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**The power of language in communication
with a focus on the new paradigm of
sustainability**

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings learnt how to communicate even before learning how to speak. Indeed, like other non-human primates, they had an effective and complex non-verbal communication system that allowed them to live in groups thus conducting their main activities, from hunting to defense. Language only emerged about 150,000 years ago, coinciding with the arrival of Homo sapiens in Africa: thanks to it, the human species had the opportunity to invent, use and manipulate symbols during communicative exchanges.

Thus, communication – a term whose origin comes from the verb “*communico*” which means to share with – consists of three key components: a message to be sent, a sender (or encoder) of that message, and a recipient (or decoder). The message can then be conveyed in a variety of ways, the most basic and immediate of which is language. However, the act of communication is not only limited to the utterance or writing of words. As a matter of fact, individuals can send messages also through facial expressions, gestures or can use a different tone of voice according to the meaning they want to convey to that particular expression. In addition, people can encode and decode messages by means of visual or graphical representations: the so-called nonverbal language.

As we will see throughout the analysis, language is, thus, classified into verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal. The former is the one to which we pay most attention because we choose which words to use and thus which register to adopt according to the interlocutors. Nonverbal language, on the other hand, is more difficult to control because it is the combination of gestures, images, sounds, and colors. Lastly, paraverbal language is, instead, strictly related to how we say something, taking into account indicators such as tone of voice, speed, timber, and volume.

In terms of marketing and communication, communicative exchanges take place between the companies and the customer audience. The former want to send a specific message about their brand identity and products to the latter, which, on the other side, is the receiver and has to decode in the right way the content delivered. Therefore, organizations and consumers must share a common language and context in order for the communicative act's aim to be achieved. As a matter of fact, experts inside a company who oversee the communication part, before launching a promotional campaign, must always analyze all the variables which can affect the effectiveness of the communicative exchange

between them and the recipients. Indeed, they must pay attention to which words they use, to which visual they select as a supplement of the verbal language, and, lastly, they must take into account the background of the target audience in order not to incur in the risk of ambiguity and discrimination.

Having said that, the present dissertation will, thus, be focused on the relevance of language in communication, especially in that of sustainability. In detail, it will be a path subdivided into three chapters to underline the various different linguistic mechanisms which are exploited in advertising, with a focus on the importance of the new emerging trend of the circular economy. The present thesis will, thus, be structured as follows.

In the first introductory chapter, it will be analyzed how language, which can come in various forms, as previously anticipated, namely words, icons and symbols, influences advertising. Starting from the analysis of the first advertising campaigns, different studies of well-known linguists will be proposed and applied with reference to examples of modern advertising campaigns. In addition, a strong focus is put on the implicit communication, from Grice theories to the analysis of stereotypes, implicatures and ambiguity adopted as a persuasion tool in recent commercials. Lastly, chapter I focuses on the “fallacies” of communication, that is, mistakes in the use of language to make inferences, which are exploited by advertisers to create amusement in consumers.

The second chapter, instead, starts with a comparison between commercial and sustainable advertising underlining how communication has to adapt to new paradigms. Sustainability, indeed, in the recent years has become a very frequent word in our lives. As years go by, the attention given to the sustainable part of the economy has grown exponentially since it is one of the elements which customers value more. Not only governments, but also companies seem to have understood that they must make their part and change their business value propositions to improve the planet and, therefore, the living conditions of the communities which populate it, namely human beings, animals, and vegetations.

In this regard, chapter II will focus on analyzing how language plays a crucial role also in advertising sustainability which must comply with several rules which impose it a certain degree of technicality, but, on the other side, it must overall preserve some creativity to capture the attention and consensus of the recipients. Chapter II will, thus, highlight the

relevance of verbal and visual language both to narrate a sustainable brand and to avoid greenwashing problems.

As a conclusion, the third and last chapter will be devoted to the analysis of Coop Italia case history to summarize the theoretical findings and models presented in the text and illustrate how they have been applied by a real company in the development of its marketing and communication strategy.

As a matter of fact, to better understand how language is relevant to environmental communication it is fundamental to study an example of a brand which makes sustainability the value driver of its mission and actions. In this regard, Coop is certainly a good case to be studied due to the numerous certifications and projects undertaken which attest it. As a result, the organization's communication strategy will be investigated in order to demonstrate the value of using the appropriate language when providing information to the customer base. Indeed, the analysis will be focused on the different channels of promotion mostly exploited by the company, both online and offline, from the official website and its main activities on the social network accounts, to the packaging, excellent touchpoint with the customers and medium of communication as we will see deeply in detail in the second and third chapters, and, finally, events and other initiatives.

Thus, the contents proposed have been chosen since they can be considered as a further proof to the aim of the present thesis as the title of this work, “The power of language in communication with a focus on the new paradigm of sustainability”, recalls.

CHAPTER 1 - "KEY FACTORS IN COMMUNICATION: LANGUAGE, SIGNS AND CONTEXT"

1.1. What is communication?

The word communication takes its origins from the Latin verb "*communico*" which means to share with, it is thus a process of sharing information with other people. Communication has been often defined as the transmission of information, the exchange of ideas or the process of finding a common point of thought between a sender and a receiver. Many factors affect the ability to communicate: words, pictures, sounds and colors and language, the key determinant for an impactful and effective communication.

Two elements represent the main participants involved in the communication process. As the linguist Roman Jakobson underlined, communication starts from the *sender*, or source, who can be a person or an organization delivering a specific *message* to the so-called *receiver* who in turn must be able to decodify it. Indeed, according to the traditional model, the content of the communication is always encoded in a *code* which corresponds to the language used to communicate. Moreover, there are other two elements which determine the right success of the communication: the *context* and the *channel*. The first one, which will be deeply analyzed later in this chapter, is the combination of shared information and knowledge (linguistical, historical, cultural and situational) which allows the correct comprehension of the message. The latter, instead, is the medium through which the message is sent from the sender to the recipient.

According to Jakobson, there are six functions¹ of the language which correspond to the six determinants of the verbal communication above mentioned. A *referential function* is associated to the context since it highlights the relationship between the speaker and the world. An *emotional function* is correlated with the sender who tries to express a feeling while sending the message to the recipient who is, in turn, linked to a *conative function* thus underlying his being influenced by the sender. The channel has a *phatic function*, as it expresses the commitment to keep the contact while, on the other side, the message has a *poetic function* that is related to how it is structured focusing on specific aspects, as the tone of voice and vocabularies used. Lastly, a *metalinguistic function* is used to explain the

¹ <https://socialnetworkabc.wordpress.com/1-3-funzioni-della-comunicazione-jakobson/>

different elements which characterize the code. Generally, these six functions are always present in the message communicated, but a specific function may predominate on the others depending on the focus the speaker wants to emphasize.

In a world which is in continuous evolution and where everyone is subjected to an overload of information, it is necessary to understand that communicating in the right way is fundamental. In fact, advertising through communication has become more and more critical to persuade customers through their journey towards the buying of a product or a service.

An American professor and designer, John Maeda, in his book “The laws of simplicity”, points out a list of ten basic rules in order to be concise and communicate effectively the desired message. Below, we will analyze just a few of them.

The first rule to keep in mind is *to reduce*: the more incisive the message is, the more striking the content inside it will be and the more people will remind the information vehiculated. An example could be the following sentence: “The Hotel X informs the kind customers that the parking is free”. It is, as a matter of fact, possible to notice that the sentence can be rewritten as “Parking free – Hotel X” thus making use of less words and with more communicative efficiency.

Furthermore, *to make smaller* is another key aspect, which has not to be confounded with the previous law mentioned above. According to Maeda simplicity deals with “the unexpected pleasure which derives from what seems meaningless²”. In advertising this can be noticed in the payoff, a brief sentence made up of three or four words which describes the brand identity. It usually accompanies the logo and it is able to capture the essence of a brand, thus making it more memorable in consumers’ minds. Few examples can be mentioned: “Dove c’è Barilla, c’è casa” - Barilla, “Just do it” – Nike, “A little, a lot” – Kinder, “Think different – Apple”.

Another suggestion given by Maeda is *to hide*. It means that it is better to communicate and to show only what is needed and no more. As an example, Facebook posts can be taken into consideration: it is possible to present just a preview of something which can be later analyzed better in detail. The same thing can be applied to the reading of

² Y. Bindi, *Language Design*, Guida all’usabilità delle parole per professionisti della comunicazione, Milano, Apogeo, 2017, p. 55

newspapers: catchy titles are those who push the readers to be interested in the whole text. What you decide to show before and after affects actions and choices of users.

Moreover, *to organize* is recommendable: try to give an order, establish priorities in the contents. Time is also another crucial aspect: people have no patience. Syntax must be plain and linear. LinkedIn is a concrete example of how a simple structure makes everything clearer and easier to do. For example, when creating an account, there is a list of actions to take to which a series of colors correspond. The short sentence “Vedi il tuo profilo migliorato!” is the starting point of the experience and the user is pushed to keep going on because of this organization.

According to Professor Maeda, “Knowledge makes everything simpler”: explaining something through metaphors, shared examples, is often the most efficient way to reach the point.

Lastly, while communicating, it is useful *to differentiate*: alternating the length of sentences can capture both the listener and the reader’s attention. Variations produce emotions.

1.2. Language design: deixis and indexicals

Language is the medium through which human beings can communicate. According to the Treccani Encyclopedia definition, it is a “form of communicative conduct aimed at transmitting information and establishing a relationship of interaction that uses symbols having the same value for individuals belonging to the same socio-cultural environment. The ability to communicate (that is, to identify states of experience by linking them to variations in the state of a physical medium within a code) is not the exclusive privilege of man: today we know an increasing number of different communication codes that are used by plus various animal species³”. From these definitions, it is possible to draw some conclusions: language is not only verbal, and it depends on a particular context.

³ Definition accessed at Treccani Encyclopedia online

There are some linguistic elements which are called “deictics” which link the text to the physical environment of a communicative event. The term “*deixis*” derives from the Greek and it means “*indication*”: it is a context sensitive phenomenon since the comprehension of certain linguistic expressions strictly depends on the role of the context.

Linguists have studied a lot deixis, but it is especially thanks to the work of Fillmore and Lyons that deictical expressions are now classified in five main categories: personal, spatial, temporal, textual and social ones⁴.

1.2.1. Personal, spatial, temporal, textual and social deixis explained

Personal deictics include personal pronouns, as “me, you”, verbal desinence or possessive adjectives like “mine, yours”. In general, they are all examples of linguistic expressions which can refer to different individuals which can be involved directly or not in a communicative exchange.

We can mention two famous recruitment campaigns during the first World War in which the communicative function of indexicals appears clear. The UK recruitment campaign said “Britons, your country needs you” and the American one, through the words of Uncle Sam, which is the personification of the country, said “I want you”.

In both the campaigns the use of indexicals captures the attention of the readers since they feel directly involved. The American one is even more efficient than the British campaign since it uses the first person indexical “I” to convince people and it is much more individualized, whereas, in the other campaign the “country” calls for people to enlist thus appealing to the sense of belonging to a community.

⁴ F. Domaneschi, C. Penco, *Come non detto, Usi e abusi dei sottintesi*, Bari, Laterza, 2016, pp. 72-73



Figure 1.1. UK and US recruitment campaigns during World War I

Another more recent example is the Vodafone spot “Power to you” which makes use of the second person indexical in order to be catchy as if the brand was talking with a specific person.

Spatial deixis is, instead, referring to a place. Adverbs of place as “here, there” are part of this category. An example could be the sentence “We will be there” in which there is the place indexical “there”. However, it is important to remember that location from the speaker’s perspective can be either physical or mental⁵. In the sentence previously mentioned, it could be interpreted as if a brand is expressing closeness towards its customers maybe during hard times, or, on the other side, it could be just pronounced by some speakers confirming their presence at an appointment.

Temporal deixis deals with the time in which the utterance is expressed and sometimes depends on the concept of time a particular culture has. An example taken from a commercial launched by Vodafone in 2017 asserts that “The future is exciting” in which “the future” is the time indexical. However, it is only possible to deduce the concept behind this promise made by the brand because of the context in which we are living: continuous evolution in technologies to make our lives better.

Lastly, textual deixis includes expressions which involve parts of the texts in a specific communicative situation, whereas social ones express the social distance between the

⁵ G. Yule, *Pragmatics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 12

speakers. The former group, also known as “discourse deixis” places the text (both oral and written) as the deictic center: in the oral text, the reference to other parts of the speech occurs through temporal deixis through linguistic expressions such as “As I said before etc.”; on the other side, in the written text spatial deixis formulas are used as for example “In the previous chapter etc.” The latter group, instead, expresses the personal or social distance between the speakers which can be due to many factors such as the social status, gender, age or degree of familiarity. In the English language the courtesy form is not the same as in the Italian one. Indeed, if you are a young student and you have to converse with a Professor or with a person of a higher status than yours, you make use of appellatives as “Sir or Madam” to show your respect towards them, but always using the “you” pronoun. On the other side, in Italian we use “Lei/Voi” form when there is not intimacy enough in the relationship to address the interlocutors with the “you”.

