of the car brand and in order to better establish this connection, the ads presented the slogan "A billboard the Prius way", accompanied by the Toyota logo – a clear reference to the Prius' innovative and ecological features.

Another instance of situational-oriented advertising campaign that focused on bringing up the environmentally friendly attributes of a Toyota product was that created to promote the Toyota Mirai, a zero-emission, hydrogen-fueled car. Developed in 2017 in the US by the Saatchi & Saatchi L.A. advertising agency, this campaign centred around the installation of billboards coated with titanium dioxide vinyl that cleaned and purified the surrounding area thanks to a chemical reaction with the oxygen in the air[47]. This way, the ads literally interacted with the physical environment in which they were placed, presenting an actual and verifiable benefit that reflected those provided by the product promoted.

As a final example for situational advertising, in 2016[48] Toyota also created a 10-story high climbable billboard that leaned against one of the buildings of New York's Times Square: the structure stood out from the urban-looking surroundings as it reproduced the side of a mountain and it successfully attracted the attention of passers-by as professional rock climbers scaled it, causing it to become viral on social media. The billboard advertised the new Toyota RAV4 Hybrid and it presented the slogan "How far will you take it": the goal was thus to associate the product with the concept of

[47] Source: Jardine A., 2017, *Toyota's 'eco-billboards' for the Mirai actually clean the air around them,* Adage website, March 24th, accessed on July 1, 2020.
[48] Source: Iliff L., 2016, *Toyota's climbable billboard creates buzz for RAV4 Hybrid,* Automotive News website, April 11, accessed on July 1, 2020.

adventure and pushing one's limits, something that (as the ad suggests) can be done also by driving the RAV4.

As it has been shown, Toyota repeatedly displayed its ability to create creative and situation-bound advertisements that are successfully communicative and buzz-worthy; in addition, it demonstrated the capability to adapt a message to different countries, thus taking into account and making and effective use of the cultural context in its advertising strategies.

The example that I am going to bring up in this case is that of the 2017 commercials produced to promote the Toyota Camry: indeed, for this occasion, the brand developed several ads to target specific ethnicities in addition to a "transcultural mainstream" version[49]. This last "basic" version, which can be considered as a benchmark to understand the other iterations of the ad, includes three different individuals (a boy, a woman and a man) impatiently waiting to be picked up, while their counterparts are enjoying a drive with the Camry with no rush, suggesting that the use of the product is a pleasurable experience that makes you forget of everything else.

The first cultural adaptation presented by Toyota targets African-American consumers and it shows a black man driving to a restaurant to pick up his food, even if he had the option of getting free delivery; throughout the spot, a peacock is shown flashing his tail and at some point an African-American woman is seen looking with admiration at the protagonist as he drives by. The main idea conveyed by this version of the commercial is that of "showing off" to reflect the importance attributed to style, confidence and self-identity by this target segment, as the chief creative officer of Toyota explains (Maheshwari, 2017).

The second version targeted Asian-Americans: here, a Chinese-American father drives to pick up his daughter from sport practice and on the way back he plays some music in the car that they both appear to enjoy. In this case, the agency that developed the adaptation of the spot stated that usually Asian parents (and fathers in particular) tend to show less affection and attachment to their children; thus, the bonding situation presented in the ad may seem unusual to the target audience. However, this is the case of an intentional strategy: the goal of the sequence, indeed, is that of showing how the Toyota Camry can

bring up a positive (albeit different) side of an Asian dad and how driving can be shared as a pleasurable and bonding experience (Maheshwari, 2017).

Finally, the third cultural segment approached by Toyota with its Camry ads is that of Hispanic customers. In this case, two different versions were made: in one, a young man driving the promoted car declines a call from his mother to keep enjoying the ride, thus displaying a rebellious behaviour; in the other, an attractive woman sitting in the car is seen applying red lipstick and checking herself in the mirror before getting out to enter a supermarket. In the first instance, the aim of the ad is that of showing how the Camry can bring out the rebellious and "edgy" side (Maheshwari, 2017) of its drivers, slightly challenging some of the traditional habits of the target market – in this case, the attachment to family demonstrated by Hispanic individuals; in the second instance, instead, the ad exploits the idea that Hispanic women always prefer to look good and attractive even when running minor errands such as grocery shopping – thus suggesting that the Toyota Camry can help in "making you look good".

Overall, the approach demonstrated by Toyota is a great example of how a brand should tailor its ads when approaching culturally different customer segments: indeed, companies should take into account the cultural differences, habits, goals, desires and needs of every target ethnicity and address them in each of their promotional content adaptation, while maintaining brand consistency thorough the display of the product's crucial and most characterising features.

[49] Source: Maheshwari S., 2017, *Different Ads, Different Ethnicities, Same Car,* The New York Times website, October 12th, accessed on July 1, 2020.

CONCLUSION

Up to this point, the relevance and impact of context and its different categories have been described in relation to branding and advertising strategies. Following the theoretical models and observations that have been presented in the three preceding chapters and the respective brand case studies, it is now possible to state that taking into account factors related to the linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic contexts is a crucial step for marketers who are developing and communicating the identity and image of a brand or who are creating an advertising campaign to introduce new products in the market.

Indeed, as it has been demonstrated, the linguistic context plays a relevant role in terms of brand name creation, as it can be exploited to arise positive associations and to convey the brand's key features and benefits, also through payoffs acting as co-text; in addition, many linguistic devices can be used to ideate attention-getting slogans and advertising copy-texts, both online and offline. Meanwhile, factors and techniques related to the paralinguistic and visual context can function as mediums to convey branding dimensions such as the tone of voice and to illustrate the brand's identity and attributes through logo design; in advertising, instead, such devices can be exploited to attract the attention of the audience and to communicate relevant aspects of the promoted products. Finally, the extralinguistic context and its situational and cognitive/cultural dimensions should be taken into consideration to guide the customer towards the purchase decision while appropriately adapting the marketing strategy (in both the cases of branding and advertising) to each cultural target segment.

A concluding remark in addition to the just mentioned observations is that the context categories that have been presented and analysed throughout this thesis often tend to overlap: this is the case, for instance, of linguistic factors that inevitably need to be expressed through typographical (and thus paralinguistic and visual) cues; or, again, overlaps may occur when cultural characteristics of specific customer segments influence the way in which these individuals conduct their cognitive processes. Thus, marketers need to adopt a thorough approach that encompasses all aspects of context, in order to take advantage of possible intersections between different dimensions.

Finally, it is important to always keep up with the latest developments in technological and digital media: as a matter of fact, the diffusion of social media and other digital platforms has created new contexts and environments that require specific approaches in terms of language, tone of voice, visual contents and so on. Learning how to communicate online is thus crucial for marketers, as both branding strategies and advertising plans can benefit from the large reach that digital areas are currently offering.

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