Deixis is, indeed, a linguistic tool which is widely exploited by the verbal communication in order to produce highly persuasive effects. As mentioned above, personal deictics are the most used in advertising, but references to them may be found also in political speeches. As a matter of fact, politicians, while proposing their campaigns and talking in front of crowds of listeners, are able to capture both the attention and consensus of the masses thanks to the use of personal deixis tools. Examples of sentences like “The crisis in which we found ourselves” explain how the use of “we” manages to establish a sense of empathy and involvement between the speaker and his audience. Furthermore, the slogan “Yes, we can” used by Obama, the 44th President of the United States, during his campaigns before the elections is another example of indexicals. In fact, thanks to the use of “we” there is a reduction in the social distance and people feel more involved.

1.2.2. Words, icons and symbols

Languages are the means through which we satisfy our communicative needs thus developing systems of signs that allow us to communicate. They can be classified into three categories, verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal ones, depending on the presence of words or not.

Verbal language is the form of language to which we pay more attention since we decide which kind of words to use, so the register to implement, according to our interlocutors. The nonverbal language, on the other side, is less easy to be controlled since it is a mixture of gestures, images, sounds, use of colors: it is used to strengthen the verbal one.

Paraverbal language is, instead, strictly connected to how we say something thus taking into consideration indicators such as the tone of voice used, the speed, timber and volume if the communication is oral. On the other hand, if we are taking into account an example of written communication, indicators will be the punctuation or the length of the period which convey the rhythm or the velocity to the text.

Albert Mehrabian, an American psychologist and professor at the University of Los Angeles, developed a study which analyses the importance of all the three levels of communication while sending a specific message.

After his research, he proposed the famous model “55, 38, 7%”⁶ according to which the 55% of the communicated content is understood thanks to the nonverbal language, so through gestures and facial mimic, the 38% is deduced by paraverbal factors as tone and timber of voice and the remaining 7% through the words pronounced. These findings allow us to draw some conclusions:

1. An effective communication is mostly based on what is not said explicitly through words;
2. nonverbal and verbal languages have to be coherent in order to reinforce each other.

As previously introduced, people communicate through signs: the use of a gesture is an example of signs that differ according to the culture. The thumbs-up sign in most American and European cultures means that things are going according to plan or refers to approval. However, the same sign translates into rude and offensive messages in Islamic and Asian countries. In Australia, it means “okay”, but if you move it up and down it is considered a grave insult⁷.

⁶ T. T. Amsel, *An urban legend called: “The 7/38/55 Ratio Rule”*, Tel Aviv, European Polygraph, 2019, p. 97-98

⁷ A. Van Niekerk, *The use of indexical signs, symbols and icons in print advertising communication*, Bloemfontein, 2018, p.111

Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of semiotics, focuses his analysis on the lexical sign, the smallest unit of meaning. The linguistic sign is, indeed, arbitrary and conventional, which means that there is not a direct linkage between it and the object to which it refers.

Signs are constituted by two elements: the signifier and the signified. The first one is the means through which the latter can be represented.

Moreover, Peirce, an American philosopher, semiologist, logician and academic, makes a further distinction of signs into index, icon and symbol based on the relationship between the two elements going beyond language.

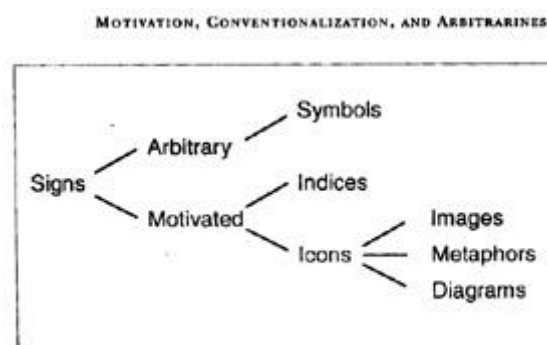


Figure 1.2. Peirce's classification of signs taken from Motivation, Conventionalization, and Arbitrariness in the Origin of Language written by Robbins Burling, University of Michigan

An index is strongly connected to the object that it refers to so it must share a common characteristic with it. Peirce defined this sign as having “temporary, spatial, or even a causal connection with the object represented⁸”: an example could be the smoke which points out the presence of fire. In this case, smoke is an index of fire since one precedes the other thus linking them by means of a causal relationship.

The signs we use in communication are voluntarily produced. As a matter of fact, in successful advertising, textual and graphic elements are combined in different proportions to form a type of discourse which has the power to provoke feelings and

⁸ A. Van Niekerk, *The use of indexical signs, symbols and icons in print advertising communication*, Bloemfontein, 2018, p.112

actions, shape values, expectations and lifestyles, and which is addressed to a particular audience⁹.

People's minds easily accept and recognize the use of icons and words which immediately convey the information desired¹⁰ since there is a relationship of analogy between the signified and signifier. The term icon derives from the Greek "eikon" and means "image": it is recognized as an approximation of reality. Creating an icon is time-consuming since it is not easy to find the right image which is, at the same time, clear and not ambiguous: this could be realized through the choice of suitable colors, figures and shapes.

We can analyze the icon used by Facebook until few years ago to indicate the section "Friends".

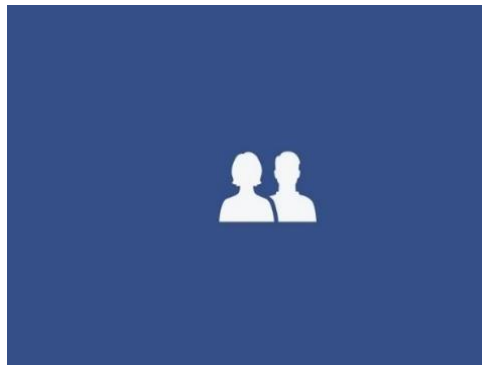


Figure 1.3. Facebook icon of friendship

As Figure 1.3. shows, there is a woman in front of a man: this choice has not been made by chance. It, indeed, represents not only a stylistic decision, but also an ideological one thus suggesting the fact that the company cares about the details and it does take a stand in the fight for gender equality rights. Facebook could have used other kind of icons to represent friendship, as for example two hands shaking, but they decided to use that icon in order to portray the human sense of the concept. In this case, the icon is not accompanied by an explicative text as, on the other side, it is noticeable on the icon of the well-known application "Just Eat".

⁹ E. Eynullaeva, E. Woodward – Smith, *The verbal and the Visual in Advertising Language: A Cross – cultural analysis*, 2012, p.199

¹⁰ Y. Bindi, *Language Design*, Guida all'usabilità delle parole per professionisti della comunicazione, Milano, Apogeo, 2017, p. 188



Figure 1.4. Icon of the Just Eat application

The logic behind this application is very straightforward. As we can see from Figure 4, there is a house with cutlery inside. The logo is just a further explanation, but the meaning of the service offered using the app can be quickly understood just by looking at the icon: delivery of food directly to your home. Icons are thus considered motivated signs as they represent a real concept.

Due to the digitalization of the latest years, people are now used to getting in touch with other kind of icons called “emoji”: pictographic signs which represent faces, people, objects and situations. They are mainly used in our written conversations in order to express moods thus providing an emotional side. When we see a smiling face in text message or in a post published on social networks, we surely think about a happy mood or about something positive: we have developed some shared associations.

On the other side, symbols are arbitrary as the signifier used is taken as a convention and does not resemble a concept present in the real world. According to the definition given by semiotics, symbols are “*something that stand for something else*”. Every time a symbol is built up and understood, our brain uses a language to mediate perception and cognition operations¹¹.

An example of symbol which we all know is the scale to represent the abstract concept of justice thus recalling values of equilibrium and equity.

¹¹ Y. Bindi, *Language Design*, Guida all’usabilità delle parole per professionisti della comunicazione, Milano, Apogeo, 2017, p. 190

Symbols (both linguistic and visual) contain a hierarchy of meanings. Shelestiuk writes that “the direct meaning constitutes the first layer of sense and serves as a basis for the indirect (secondary) meaning – the second layer of sense, both of them united under the same designator (a name, a visual image, a significant object or person, etc¹².)”. Finally, the meaning of symbols may be understood by analyzing the entire context of the advertisements.

1.3. The non-said and Grice

As above mentioned during this analysis, most of what people, organizations, advertisers communicate implicitly refers to something other than the explicit meaning of the message which, in turn, can be deduced by a community because of shared conventions and principles. What we see is just a minimum part of what is communicated.

As a matter of fact, advertising, and political and journalistic communication, exploit the “non-said” technique in order to persuade the target audience. Communicating something through implicatures allow some degree of freedom to advertisers: their work cannot be judged so negatively since their message is not said explicitly also leading to a high degree of conviction.

Herbert Paul Grice, an English philosopher of language, with his studies contributed to the science of communication by developing theories dealing with the pragmatic dimension of language, meaning what goes beyond what is said explicitly by the speakers.

In his famous work “Logic and Conversation”, published in 1975, he considers the pragmatic aspects of a conversation where the meaning is strictly related to the intention of the speakers, but can be fully intended by the listeners. With his publication, Grice contributed to theorize speech acts, thus introducing four maxims of conversation as guidelines for efficiency of the use of language in conversation.

According to Grice, conversation can, indeed, be conceived not only as a “rational behavior” , thus being governed by reason and purpose, but also “cooperative”, since it

¹² A. Van Niekerk, *The use of indexical signs, symbols and icons in print advertising communication*, Bloemfontein, 2018, p.113

involves something we have to do together with other people, and, lastly, it is “goal-oriented”, since every time we communicate something our main aim is always the achievement of an objective.

1.3.1. Conversational maxims

Conversation is like a game with its own “rules”: it is governed by unwritten laws and Grice tries to specify the constraints on the speakers’ possible moves. As above mentioned, conversation is based on the cooperative principle which states that you have to “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged¹³”: this is a very general rule, but can be further subdivided into four groups of subcategories denominated as “conversational maxims”.

1. The first one is about the quantity of information that the speaker is expected to provide: the contribution must be as informative as it is required, paying a particular of focus in not being more informative than requested. Overinformation is not cooperative. Recent studies conducted by Miller, Galanter, and Pribram, showed that receiving a quantity of information which overcomes our “working memory” leads to an overload of information that, therefore, reduces the quality of decisions.

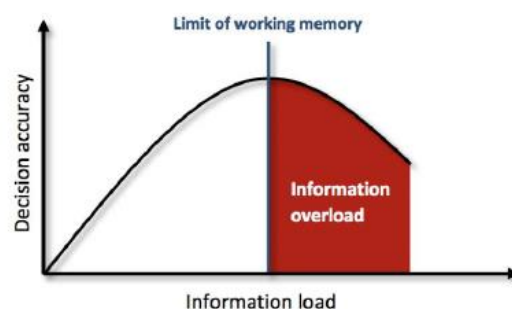


Figure 1.5.- picture taken from a slide of a webinar held by Confcommercio Veneto

¹³P. Grice, *Studies in the way of words*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975, p.26

2. The second maxim deals with the quality of the information where “quality” stands for veridicality. Information is, indeed, good if it is true and justified, when you have evidence to prove what you claim. One general supermaxim could be asserted as “Try to make your contribution one that is true” and two submaxims which are “Do not say what you believe to be false, do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence”.
3. The third one is, instead, linked to the relation between the contributions made by each speaker and the conversation which is undertaken. As a matter of fact, contribution must be relevant to what it is being said by the other speakers involved. Here there is just a single maxim which claims, “Be relevant”.
4. The fourth and last maxim concerns the style of the utterance that must be formulated clearly and intelligibly to be easily understood by speakers. Under this category we can reckon “Be perspicuous” as the general supermaxim and a few submaxims which are the followings: “Avoid obscurity of expressions, avoid ambiguity, be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity) and be orderly”.

By enlisting such rules, Grice does not want us to respect them, on the other side, he just wants to explain how a reasonable speaker is expected to behave by other reasonable speakers.

Cooperation raises expectations since everyone is expected to facilitate the mutual linguistic exchange. On the other hand, it must be said that people are not always cooperative thus violating the four maxims explained above. There are, in fact, cases in which the maxims are infringed, and this is considered to be the major source of the implicit.

We can violate the maxim unostentatiously, for example by telling lies, or by manifesting our choice of non-cooperation “*opt out* from the operation both of the maxim and of the Cooperative Principle”¹⁴, for example saying “I am not allowed to talk about that”. In some cases, the violation could be prevented if the contribution is interpreted in a specific way

¹⁴ P. Grice, *Studies in the way of words*, Harvard University Press, 1975, p.26

or when the speaker faces a clash of maxims and he is forced to privilege one with respect to another.

Grice, indeed, indicates the maxim of quality as the most important to observe. It may also occur a case in which the speaker violates a maxim ostentatiously by making fun of it: the maxim is violated in order to communicate an implicit message.

The cooperation principle may be satisfied also if the maxims are violated, and this is possible thanks to a voluntary strategy. Irony is an example of linguistic tool which allows your message to be deduced even if it is not explicitly communicated. Yvonne Bindi, in her book “Language Design”, reports an example which is very explicative. It shows the webpage of Alitalia saying that “Oops... the page you were searching for, flew away “. It is, in effect, an example of ironic communication which flouts the maxim of manner, but the principle of cooperation is still respected. In this case, the flying company could have said the usual sentence “The server timed out while waiting for the browser request”, but it, instead, preferred to make use of irony since the implicit message is clear to the users.

Another tool used to flout a maxim, in this case that of quantity, is patent tautology: a statement that is necessarily true simply because of the meaning of the terms, but which is totally uninformative. An example concerning public campaigns is the slogan “Love is love”. Its meaning, indeed, is nothing if these words are not accompanied by the image of the rainbow: we are helped by the visual context to understand the implicit message of marriage equality.



Figure 1.6. Slogan of LGBT+ communities

In our usual conversations, the maxims of Grice are violated spontaneously or intentionally. In fact, most of the times expressing ourselves through implicatures is a means of showing the degree of confidence between us and the interlocutors. Moreover, when we talk, there are some information which are not needed to be explicit and this can be also referred to as “presuppositions”: something we take for granted during a conversation. We will now analyze better in detail the use of implicatures, something that the interlocutor understands without the speaker says it explicitly, in advertising and their main properties.

1.3.2. The implicit communication

Saying something implicitly has basically two functions: it seduces the listener and safeguards the speaker¹⁵. The listener is, as a matter of fact, involved in the process thus becoming an “accomplice” of the message: he must derive the meaning of the content vehiculated by himself. On the other hand, the speaker is somehow protected when spreading an implicit message because it is not directly criticizable.

1.3.3 Implicatures: conversational and conventional

Grice distinguishes between two kinds of implicatures: conversational and conventional ones. As we previously introduced, conversational implicatures arise due to the violation of conversational maxims and are characterized by the following properties which make them different from presuppositions and conventional implicatures:

1. Cancellability: the speaker can deny implicatures without contradiction;
2. Calculability: it implies the possibility to infer the implicature from the linguistic meaning of the sentence, the cooperative principle and the context (linguistic, situational and cognitive);
3. Non-detachability: conversational implicatures are not triggered by certain lexical items.

¹⁵ F. Domaneschi, C. Penco, *Come non detto, Usi e abusi dei sottintesi*, Bari, Laterza, 2016, p. 37

In addition, Grice distinguished the category of generalized implicatures and, among them, the subset of scalar implicatures. Under the latter subset, we can mention this example which is very used in advertising. It usually happens during sales time to watch tv spots which say “Discounts up to 50%”: this example’s implicit message is that it is true that there are discounts up to half of the initial price, but this may apply only to some products and not to all of them.

Generalized implicatures, on the other hand, arise with the use of a specific expression not depending on the context or on the usage occasion. For example, if a person says, “I walked into a house”, we can deduce that he or she was not walking into his or her private residence. The indefinite article “a” allows us to implicate the assumption that the house in question is a generic one.

Also, journalists exploit this kind of linguistic technique a lot: catchy titles composed by two sentences always implicate a causal relationship between the facts. An example could be “Lack of safety controls. The train derails”. The lack of controls is, indeed, the cause of the derailment.

Contrarily to what occurs with generalized implicatures which arise independently of the context, conventional ones depend on the conventional meaning associated with the terms expressed while stating an utterance.

“Elena is Italian, but she does not love pizza” implicates that generally an Italian person, loves pizza simply because of the Italian nationality. These kind of implicatures are associated with specific expressions like “but, even, therefore”.

1.3.4. Stereotypes

Shifting our attention to another linguistic tool which is widely used not only in advertising, but in communication in general, we can now look at “stereotypes”. This word is usually read with a negative accent, but, on the other side, it must be remembered that we are dealing with a facilitator: even without noticing it, we all take advantage of them to communicate something easily and quickly. Stereotypes have, indeed, the pro of

reducing the effort to communicate something with a single concept. The philosopher Hilary Putnam defines them as “aspects of the signified which are socially shared¹⁶”. Language is, in effect, full of words of which we just have an approximative knowledge or we only know the stereotype of what it refers to.

During the 1970s, philosophers started to deal with this topic and, especially, Marvin Minsky, one of the founders of the artificial intelligence, developed his theory about stereotypes. According to Minsky, we associate to every lexical item in our vocabulary a stereotype. Such stereotypes are viewed as representations of reality and for every property there is a value of “default”. The latter plus all the possible variations are known as “frame” which is, in turn, linked to other frames. For example, starting with the frame “tiger” with its default values, like the number of legs, the habitat ecc ecc, we can connect to them the frame “jungle” and so on so forth. The author of this model provides a structured way to explain the organization of the known concepts.

Afterwards, some fellow scholars of Minsky identified a further distinction. As a matter of fact, they introduced the figure of the “script” which stands for the series of things to do. There are some activities which are performed in the same way all over the world: they are seen as constant to which we all agree on. A very interesting example taken from “Come non detto” compares the bar, a place where all people perform the same list of actions, to the script: a person enters, orders, consumes, pays and exits. This is to say that stereotypes, through already stored knowledge in our minds, help us to quickly comprehend the situations we are asked to face.

In advertising, stereotypes have been extensively exploited in order to facilitate the understanding of situations proposed during spots which have the availability of just few seconds to vehiculate a message.

Going back to the 1980s, Barilla’s group got us used to see tv spots full of stereotypes. They always propose a family with a father, which embodies the ideal of the householder, and the mum which calls the family to eat together. Along with the years, the stereotype

¹⁶ F. Domaneschi, C. Penco, *Come non detto, Usi e abusi dei sottintesi*, Bari, Laterza, 2016, p. 5

remains unchanged: the happy family of the advertising who eat Barilla's products is used as a shortcut to make us feel closer to that stereotype.

Another example is the tv spot of Fiat model 500 transmitted on air in 2012. It starts with an Italian song, which will be kept as the music background for all the spot, thus reminding the spectators about the origin of the vehicle. Going on, different stereotypes will appear: the wedding in the little borough, the cafeteria and the old people watching in astonishment. This advertisement has been thought for a specific target of people: the new Italian immigrants. At the end, the spot closes with this evocative sentence "The next wave of Italians has come to America and they have come to party", making reference also to the stereotypes of Italian people as party and solar people.

In addition, it could be useful to analyze another spot of Fiat in the US. For the launch of Fiat model 500L, they make use of various constructs which are known as stereotypes of the Italian family abroad. Starting from the loud chats, the espresso coffee and pappardelle pasta, elegant clothing, the passion for football and the quality of Italian men as very good admirers. All these aspects underlined by the tv spot embody the stereotype of the Italian family and reinforce the Made in Italy values. Despite the short length of the spot, the message that "Italian is better" is thus quickly understood thanks to the use of stereotypes.

Apart from being facilitators in communication, stereotypes, on the other hand, may create misunderstandings or offend someone. As a matter of fact, they assume a negative value when they build fixed and rigid structures.

In advertising, frequent errors of this kind have been made. H&M in 2018 launched a campaign which was highly criticized and forced the Swedish clothing company to remove it. The company published on its website a photo with a kid who was wearing a sweater: the problem was the sentence on the sweater associated to the skin color of the child.

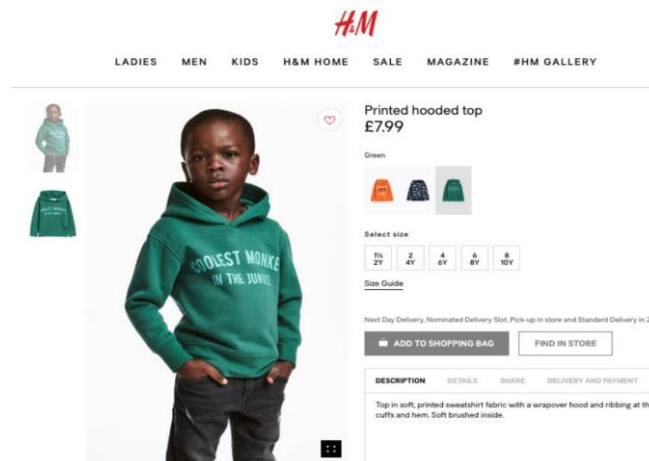


Figure 1.7. H&M campaign accused of racism, adapted from “La Repubblica”

As it is written on the picture, the sentence says these words “The coolest monkey in the jungle”. The screenshot of the webpage became viral in short time. Users, in fact, accused the company of being racist and retrograde for not having thought about the gravity of juxtaposing words of that kind to a colored child. According to the public opinion, the image of the monkey is, indeed, classified as a negative stereotype because it has always been viewed as an “impolite and savage” creature.

Matching the monkey with a person of color results as a cruel offence towards the latter because it seems as if all the people coming from those countries are considered as “savage animals in the jungle”. H&M quickly tried to remedy to this big fail by removing the picture from its webpage and by apologizing with all those who felt offended by it.

1.3.5. Metaphors

Let’s now analyze another linguistic tool which is broadly exploited both in daily life dialogues and in advertising in general: the metaphor. According to the definition given by Encyclopedia Treccani, a metaphor is an “expressive linguistic process, and figure of traditional rhetoric, based on an implied similitude, i.e. on an analogical relationship, whereby a word or a phrase is used to express a concept different from the one they normally express”.

As a matter of fact, metaphors are forms of figurative language. One of the first studies on the frequency of the metaphorical uses estimated “four metaphors per very minute of speaking”.¹⁷ In a Gricean framework, a metaphor may be explained as a violation of the maxim of quality since you overtly assert something that is literally false to mean something else, without saying it explicitly. Metaphors are rhetorical figures that make a comparison between two elements, differently from what occurs with similitudes. In the latter, the relationship is expressed explicitly, by means of conjunctions, such as "like" or "similar to". In the former, as above mentioned, the relationship is implicitly expressed. As a matter of fact, the term of comparison refers to two very different elements sharing an important feature in common that usually coincides with the main benefit of the product or the promise. The relationship between the two elements with different meanings contributes to the creation of a message with a new visual expression that neither of them, taken individually, could have had. It must also be said that the use and function of the metaphor are in close connection with the socio-cultural conventions of a specific population¹⁸.

Metaphors have been widely studied since ancient times: Aristotle is the first one who conceived them as conveying a figurative meaning beyond the literal one.

In the 1980s, on the other side, the linguist George Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson unhinge the classic vision of metaphors asserting that they not only belong to literary and scientific language, but also to our ordinary way of expressing concepts and thoughts.

In “Metaphors We Live By”, the authors assert: “We have found [...] that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 3)”.

According to the American authors, the metaphor is a cognitive mechanism which functions as a categorizing and organizing tool of our wealth of knowledge¹⁹. “Each metaphor has a source domain, a target domain, and a source-to-target mapping. (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 276)”

¹⁷F. Domaneschi, C. Penco, *Come non detto, Usi e abusi dei sottintesi*, Bari, Laterza, 2016, p. 56

¹⁸ <http://www.antoniofiligno.com/le-figure-retoriche-in-pubblicita-la-metafora/>

¹⁹ F. Domaneschi, C. Penco, *Come non detto, Usi e abusi dei sottintesi*, Bari, Laterza, 2016, p. 58

To sum up, in the cognitive approach of Lakoff and Johnson the metaphors are considered:

1. a linguistic tool that is part of everyday speech;
2. a figure of speech present both in language and in thought;
3. a projection between source and target domain, in which the former constitutes a solid point of support for conceptual thinking in its making linguistic 'action';
4. an 'original' element, as a product of thought that can create infinite combinations²⁰.

Metaphors are broadly exploited in advertising to capture the spectators' attention and to communicate messages quickly and more effectively since individuals are used to reasoning by analogies. They can be divided into two categories: pure and composite ones. In the pure metaphor the subject of communication is replaced by another completely different in form and nature. The two subjects share one characteristic, the main one which constitutes the subject of the communication.

In the composite metaphor, on the other side, the subject of the communication takes the form of another subject in whole or in part to highlight a characteristic or convey a specific message. This type of metaphor is used more as it is easier and faster for the target to unveil the hidden message.

The tv spot of Red Bull is an example of a very well-known advertisement with a metaphor inside it. The slogan which accompanies every spot says "Red Bull gives you wings" thus making use of the metaphor of flight to succeed in delivering the message that their energizer gives you such an amount of charge that a person could even be able to perform impossible actions. Another linguistic tool, which we have discussed previously in this chapter, is the 2nd person indexical that can be recognized also in Red Bull' slogan. The more the audience feels involved by the brand, the more it will trust the company thus being a loyal consumer of it.

Another example of metaphors in advertising is the slogan used by Geox, a company specialized in producing shoes, which says "Geox, the shoe that breathes". Associating a

²⁰ C. Dalla Libera, *Le metafore concettuali in un approccio comunicativo nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere*, 2017

human activity to a shoe is a metaphor to communicate to the consumer that their products have a high quality and make your feet comfortable.



Figure 1.8. Geox commercial

Filippo Domaneschi and Carlo Penco in their book “Come non detto: usi e abusi dei sottintesi” analyze the tv spot aired in 2016 of “I Provenzali”, a company operating in the sector of cosmetics. The advertisement portrays a girl in her bathroom who is applying some hydrating lotion on her body. At a certain point, on the background, the branches of a plant grow and blow up and, finally, the spot closes with an almond tree which appears close to the protagonist and with the slogan “Nature suits you”.

The storytelling behind this spot is very easy and linear: it aims to highlight the naturalness of the product. Thanks to the body-plant metaphor, the company seems to assert that “by looking after your body with a 100% natural lotion, also nature will take advantage from it”. Moreover, a series of positive association will be built due to the use of nature to guarantee the quality of the product²¹.

1.3.6. The linguistic phenomenon of ambiguity

Up to now, our analysis pays a specific attention to the communication of the implicit and the linguistic devices which allow to vehiculate information without explicitly reporting

²¹ F. Domaneschi, C. Penco, *Come non detto, Usi e abusi dei sottintesi*, Bari, Laterza, 2016, p. 61

it. Moreover, there is another characteristic of the ordinary and natural language that we must take into consideration: ambiguity.

As a matter of fact, it is possible to make a distinction between natural and formal language. The former is different from the latter since it contains ambiguous expression, whereas in the formal language one and only meaning could be associated to every symbol.²²

On the other side, an ambiguous expression is defined as such when it has two or more meanings by convention. For example, in the sentence “John is waiting for the coach to arrive”, the word “coach” is lexically ambiguous because of his double meaning. In fact, coach means both the trainer of a sport team or the medium of transport. This phenomenon of lexical ambiguity is called homonymy: two linguistic expressions with the same handwriting and pronunciation, but with completely different meanings.

Another case of ambiguity is called polysemy and it occurs when the speakers link the various meaning that a linguistic expression could take. As an example, we could analyze the following sentence: “Mary has bought a newspaper”. The word newspaper may be translated as the physical item that a person could buy in a newsstand or, on the other hand, it could refer to a company that publishes written news.

Ambiguity is not only lexical, but also structural and pragmatic. The first type, also called syntactic, does not arise from single words, but instead from the construction of the sentence. “Competent men and women govern our country” is an example of structural ambiguity since the adjective “competent” may modify the conjunction “men and women” or just the term “men”.

Pragmatic ambiguity, on the other side, deals with the speakers’ intentions. In the sentence “The police are coming” is not clear if a person is describing a situation, warning, or reassuring someone. The meaning depends on the situation in which the speaker is uttering those words: the ambiguity concerns the speech act.

Philosophers in the past considered ambiguity as negative and as something which should be eliminated, whereas, writers and advertisers exploited and still make use of it to

²² C. Bianchi, *La pragmatica del linguaggio*, Bari, Laterza, 2003, p. 24

strategically express concepts. If a statement is generic and vague, the majority of people could easily agree on it instead of questioning it.

On the other hand, it may also happen that ambiguity is unintended thus delivering an unclear message and leading to embarrassing situations. Heineken found itself in trouble when launching a new lighter version of the beer. The advertising said “Sometimes, lighter is better”. The Dutch company distanced itself from the accuses of racism, but the words used created unintentionally an unpleasant climate around the brand since the adjective light could be translated both as softer and clearer.

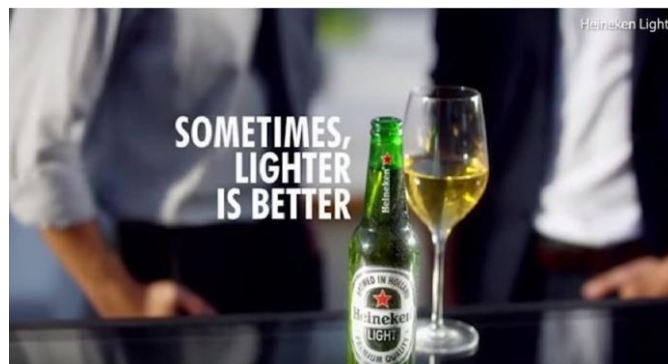


Figure 1.9. Heineken slogan accused of racism

Something similar happened to Ferrero while advertising white chocolate in Germany. The spot showed a big box of chocolate which is giving a speech in front of a huge crowd of supporters claiming at the end the following slogan: “Germany votes white”. Apart from being forced to withdraw the spot, the company had been accused of racism. So, the ambiguity of the word “white” generated misunderstandings not intended by Ferrero which, instead, wanted to create a funny advertising.

On the other hand, if it is purposeful, it could be used to amuse public or to send authoritative messages. An interesting example is the case of Pepsi advertising which voluntarily makes fun of the famous antagonist product “Coca-Cola Zero”. As a matter of fact, next to the picture of the Pepsi drink there appears the written “Too much taste to call ourselves a zero”. Here the exploitation of ambiguity is clear: Pepsi seems to assert that their products do not deserve to be called zero since it would be an offense towards their high quality.

From this theoretical analysis in which we have discovered the main determinants of communication and, in particular in commercial advertising, it is possible to draw a conclusion. As a matter of fact, individuals can understand the underlying meaning of a sentence, or a slogan or, more generally, an advertisement, thanks to a set of specific shared knowledge which can be based on linguistic or extralinguistic factors: the context helps people in disambiguating messages.

1.4. The relevance of context to advertising

As underlined in the previous sections, the structure of communication involves a sender who delivers a message to be decoded by a receiver. The message is conveyed through different means, among which the most immediate is language. In addition, the content can not only be communicated through words, but also by means of gestures, facial expressions, or a specific graphic.

Communication is thus influenced by the selected code with which to deliver a message to the target audience, but there is another factor to be taken into consideration: the context in which it takes place.

Context can be defined in general as the set of circumstances in which a communicative act occurs. Such circumstances can be linguistic or extra-linguistic²³. The discipline which deals with the study of the context is called “pragmatics”. It is indeed interested in understanding and explaining the possible uses of sentences uttered by the speakers in concrete situations.

Therefore, context is relevant to communication since it allows individuals to decode and find the right interpretation of the message being delivered, which may vary in different situations of use. Gottlob Frege, one of the founders of the contemporary philosophy of language, asserts that “A word is meaningful only in the context of a statement²⁴” which in turn must be analyzed in the widest context with respect to the speech: there is always something more.

²³ Encyclopedia Treccani online

²⁴ F. Domaneschi, C. Penco, *Come non detto, Usi e abusi dei sottintesi*, Bari, Laterza, 2016, p. 64

Context is always made up of three components which are the followings:

1. The shared knowledge, also known as cognitive context, meaning the social and cultural rules, the linguistic code, and the implicit expectations about the functioning of the world;
2. The communicative situation, or situational context, so place and time, the relationship between the interlocutors and roles and scope of the interaction;
3. The linguistic context or cotext which refers to the whole of the text to which the considered portion belongs.²⁵

The comprehension of a message is thus the result of the ability of the speaker to interpret simultaneously and in a suitable way all the laws which govern communication, both the explicit and the implicit ones.

Context is extremely relevant to marketing because companies need to develop an effective brand identity and persuade consumers with a convincing advertising strategy. In other words, organizations firstly need to think about the right words, namely the linguistic context, with which they want to communicate their ideas, products or services, then, how to achieve this aim through the right tone of voice, gestures, expressions, also known as paralinguistic or visual context and, lastly, they must take into account the extralinguistic context of their target, so who they are addressing to and which kind of social norms they share.

From the brief description mentioned above about the components of the context, it can be grasped that individuals involved in a communicative act must share a common background as well as consumers or the target audience must share with the brands some of the contextual factors previously mentioned in order to fully acknowledge the message sent by the firms, both concerning their identity and the commercials about their offerings.

Who is in charge of the communication and promotion campaigns of the company must discover which is the closest thinking approach of the users and must provide the most useful information depending on the context and on the real needs.

²⁵ Y. Bindi, *Language Design*, Guida all'usabilità delle parole per professionisti della comunicazione, Milano, Apogeo, 2017, p. 25

In the paper “How Context Can Make Advertising More Effective”, Horst Stipp, a researcher at the Advertising Research Foundation, suggests that marketers should focus on two processes in order to produce effective advertisements. The first one is the attention-transfer process in which recipients are said to pay more attention to the content proposed if there is a strong link between them and the referral context. Thus, the failure “to find context effects can be explained by the fact that respondents were shown content in which they had no interest²⁶”.

The latter, on the other side, refers to the priming/halo effects which deal with various mechanisms inside consumers’ minds that have a similar result. In order to influence advertising perceptions and reactions, they cause cognitive or emotional responses to the context. The study shows that when the user is interested in the background, certain effects are possible.

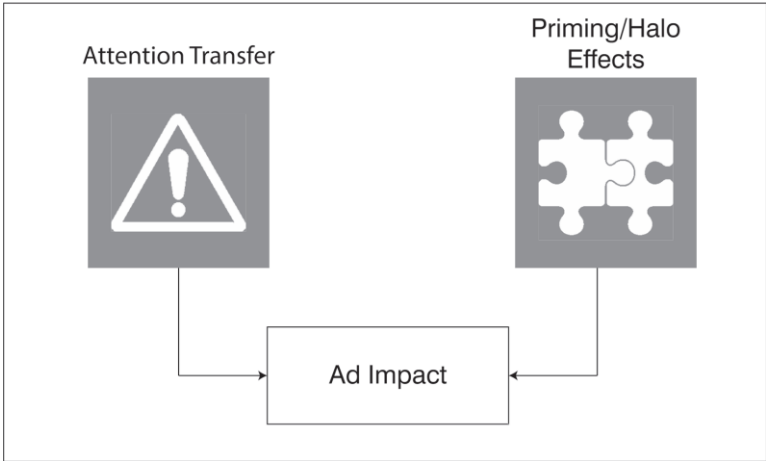


Figure 1.10. Context-EffectsTriggers, (Journal of Advertising Research, 2018)

The key is that, on a cognitive level, emotionally or even about the "energy level" in the advertising (e.g., upbeat music, short cuts) relative to the context, the customer feels congruence between the context and the advertisement. It is possible that alignment will improve the emotional advertising responses and promotes the processing of messages,

²⁶ H. Stipp, “How context can make advertising more effective”, *Journal of Advertising Research* 58 (2018), p.140

contributing to less avoidance of ads, better memory, and greater liking for ads. Alignment can also contribute to a greater ROI²⁷.

To sum up, context can be classified into strict and wide: this difference basically stands for linguistic and extralinguistic context. The first one refers to the context within the discourse, that is, the relationship between the words, phrases, sentences and even paragraphs, while the latter deals with all the set of shared assumptions, presuppositions, objectives, gestures which characterize the communicative act.

1.4.1. Linguistic, extralinguistic and paralinguistic context

1.4.2. Linguistic context

Language is one of the most powerful weapons we have at our disposal: it allows us to communicate, to share messages, to express feelings, opinions or even to establish social interactions with other people and brands. Also, it must be inserted in the context: linguistic context allows us to understand correctly a message.

Words, expressions, and utterances in order to be fully decodified need to be analyzed with respect to the context in which they are pronounced, otherwise it may happen that they are misunderstood. Linguistic context, or co-text as defined by George Yule, 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.

Previously in this chapter we have analyzed deictics and indexicals expressions in order to explain how language is designed. Knowing both the linguistic and the situational context is thus useful to know the referents to which some expressions are addressed as “I, you, here, now”. In addition, it helps in disambiguating sentences as in the following example: “Execution will be in three days”. In this case, context will play a crucial role in

²⁷ H. Stipp, “How context can make advertising more effective”, *Journal of Advertising Research* 58 (2018), P.141

determining the right interpretation of the word execution which may signify both “performance” and “legal process”.

It is, therefore, important for both the recipient and the sender of a message to simply understand what comes before and after a phrase. However, to accurately interpret its meaning and references, the receiver must recognize and appreciate the linguistic sense of what is being conveyed. Furthermore, the sender, before delivering its message, must study the linguistic context in which to position his utterance thus aiding the receiver at the comprehension stage.

Taking into account the domain of advertising, the linguistic context it is a fundamental prerequisite for the good success of a promotional campaign. Marketing and communication experts need to pay close attention to the words they use, and generally to the linguistic environment, before releasing their desired message to the target audience: this step of the communication plan is also referred to as “creative strategy” and it involves determining the basic appeal and message the advertiser wishes to convey. Starting from the brand name, marketers need to design one that enhances the brand recall and it is perceived by consumers to be easy to pronounce or spell. For example, a study showed that some products whose brand names were acceptable in both English and French were better appreciated when pronounced in French than in English. To solve these possible problems, experts make use of different strategies to convey a desirable sound to their brand names or product as, for example, alliteration, assonance, consonance or rhythm²⁸.

Language, most of the times, represents a big obstacle for brands since a word may mean different things depending on the referral context. For example, “Algida” is perfect for an ice-cream brand in Italian since it conveys the idea of something “cold”, but in the United States it is known as “Good Humor”, or “Pinguino” in Ecuador or “Frigo” in Spain since otherwise it would have not been so effective. Non-meaningful names, like “Esso”, may be created because they can translate well into other languages since they have no inherent meaning.

As concerns advertising, it “is referred to as a form of discourse in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle, but also the

²⁸ K. L. Keller, T. Aperia, M Georgson, *Strategic Brand Management*, Prentice Hall, 2012

content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges²⁹". For this reason, it is important to analyze the linguistic context behind each advert. Advertisements are usually viewed as combinations of different elements that support their contextualization and guide the viewer to the correct understanding of their meaning: headline, illustration, body copy, slogan or pay off, product name and other optional information.

With the advent of industrialization in 19th century, the style of presentation became even more relevant in increasing the persuasive effectiveness of the ad text thus leading to some changes in the structure and use of language and verbal communication. The language of advertising has become the language of everyone. As Twitchell asserts "language about products and services has pretty much replaced language about all other subjects³⁰". There had been a shift from just presenting the products to the creation of a real imagery behind them to capture consumers' attention.

Among the scholars who studied the use of language in advertising, Geoffrey Neil Leech must be mentioned for his much-quoted study "English in advertising³¹" of 1966 which analyzes the different kinds of linguistic devices used by British writers and designers in display advertising. Leech is primarily concerned with analyzing the specialized grammar of advertising. He notices much of this language's disjunctive nature, and he details some of its salient characteristics. The low frequency of role words such as articles, auxiliaries, and pronouns are among these; a preference over verbs and adjectives for nouns; and strong nominalization over predicative constructions.

Moreover, it is important to remember Geis who studied the use of linguistic devices exploited by television for the commercials. His research could be considered a pragmatic contribution since he offers a theory of communication which deals with not only how advertisers use language, but also with how consumers are expected to interpret it. Like Geis, also Goleman ³²examines the use of language from a pragmatic point of view. She, as a matter of fact, claims that viewers need to make two types of inference.

²⁹Hosni M. El-Dali, *The Language of Consumer Advertising: Linguistic and Psychological Perspectives*, United Arab Emirates University, 2019, p.2

³⁰Hosni M. El-Dali, *The Language of Consumer Advertising: Linguistic and Psychological Perspectives*, United Arab Emirates University, 2019, p. 97

³¹ Hosni M. El-Dali, *The Language of Consumer Advertising: Linguistic and Psychological Perspectives*, United Arab Emirates University, 2019, p. 102

³² Hosni M. El-Dali, *The Language of Consumer Advertising: Linguistic and Psychological Perspectives*, United Arab Emirates University, 2019, p. 103

On the one hand, a type of inference, which could be called linguistic, is based on the awareness of the structure and conventions of the genre of advertising by the viewer. On the other hand, the second form of inference, which could be defined as pragmatic, involves a willingness to comply with the Gricean Cooperative Principle, already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, by believing that content will be favorable to the product.

However, it is Leech who identifies four main prerequisites ³³that a successful advertisement must have, and they are the followings:

1. Attention value: an effective advert must capture people's attention and aid brand recall. On the linguistic level, this can be achieved by breaking conventions of language use such as using wrong spelling, neologisms, puns, grammatical solecism, rhymes, semantic deviations and by putting language in inappropriate contexts;
2. Readability: the viewer seeks for easy and quick information. As a consequence, the advert must be concise in the language used, mostly informal in order to involve the individual and to shorten the distance between the brand and him. Along this dissertation, we saw the importance of deictic expressions in advertising: there is a huge use of "you" to address the viewer. Moreover, terms like "this, that, those, it, here and there" indicate items in the immediate context and occur very frequently in advertising copy. Elliptic sentences, phrasal verbs, idioms and contractions are characteristic features of advertising language due to their high degree of informality;
3. Memorability: an advert must be remembered and interiorized by the recipients. Language helps in doing so through several linguistic devices which are highly repetitive such as alliteration, metrical rhythm, rhyme, grammatical parallelism as well as semantic and syntactic repetition and lexical repetition.
4. Selling power: sales of products or services are the ultimate goal of companies which succeed in doing so through the use of specific linguistic devices in advertising. For example, they make extensive use of imperatives since

³³ M. Vasiloaia, *Linguistic Features of the Language of Advertising*, George Bacovia University, Bacau, Romania, p.2

instructions or orders which tell exactly what to do are more likely to grasp people's attention. Furthermore, Leech identifies a series of adjectives which better suit the advertising language: new, good, better, best, sure, delicious, free, fresh, nice. The recipients, indeed, develop good associations only in relation to positive terms.

Due to the high digitalization of the latest years, advertising must be highly effective since the very first lines. As a matter of fact, Forbes reports that "it now takes people on average about eight or nine seconds to find the result they want, but 80% of readers never make it past the headline³⁴." So, everything starts from the very beginning: headlines are implicitly the first thing your viewer pays attention to. It, indeed, should be attention-grabbing but should also encompass the overall message in a short sentence. Headlines can be thought-provoking, strictly informative, humorous, but always leaving in the readers the desire to discover more³⁵.

As mentioned above, the ad copy must be creative, concise and respect the maxim of quality thus providing relevant information about the content communicated. Moreover, a strong Call to action is needed. Looking at the definition given by Investopedia, a CTA is a marketing term that refers to the next step or the action that the marketer wants the consumer to take. Calls to action can be as direct, such as a button that says "Buy Now," or a softer CTA such as "Read More³⁶." All these linguistic devices help communicators in building evocative and successful advertisements.

Let us now consider in detail what are the various linguistic techniques used to set up the right linguistic context and to create a powerful advert. Experts use a lot of mnemonic devices which are useful for the recipients to remember the text of the advertisement and recall it at the right moment. Rhymes, as can be read in the definition given by the Cambridge Dictionary are "words that have the same last sound as another word", ³⁷ and they are linguistic tools which are widely exploited in advertising, mostly to create slogans. Rhyme makes the slogans and headlines look striking and easier to recall in

³⁴ <https://marketingpic.com/what-makes-good-ad/>

³⁵ <https://marketingpic.com/what-makes-good-ad/>

³⁶ Definition accessed at Investopedia online

³⁷ Definition accessed at Cambridge Dictionary online

Leech's perspective. Similar to Leech, as it resonates in one's head, scholar Xiaosong Ding regards rhyme as a way of better memorization of the slogan. In addition, the purpose of rhymes in slogans is to transmit simple data.³⁸

For example, we can mention the slogan of Yahoo, the famous American company in the internet services: "Do you... Yahoo?". In this case, the rhyme refers to the sounds, plus it turns out to be critical in aiding brand recall in consumers' minds.

Moreover, alliteration, the rhetorical device of commencing adjacent or closely connected words with the same sound or syllable³⁹, is broadly exploited in creating successful slogans.

For example, we can mention Fila's slogan: "Functionable...Fashionable...Formidable". The repetition of the groups of syllables results in being easily remembered by the target audience due to the sound effect. As a matter of fact, alliteration will help the slogans achieve the requisite powerful beating rhythm to make it a repeatable phrase. Another example could be found in Toyota' slogan which says "Today, Tomorrow, Toyota": the alliteration of the first consonant makes the information catchy and attractive to the recipients.

At the lexical level, as previously mentioned along this analysis, there is a recurrent pattern in advertising which consists in using "you, we, us" pronouns. As a matter of fact, this linguistic strategy, also known as second person deixis, allows to reduce the distance between the ad and the recipients which feel as if they were interacting and talking directly with the brand and as if the ad producers were making real and sincere promises to the audience. An example is Hyundai' slogan that by saying "Always there for you" exploits the use of person deictics to involve and shorten the distance between them and their clients and possible prospects.

On the other side, semantic advertising strategies, as personification, metaphors, hyperbole, metonymy, simile, and euphemism are also broadly exploited. According to Leech: "Figurative language also has a striking and memorable quality which suits it for

³⁸P. Skorupa, T. Dubovičienė, *Linguistic characteristics of commercial and Social advertising slogans*, *Philology, Educology*, 2015, p.111

³⁹ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095404181>

slogans and headlines⁴⁰". We already went through the analysis of various linguistic tools which fall under this category and, as we said, they are so much useful because they facilitate the comprehension of messages, since people reason by association, and they help disambiguate sentences according to the context of use. In the publication written by Skorupa and Dubovičienė, the authors make reference to the Esso' slogan when talking about metaphors. The words said are "Put a tiger in your tank" and they imply that the fuel for Esso's customers will be so powerful that it could be compared to the velocity and strength of a tiger: this is a clear example of how linguistic context is put into practice and how viewers are asked to interpret the message spread according to the semantic meaning of the words used. As a matter of fact, "tank" is strictly related to the fuels' world, but the word "tiger" in the slogan incorporates the brand name of the company into it, as the tiger has been the logo and symbol of ExxonMobil and its related companies for a long time⁴¹.

To sum up, the linguistic study of slogans found that rhyme and alliteration are the most commonly used sound techniques in commercial advertising slogans that help convey basic data and make a piece of writing memorable, whereas rhythm, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia can be considered the most unusual sound techniques used in slogans. Furthermore, one of the ways to make advertisement ads unforgettable and emotionally colorful is figurative language. Commercial advertisement slogans have shown fairly regular use of puns, similes, metaphors, personifications, hyperbole, and euphemism, which are used under legal control in slogans, for example, items with a sexual connotation or other "taboo" products, whereas metonymy and apostrophe are quite uncommon in use.

As we have seen, linguistic context refers to the context within the discourse, that is, the relationship between the words, phrases, sentences and even paragraphs⁴². It is widely useful to eliminate ambiguity, to indicate referents and to detect conversational implicatures. On the other side, it must be taken into consideration that when talking about context we cannot mention only the linguistic one, but also the extralinguistic one.

⁴⁰ P. Skorupa, T. Dubovičienė, *Linguistic characteristics of Commercial and Social advertising slogans*, *Phylology, Educology*, 2015, p. 113

⁴¹ P. Skorupa, T. Dubovičienė, *Linguistic characteristics of Commercial and Social advertising slogans*, *Phylology, Educology*, 2015, p. 114

⁴² L. Song, *The role of context in discourse analysis*, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, Qingdao, China, 2010, p. 876

1.4.3. Extralinguistic context

Language is, indeed, the means through which we communicate and through which we are able to decodify messages, but the act of communication is not based only on linguistic dynamics. As a matter of fact, the extralinguistic context is a set of elements and factors that go beyond language and can be divided into two categories, situational and cognitive. The former can help us in disambiguating sentences since it deals with the physical location and temporal circumstances in which the utterance is expressed, the latter, also known as cultural context, is the combination of shared presuppositions, assumptions and gestures which are typical of a communicative act.

In order to better understand, the influence of the situational context we can analyze the following sentence: “We have to cut it out”. The meaning of the utterance can be different according to the situation in which the speaker pronounces these words. For example, it could be said by a barber when looking at his customer’s long hair or it could be even uttered by a gardener when looking at the hedge of a garden: the right interpretation of the meaning can be deduced thanks to the situational context thus including the surrounding environment.

Moreover, as previously anticipated, the extralinguistic context does not only deal with visible elements and circumstances that are part of the environment in which the speech act is taking place, but also it involves a set of shared assumptions, namely a shared code, interiorized by the speakers due to the belonging to the same society, same culture and sometimes same religion belief.

As an explicative example, it is possible to analyze the following sentence: “The Caritas accuses the Government: it fails over immigrants”. To fully understand the sentence, which may be the headline of a newspaper or also of a newscast, recipients must know which is Caritas and the Government to which the accuse is addressed. The audience must know all these elements which are part of the society and culture of their time.

Situational context may thus be exploited by marketers to take advantage from it in order to give life to successful advertising campaigns. During recent years, indeed, a new discipline of marketing called “situational marketing” is born. It occurs “when companies use popular social events to draw attention to a product or service in order to sell it and

promote their brand in the meantime⁴³". In this case, brands adapt their promotional activities to situations which the audience knows and remembers.

Holidays, releases of famous movies, International days, pop culture events are all examples of situational marketing which can be exploited by organizations to publicize their products or services, but also raising brand awareness and recall. Thanks to the extralinguistic context, in which companies can insert their campaigns, a lot of people will find it easier to connect the advertisement to the brand and, also, will understand the message communicated.

Outdoor advertising and other more recent strategies of ambient marketing can be useful to understand the influence of the situational context, so the "physical" surrounding environment, on commercials. Ambient marketing is an "unconventional form of marketing based on creativity and surprise that uses places and times of everyday life to reach and impress the public"⁴⁴. As an example, we can report the Casinò of Venice advertisement at the Marco Polo airport. Tourists while waiting for their luggage, they will assist unconsciously at an attempt of persuasion: the reel, where the baggage turns, becomes a roulette wheel. Casinò of Venice had been able to exploit the situational context in order to attract travelers' attraction and to push them to remember their brand.



Figure 1.11. Casinò of Venice advertisement at Marco Polo airport

⁴³ <https://socialtoolkits.com/situational-marketing-how-brands-use-it-and-how-you-should-too/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.glossariomarketing.it/significato/ambient-marketing/>

With ambient marketing, you are using a space, and you try to cover it using your brand, to meet your customer base. As in the previous example at Marco Polo airport, the benefit is that you are not interrupting people, but, on the other side, you are getting their attention and surprising them.

The above-mentioned situation-based advertising strategies are especially successful because they are able to influence the target customers' cognitive processes. As a matter of fact, the cognitive sphere and responses of the advertising audience also constitute a relevant part of the advertising-related extralinguistic context.

It is, indeed, important not to forget another impactful aspect which is part of the extralinguistic context and plays a crucial role in marketing and communication, especially in advertising. Culture, indeed, must be dealt with carefully by marketers and advertisers when developing messages to be spread to the target audience. Nearly every country exhibits cultural traits that influence not just the needs and wants of consumers but how they go about satisfying them.

Marketers, as a matter of fact, must be sensitive not only in determining what products and services they can sell to foreign cultures, but also in communicating with them. Advertising is often the most effective way to communicate with potential buyers and create markets in other countries, but it can also be one of the most difficult aspects of the international marketing program because of problems in developing messages that will be understood in various countries.

For example, Japanese strongly believe in the value of the group, social interdependence and collectivism. On the other side, American culture is more based on individualism. This is to say that advertisements stressing the importance of individuality and nonconformity have traditionally failed when they have been proposed to the Nipponese audience and this is the reason why experts in communication need to study and develop different ads for different countries.

An example of a company which ran into problem because it lacked to take into account the power of extralinguistic context is the case of Nike commercial aired in China. The spot showed the NBA basketball star LeBron James defeating a Chinese dragon and a kung fu master. Therefore, the government banned it accusing it of being blaspheme because it showed an American sports icon winning over the dragon, which symbolizes Chinese

culture, and also over the martial arts teacher, a symbol of national pride. Marketers need to pay a close focus on how cultural norms could affect the perception of customers on the adverts. Some countries, for example, decided to even put restrictions on topics which could be proposed in commercials: in the Islamic countries alcohol and pork cannot be advertised, human nudity is forbidden as well as images of a cross or pictures of Mecca⁴⁵.

1.4.3. Paralinguistic and visual context

Advertising, as from what we have said and analyzed so far, is not an easy and short process as it may seem: it requires a long study of different factors before being aired to masses. We analyzed the influence of linguistic factors, such as the diverse rhetoric or rhythmic techniques, and also the relevance of situational and cognitive-cultural factors, as the importance of the “physical” environment in which the ad is placed or the cultural symbols which must be respected in order not to offend the common opinion and to spread message more quickly because those beliefs are already shared and stored in people’s minds. Beyond these linguistic and extralinguistic contextual influences on advertising, we must mention the relevance of the paralinguistic and visual context too.

Paralinguistic context includes all the nonverbal aspects such as gestures, facial expressions, sounds, tone of voices with which an utterance is pronounced. It, indeed, deals with the 55 and 38 percentage of Albert Mehrabian’s model, previously presented in detail at the beginning of this thesis. Paralanguage includes all the voluntary or unintentional movements that we perform when speaking to someone. Unconscious facial expressions or body gestures contextualize the message that is being communicated saying more than what the linguistic meaning can do. Most of the times, paralanguage is useful to understand the real feelings and opinions of the speakers, because it can unveil them unconsciously.

Variations in the tone of voice to pronounce a specific utterance make clear the intended meaning of the speaker. The meaning of a sentence can thus change according to the intonation of the interlocutor as in the following example: “Thanks for letting me know”.

⁴⁵ Belch & Belch, *Branding and communication 2*, Create Mc Graw Hill

The speaker may have uttered these words to sincerely thank someone for having informed him or with a veil of irony to remark the fact of not having been adequately informed about something.

In marketing, literally, it is the "tone of voice" you want to give to communication, in harmony with the brand identity, that defines the character and personality that you want to build for a product or a brand⁴⁶. For example, advertisements about perfumes usually tend to be aggressive and sensual, while the tone is more serious when dealing with important topics as in the institutional advertising which promote a safe driving or prevention of diseases.

In advertising, as anticipated above, facial expressions play a crucial role. As a matter of fact, it is rare to watch commercials which display sad or angry faces, otherwise consumers won't be willing to buy that product or service. On the other side, the audience will develop positive feelings and associations towards a brand which portrays happy faces. According to the Facial Feedback Hypothesis, the facial expression you make also makes you feel that emotion and this is reason why if we see in an advertising, a frustrated expression we may replicate it and have negative feelings about a brand. It is not a case if we are used to watch commercials which portray happy families in the morning having breakfast all together and showing big smiles.

Despite the tone of voice, also music and sound effects have a strong impact on the perception and strength of stimuli. Listening to music is not just a mechanical process that involves the hearing organ and the brain. Associations are created between the different brain areas: the temporal areas for listening and language, the frontal areas for abstract thinking, the cerebellum responsible for motor control to which the perception of rhythm is due, other areas for learning, concentration and memory. The more familiar music is, the more dopamine is released, a neurotransmitter that improves mood, reduces anxiety, increases pleasure and concentration⁴⁷.

While listening, the limbic system responsible for emotional responses is activated, which explains the sentimental involvement with certain songs or musical genres. This is to say that paralinguistic devices as sounds help people to activate positive associations towards

⁴⁶ <https://www.glossariomarketing.it/significato/tone-of-voice/>

⁴⁷ B. Monteleone, *Neuromarketing nei servizi, Vendere di più, vendere meglio*, Confcommercio Imprese per l'Italia, slide n. 16

what they are listening to as it happens when they are confronted with a specific musical background or jingle used in advertising. Jingles can be thought of as complements of the slogans which are the most valuable element in terms of brand awareness. Due to their catchy nature, the audience is likely to mentally rehearse or repeat the jingle even after seeing or hearing the ad⁴⁸.

Music and sound effects have a strong impact on the perception and strength of communication stimuli. Academic studies show that there is a direct correlation between the sound you perceive and the products or services you want to buy. The strategic use of sound can make the difference in the strategic positioning of a brand, product or service. The most popular brands are also recognized through the sounds that distinguish them: music, but also voices.

It is possible to make a further distinction between the sound of the logo of a company and the corporate music. The former is a sound, a melody or a short piece of music that creates an acoustic relationship between the customer and the brand, as in the case of Mulino Bianco's logo, whereas, on the other side, the latter deals with the set of sounds and music that create the soundscape of the brand, as, for example, Fattorie Osella's one.

Paralanguage devices are not the only nonlinguistic factors which affect contextualization of the messages communicated. As a matter of fact, we must mention the relevance of visual context during the decoding process. Yvonne Bindi, in *Language Design*, transforms the quotation "We were not born to read" of Maryanne Wolf, a cognitivist neuroscientist, in "We were not born to read linear structures, but to recognize shapes in the space⁴⁹". It is for this reason that we must not underestimate the power of images, shapes, colors in order to aid the full comprehension of the intention of the advertisers. Moreover, visuals can surely enrich the persuasion effectiveness of the ads.

Studies show that our brains do not only process visuals faster, but they also retain and transmit much more information when it is visually delivered.

⁴⁸K. L. Keller, T. Aperia, M Georgson, *Strategic Brand Management*, Prentice Hall, 2012

⁴⁹ Y. Bindi, *Language Design*, Guida all'usabilità delle parole per professionisti della comunicazione, Milano, Apogeo, 2017, p. 12

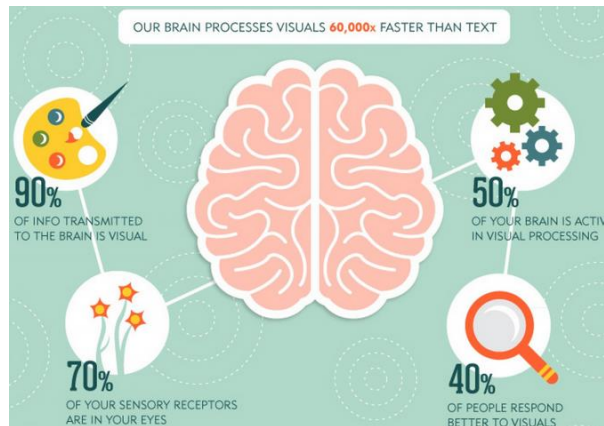


Figure 1.12. The importance of visual contents

As is demonstrated by the picture above, we tend to memorize more easily pictures rather than words: the 40% of people respond better to visuals. In 1985, E. Gombrich in his famous book *The Image and the Eye* wrote the following sentence: "No wonder it has been asserted that we are entering a historical epoch in which the image will take over from the written word"⁵⁰. During recent years, especially due to the advent of technology and to the digital revolution, communication had to adapt its style of delivering information to more evolved devices of infographics and illustrations in general. The photograph, illustration or graphic must catch or arouse the interest of the audience.

Thus, visual context helps a brand to promote its products or activities in a more strategic and effective way thanks to the high memorability related to the power of images. We have already seen along this analysis an example which clearly shows the relevance of visuals in advertising: the rainbow associated to the sentence "Love is love". The words without the illustration of the colorful rainbow would have had no meaning at all apart from the obvious tautology.

In addition, the visual can be useful in carrying meaning, which is not explicit, but, on the other hand, it refers to a rhetoric and symbolic one. According to Linda Scott, author of "Images in advertising: the need for a theory of visual rhetoric", to build advertising images as a form of rhetoric, visuals must have some precise characteristics:

⁵⁰ E.H. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 137. See <https://www.studioaf.eu/articoli/blog/2016/il-potere-delle-immagini-nella-comunicazione>

1. They must represent concepts, abstractions, actions, metaphors in order to be used in the *invention* of a complex argument;
2. They must be arranged in such a way that they guide the order of argumentation, also known as *arrangement*;
3. They must also have major variations in their manner of delivery, so that an intended appraisal can be indicated by the choice of style⁵¹.

Moreover, the author suggests the creation of “a symbol theory of pictures” in order to draw a list of the meanings associated to visuals by convention and not only with respect to their resemblance of the nature. The objective of the new approach by Scott is to highlight the power of images as “information in symbolic form”, so as messages that need to be cognitively interpreted by complicated combinations of learned pictorial schemes and do not inherently have an analogy with nature.

As a matter of fact, a lot of advertisements simply copy the product as it is thus portraying a realistic image of what is being promoted to show it without possible conflicts of interpretations. In addition, since these visuals are considered to be part of the consumers’ inner nature and mood of thinking, they do not require cognitive reasoning by viewers who are lowly involved in the learning process.

On the other side, advertising strongly relies on visuals which are catchy and evocative in order to capture the recipients’ attention. Linda Scott reports an interesting example to highlight the relevance of images as powerful devices for completing and reinforcing the commercial’s meaning. The campaign launched by Clinique, a leading company in the make-up industry, showed a lipstick and a lotion inside a glass of soda, a weird association. Visuals, in this case, confuse the receivers who are not able to find immediately the connection between those products and the drink. Indeed, as the author suggests, viewers need to interpret the message metaphorically since the company may have wanted to say that “Clinique’s summer line is refreshing as a tall glass of soda” or also underlying the property of the lipstick of being waterproof.

Our eyes can register as much as 36,000 visual messages every hour. Visuals, indeed, communicate so much more and so much faster compared to a written text. They help

⁵¹ L. Scott, *Images in advertising: the need for a theory of visual rhetoric*, Oxford, Journal of Consumer Research, 1994, p. 253

increasing brand awareness since potential customers can better visualize and store in mind the memory of your products, but especially they will easily recall the brand. Moreover, images are vital to appeal your target audience and to catch their attention. An advertising campaign, indeed, manages to be successful also if it is able to psychologically involve the receivers who will project themselves as the subjects of the commercial. The function of visuals as imagery is a powerful device in advertising: pictures which go beyond the simple analogy with nature will result in better returns for the companies adopting this strategy. The visual context of the message is thus used to inform, persuade and retain the target audience and the market.

1.5. Fallacies in communication

Using language means especially to reason, or more precisely, make inferences which consist in deriving conclusions from the premises. As Aristotle asserted, the human being is a “rational animal” which differentiates himself from the other living beings because of the ability to reason. Substantially, to reason means “to argue”, so to be able to give reasons for our theses. As a matter of fact, when we reason or provide an argument, we reach a conclusion according to some initial premises, supporting our thesis, and using specific rules.

As examples of types of reasoning we can mention deduction and induction. In logic, the former consists of a series of premises which allow to derive logical consequences. If it is to be considered valid, it means that if premises are true, also the derived conclusion will be true.⁵²

A classic example of valid inference is the following:

“All men are mortal.

Socrates is a man.

Socrates is mortal.”

⁵² C. Bianchi, *Pragmatica del linguaggio*, Bari, Laterza, 2003, p.101

In the syllogism above, the first two sentences are the premises from which we can derive the third statement which is the conclusion. Moreover, Greek stoics proposed two other schemas which guarantee the truth of the conclusion if the premises are true and they are the *Modus Ponens* and *Modus Tollens*. A lot of advertisements make use of these two logical tools. The *Modus Ponens* schema is “If A then B. A. B.”, whereas, on the other side, the *Modus Tollens* is based on “If A then B. Not B. Not A”. As I previously anticipated a lot of commercials use the formula “If... then”. For example, the slogan of Oreo cookies which says, “If it's not Oreo, then it's not milk's favorite cookie” or Aia’s one which is “If there is Aia, then there is joy”.

Induction, on the other hand, differently from what occurs for deduction, follows a reasoning schema in which the conclusion does not arise necessarily from the premises, which, instead, just provide evidence to support the conclusion. The difference between inductions and deductions is basically that in the latter the conclusion is true, while in the former group it is not a necessary one, but only possible.

Our ability to formulate reasonings depends mostly on the context and on the instructions that we are given in specific circumstances. Sometimes, it might occur that the arguments are not valid at all, but, at the same time, they still appear plausible and convincing. These forms of thinking are called fallacies and are widely exploited as strategical linguistic mechanisms of persuasion.

The term fallacy derives from the Latin “fallere” which means “to cheat”. Aristotle was the first person to have dealt with this topic in his “Sophistical Refutations” where he proposes a list of twenty kind of fallacies, dividing them into “sophisms”, deceptive reasonings used by sophists to cheat on the listeners, and “paralogisms”, involuntary and unconscious mistakes. Currently, the classification is between formal fallacies, in which the mistake in reasoning resides in the structure of the argument, and informal ones, where the inaccuracy is due to several factors such as the falsity of the premises, their pertinency and many others.

1.5.1. Formal fallacies

As previously anticipated, it is possible to describe a “fallacy” as any invalid inference. In a “formal” fallacy, the argument's structure or “form” is invalid. This implies that, even if the premises are true, the conclusion is not a logical consequence of the premises. Formal fallacies often seem superficially comparable to valid arguments and can therefore be easy to miss⁵³.

Under this category of fallacies, we can mention the “Affirming the consequent one”. The schema is similar to the one of *Modus ponens*, but is not valid. For example, let us analyze the following sentence: “If Elisa comes from Naples then she is Italian. Elisa is Italian. Elisa is from Naples”. As can be deduced from the example, the reasoning does not work because it is not sufficient to be Italian for coming from Naples: Elisa could have been born in another city of Italy and still owning the Italian citizenship. Even if affirming the consequent is not a valid reasoning, experts in communication and advertisers exploit this linguistic device a lot due to its highly persuasive characteristic.

To better understand how this type of formal fallacy is used in advertising, we can comment a famous commercial aired by Rocchetta water. The scene shows two girls just right out of the fitting rooms of a shop. The first one is brownish and a little bit robust, while the second one is a blondie and slim girl. They both ask to a group of feminine friends how they look like and they receive two different answers. The brownish girl according to the group has to “purify” herself, whereas the blond and slim one is already purified”. The spot ends with the blond girl who satisfied shows her secret of beauty and says “Rocchetta, the health’s water”.

This commercial is based on the “Affirming of the consequent” fallacy since we can rebuild the reasoning behind it in the following way: “If you drink Rocchetta water, then you purify yourself (you are slimmer, more beautiful and healthy). The blond girl is purified. The blond girl drinks Rocchetta water”. The reasoning lacks for adequate support. As a matter of fact, the blond girl may be in such a good physical condition for many other reasons than just drinking Rocchetta water.

Another example of formal fallacy is called “Denying the antecedent”. Its form is similar to that of the *Modus tollens*, and for this reason it is viewed as valid even if it is not. You

⁵³ N.M. Gibbs, *Formal and informal fallacies in anaesthesia*, Australia, 2010, p. 640

deny the antecedent and try to infer the denial of the consequent. Let us propose an example: “If the pavement is wet in the morning, then it rained last night. The pavement is not wet this morning. Therefore, it did not rain last night”. The sentence is invalid since it could have rained, but it may have stopped earlier evaporating before morning: the premises do not guarantee the truth of the conclusion.

Despite the invalidity of this fallacy, it results very convincing and persuasive as can be grasped by the analysis of the following example. A very famous commercial about an anti-limescale follows the mechanism of the denial of the antecedent. Thus, it shows a woman talking to a technician because her washing machine is out of order. According to the expert, the problem resides in the secondhand product used by the woman, instead of Calfort. The reasoning is the following: “If you use Calfort, then you will have clean pipes. You do not use Calfort. You do not have clean pipes”.

As it can be deduced by the analysis of the previous example, it is a proof of invalid fallacy since the washing machine pipes’ of that lady may have been out of order due to many other factors and not only because of the lack of use of that specific product. The conclusion of the technician, indeed, does not follow from the premises.

1.5.2. Informal fallacies

Informal fallacies, on the other hand, are incorrect reasoning that exploit rhetorical techniques or other features of language to deceive. In informal fallacies, in particular, the reasoning error is mostly to be found in the content of the premises and in the conclusion. It is possible to classify them into relevance and semantic fallacies. The former deal with those reasoning in which the premises seem relevant with respect to the conclusion and, for this reason, they are inadequate to establish the truthfulness of them. The latter, which are also called equivocation ones, on the other side, arise due to the use of expressions that can have more than one interpretation.

Let us analyze the first group of informal fallacies by enlisting all the subcategories in which it can be classified:

1. Argument from ignorance (appeal to ignorance, argumentum ad ignorantiam): a claim is true because it has not been or cannot be proven false, or vice versa. An interesting example is the electoral commercial of Ronald Reagan for the presidential campaign in 1984, as reported by Domaneschi and Carlo Penco in *Come non detto: usi e abusi dei sottintesi*. It shows a bear which is free in a forest and a background voice which suggests being prepared to the worst. The spot, indeed, is aired during Cold War and it is an example of fallacy ad ignorantiam since no one knows if Russia, embodied by the bear, is effectively aggressive, but it might be so, it is better to be ready. The conclusion, also in this case, does not follow from the initial premises.
2. Appeal to authority (argument from authority, argumentum ad verecundiam): an assertion is deemed true because of the position or authority of the person asserting. An example can be found in the advertising of the Head & Shoulders shampoo in 2017 which sees the goalkeeper of the Italian football team Gianluigi Buffon as a testimonial. In the commercial it is heard that the product fights itching, dandruff and oily hair. The truth of the thesis is supported by appealing to an authority that is completely irrelevant to what you want to argue; Buffon, in fact, is known for his sporting skills and certainly not for his competence in the field of cosmetics.
3. Argumentum ad populum (appeal to widespread belief, bandwagon argument, appeal to the majority, appeal to the people): a proposition is claimed to be true or good solely because a majority or many people believe it to be so. As an example, we can mention the Scavolini commercial, whose slogan says "Scavolini, the most loved by the Italians". Quality is proved mostly because the majority of Italians love it and, therefore, we all should share the same thought about it.
4. Appeal to pity (argumentum ad misericordiam): this fallacy's main aim is to generate feelings of sympathy or mercy in the listener to obtain common agreement. Examples of fallacies of this kind include all those commercials which show inhuman situations and aim at generating compassion to raise funds. An Ad misericordiam fallacy "A better tomorrow depends also on you". Being emotionally involved is not a sufficient reason to justify the donation to that specific association and not to another one.

5. Argumentum ad baculum (appeal to the stick, appeal to force, appeal to threat): this fallacy exploits coercion or threats of force to support a position.
6. Appeal to consequences (argumentum ad consequentiam): here the conclusion is supported by a premise that asserts positive or negative consequences from some course of action in an attempt to distract from the initial discussion. Examples of commercials could include those institutional spots aired to prevent safety when driving forbidding the abuse of alcohol. Appealing to the consequences, indeed, is not a logic proof to support a specific thesis.
7. Ignoratio elenchi (irrelevant conclusion, missing the point): it is an argument that may in itself be valid, but does not address the issue in question.
8. Ad hominem: this informal fallacy consists of attacking the arguer instead of the argument. It is widely exploited by politicians in their speeches.
9. Falsa causa: as the name of the fallacy itself anticipates, it is based on the fact that an event following temporarily to another one could be considered as a premise to support the second event being the cause of the first one.
10. False dilemma: this fallacy is the most exploited in advertising. It is sometimes referred to as the "Seller's dilemma". It consists of presenting two alternatives as the only possible options. Using the false dilemma explicitly may lead to some companies to risk sanctions by the law. A famous example is the Dash detergent spot in which it is portrayed as cheaper than its main rival in a well-known comparative commercial from Procter & Gamble in 2013. It had been sanctioned by Antitrust because it was found to be deceptive towards its main competitor Dixan. The advertisement shows that either you choose Dash and save a third of the main opponent, or you choose the competitor's and pay a third more.

The fallacies analyzed above are just few examples of the main critical ones under the category of relevance. Another important group of fallacies which must be taken into account include "semantic or equivocation" ones: fallacies generated due to the possible multiple interpretations.

Let us analyze the main categories in which semantic fallacies are classified:

1. **Anfibolia:** it occurs when an utterance is ambiguous due to the use of misleading terms⁵⁴. As an example, we can analyze the Crodino' spot. The scene opens with a man with his little dog and a gorilla sitting down at the bar counter. At a certain point a girl arrives and makes compliments to the puppy, the man answers in the following way "They gave it to me for my wife!". Then, gorilla asks the man where these exchanges take place. It is, indeed, an example of ambiguity since the real meaning of the sentence pronounced by the man is that they gave him the dog as a companionship for his wife and not in exchange of her. The humoristic effect of this fallacy helps people remember in a positive way both the commercial and the brand.
2. **Accent:** it is widely exploited in advertising and it occurs when there is a lot of emphasis on a specific linguistic expression or sometimes on a complete sentence thus omitting or talking quietly about other aspects which could be more interesting and relevant for the recipients. As an example, we could mention the commercials of medicines where the tone of voice used to indicate all the benefits provided by the assumption of the products is very remarked. On the other side, at the end, there is always an impersonal voice-over which rapidly says, "This medicine could have side effects even serious". It is thus clear why there is not the same emphasis on both the information provided by the advertisement: the fact that there could be side effects may scare the audience thus leading to a lower in sales.

⁵⁴ Definition accessed at Treccani Encyclopedia Online

CHAPTER 2- “HOW COMMUNICATION HAS TO ADAPT TO NEW PARADIGMS”

2.1. The relationship between commercial communication and sustainability

In the first chapter of the current dissertation, we analyzed the different communicative strategies which affect commercial advertising. However, especially in the past few years, another relevant trend for the field of communication emerged: sustainability and green marketing. In the following pages, the analysis will thus be focused on the various communication techniques to communicate the importance of being sustainable to generate profits and brand loyalty for an organization.

Consumers, indeed, are no longer interested only in the products or services offered, but, on the contrary, they care about the sustainable level of the companies. Sustainability must be read in its three meanings: environmental, social and economic. As a matter of fact, companies which claim to be sustainable must comply with all the three dimensions mentioned above. Being sustainable does not solely mean to respect the environment, but also to respect the people working inside and outside the organization, including all the communities which could be affected by their work, and, lastly, to be economically sustainable, which has to do with the ability of an economic system to generate lasting growth of economic indicators, in particular, the ability to generate income and work for the livelihood of populations.

As previously analyzed in the present dissertation, advertising has always been employed by companies to sell products or services to their target audience. In recent years, demand has suffered from important changes: consumers do not seek anymore only for iconic brands to exhibit, on the contrary, they ask for coherence with their system of values, among which the respect for the environment, for the whole society and ethics are the most important to be observed.

Firms thus have to adequate their supply to this paradigmatic change: they must change their model by proposing a new one in which green marketing is at the center. Communication about sustainability, both related to environmental and social issues, is not a spin off or an evolution of the traditional commercial communication. The first difference, indeed, can be perceived by taking the objectives into account. As a matter of fact, commercial advertising mainly aims at favoring the economic exchange. In other

words, its goal is to convince, and sometimes to illude, the customer base about the benefits of the organization itself or its products with respect to those of competitors.

On the other side, sustainable communication tends to be less persuasive, rather preferring to inform, and privileging the target and, more generally, the stakeholders' involvement, as the main objective to achieve. Communication must not only deliver the message that sustainability deals with the technic or philanthropic aspect of the issue but must aim at delivering clear and comprehensible messages in which the benefits derived from the adoption of this new paradigmatic strategy are tangible.

Organizations need to focus on how they communicate their contents, in an intelligible and pertinent way, to the recipients, who, in turn, will be more and more interested in understanding the dynamics in which they feel to be directly involved. In any sustainability strategy, communication plays a crucial role. If there is a lack of internal contact within an organization, the improvements to make the organization more sustainable will be difficult to execute. In addition, external contact with clients, work partners and the community are a must for sustainability strategies, otherwise the company may face losses in terms of products or services revenue, so there is a growing movement on a global scale towards sustainability⁵⁵.

As anticipated above, communication of sustainability must not be managed following the stylistic features of commercial advertising, but, at the same time, it must maintain a degree of creativity combined with the truthfulness and clarity of the messages being delivered. In other words, advertising sustainability must not only declare the claim "My brand/product is green", rather it must prove its sustainable value propositions with demonstrations: creativity must support the reasoning thus making it catchy, but especially easily understandable.⁵⁶

Communicating sustainability does not only mean to inform, but to pool together specific knowledge, to build a new awareness for people who comprehend the value of a "circular

⁵⁵ R. Genc, *The Importance of Communication in Sustainability & Sustainable Strategies*, 14th Global Conference on Sustainable Manufacturing, GCSM 3-5 October 2016, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2016, p. 514

⁵⁶ M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità*, *Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, pp. 49-50

wealth”, towards themselves and what surrounds them, thus bringing a reciprocal benefit⁵⁷.

A growing attention towards the sustainable issue is due to the first international environmental norms published in the 1990s. New principles, indeed, were established as, for example, that of Corporate Social Responsibility (ISO 26000) and that of environmental management (ISO 14001) which can be considered as frameworks of good practices to follow. Another relevant example is provided by the Regulation CEE 1836/93 Eco-Management and Audit Scheme which is “a premium management instrument developed by the European Commission for companies and other organizations to evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance. EMAS is open to every type of organization eager to improve its environmental performance. It spans all economic and service sectors and is applicable worldwide⁵⁸”. Providing a certification, or adhering to ecological trademarks, is a proof to customers of being a responsible, careful and innovative firm.

Communication thus plays a crucial role since it not only has to make consumers aware of the existence of a product or a service, but also it must be truthful, exalting the enhancement of the common good, the advantages both for the consumers and for the ecosystem in general: the wealth, as anticipated before, deals with that of clients, suppliers, workers and the whole community.

An effective sustainable communication cannot be limited to identify a typology of customers and the quality of the information to communicate or to the most suitable tool to be adopted. It is thus necessary to rethink and define the elements which are typical of a communication strategy and which are the following:

- Identifying the target audience and the objectives that the organization commits itself to achieve in their regards;
- Definition of the message and the channel through which to deliver it;

⁵⁷ L. Garosi, *Green Branding*, Strumenti, consigli e strategie per una comunicazione ecosostenibile, Palermo, Dario Flaccovio editore, 2018, p. 143

⁵⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/index_en.htm

- Considering the target audience, deciding the degree of accuracy of the information to be vehiculated and the language to adopt⁵⁹.

To sum up, businesses that want to include Green Marketing in their value proposals need, first of all, to raise awareness among the customer base about environmental issues and how they will affect the lives of people. Then, they have to make the customers feel that by being environmentally friendly, they will make a difference. Once clients understand and begin to appreciate and value companies that adopt these kinds of strategies and solutions, a lot will change for the better. Marketers have to believe that they will help the environment and humankind by practicing Green Marketing. Making every effort to ensure that green products provide customers with the same benefits as non-green alternatives and are affordably priced will be the key for an effective communication⁶⁰.

At the very beginning, organizations which started to adopt green marketing as the new paradigm on which to base their creative strategy made a serious mistake. As a matter of fact, companies erroneously thought that “green consumers”, who want to conduct more sustainable lives, were just a niche of customers who were willing to set aside quality of products only to have guarantees of the low environmental impact. A lot of large corporations, which based their communication strategies only on the ecological assumption, failed and had totally to rethink their advertising strategy.

As an example, we can analyze what happened in the Atlas case. In the 1990s, Henkel, the company producing Atlas cleanser, focused its advertising communication strategy on commercials which emphasized the ecological characteristics of the product, neglecting to mention its functional properties. Then, the firm was forced to modify its communicative choices presenting commercials in which the sustainable side was another advantage, beyond the fact of being an effective product. This example thus shows the importance to combine a traditional marketing strategy with a sustainable one.

⁵⁹ F. Iraldo, M. Melis, *Oltre il green washing, Linee guida sulla comunicazione ambientale per aziende sostenibili, credibili e competitive*, Milano, Edizioni Ambiente, 2020, p. 15

⁶⁰ R. Pradeep Patnaik, P. Chopdar, *Green Marketing: An innovative step towards Sustainable Development*, Odisha, p.3

2.2. The pillars and characteristics of sustainable communication

As said before, communication of sustainability deals with three dimensions which are the economic, social and environmental one. The present dissertation will mostly focus on the last one which will be also referred to as “green or circular”. Environmental communication, indeed, can be defined as “the set of strategies and actions implemented by institutions, companies, mass media in order to spread a correct knowledge of environmental issues, promote a constant relationship of dialogue and cooperation between citizens, consumers, institutions, businesses, customers and suppliers, and facilitate the consensus building process⁶¹”.

Green communication bases itself on three main pillars given by information, comprehension of information, and environmental education. The three sources are interdependent and the right interconnection between them favors the birth and the management of a social change which will be later communicated.

A communication strategy can thus be described as “sustainable” if its objective is the exaltation of the green profile adopted by the brand and the sharing of guidelines and results achieved with the citizens-consumers. With respect to the past, the object of communication changes, and so do the tone and media through which it is recommendable to spread the message. The one-to-many model does not satisfy the needs of this kind of communication anymore. In addition, there are other elements which play a crucial role: web, ambient or guerrilla marketing and social media.

⁶¹ M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità, Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, pp. 17-18

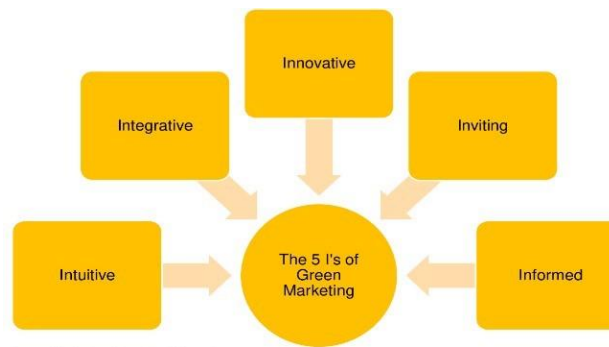


Figure 2.1. John Grant's 5 I's of Green Marketing

John Grant, the author of “Green Marketing Manifesto”, proposes a model, called “The 5 I's of Green Marketing”. The rules⁶², which are summarized in Figure 1, are the following:

1. Intuitiveness: marketing and communication of sustainability must translate in a simple, immediate, thus intuitive way, and aligned with the target, aspects which are complex, with a technical connotation, but which are critical in the definition and determination of the selection process and consequent choice.
2. Integration: the bases of any kind of sustainable strategy are competitiveness, technological innovation, profit, ecology and sociability. Marketing experts need to integrate all these determinants to generate value and wealth in the long run.
3. Innovation: it is the foundation of sustainability. Only through the creation of new products, new processes, organization can supply more performant solutions and simultaneously in compliance with the equilibrium of the planet in which we live. Continuous innovation will bring benefits to both the stakeholders and all those who are affected.
4. Invite: green marketing and communication need to vehiculate the message that by choosing sustainable products and organizations does not mean to choose an inferior lifestyle. On the contrary, communication must be an invite to people to reconsider their judgement about this category of products due to their superior characteristics.

⁶² M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità, Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, pp. 41-42-43

5. Information: the sharing of information plays a crucial role in the affirmation of sustainable standards. Communication, indeed, must contribute to the establishment and development of a new consciousness and a new style of consumption. As previously mentioned, communication does not only have to convince, but also illustrate and inform since this will be the basis for a long time and fully aware choice.

In the latest years, a sixth “I” has been added to the list mentioned above, namely “interdisciplinarity”. Since sustainability starts from the bottom of a company, reviewing productive processes thus leads to a complete new business model: marketing and communication experts, indeed, need to take into consideration all the new disciplines which are introduced to develop both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Thus, the sharing of information, which must be accurate and correct, is the basis of sustainable communication. The next section argues that it is possible to make a parallelism between the rules of sustainable communication and Grice’s conversational maxims.

2.2.1. Correctness, truthfulness, reliability, comparability

As previously anticipated, communicating sustainability is not as easy a task as many organizations may think. It is not a matter of saying how green a company is, rather it is about adopting accurate and responsible communication choices in order to transmit a correct, true and reliable message. These, indeed, are the characteristics of the first pillar of a green communication strategy.

In this regard, at the beginning of the 1990s, a growing number of international institutions and organizations promoted and developed some standards, known as “ISO” (the International Organization for Standardization), in order to establish and define the necessary requisites which environmental information must comply with for being considered as correct. In particular, ISO 14063 and ISO 14021 can be considered as two

of the most relevant ones with respect to the topic we are dealing with. From ISO 14063, it is possible to extrapolate the general principles, which will be later deeply analyzed in this chapter, to which sustainable communication should aim, namely:

- transparency of information, procedures and methods used;
- appropriateness of the language used and the selected media, with reference to the target audience;
- credibility, expressed with honest, truthful, accurate and understandable messages;
- ability to respond to interested parties promptly and comprehensively;
- clarity of the approaches and of the chosen language⁶³.

The latter, ISO 14021, is more related to the communication of the product. Its objective is to promote the so-called “environmental or green claim”, namely declarations about the environmental characteristics of the products. Moreover, it is conceived as useful in avoiding that consumers receive deceptive information: this may cause the so-called greenwashing problem to the organizations (a topic which will be analyzed in detail below). This standard mostly deals with the “Environmental labels and declarations” that companies put on their products packaging’. The following picture shows a famous example:



Figure 2.2. The Circle of Moebius

⁶³ <https://saponetteverdi.com/2012/01/10/iso-14063-linee-guida-per-la-comunicazione-ambientale/>

The name of the symbol above is “Circle of Moebius”. When it is represented without the percentage inside, it points out that the product on which it appears is “recyclable”, whereas, on the other side, if it is accompanied by the percentage number, as in the rightens symbol above, it means that the 65% of the product is made by recyclable components.

The correctness dimension of the environmental communication stands for truthfulness and aims at conveying non-deceptive information. As Grice suggested with his group of conversational maxims, information of good quality must be true and justified. Moreover, according to the maxim of manner, it must be formulated clearly and intelligibly in order to be understood by the recipients. A communication strategy, indeed, which bases itself on a highly technic and detailed language to deliver its desired contents can be considered as correct. Despite this fact, information which is correct, on the other side, may be ineffective if consumers are not educated enough about the technical language used by the organizations to show the completeness and truth of their supply.

In order to solve possible problems of greenwashing which may be generated because of misunderstandings caused by the use of a difficult language, information communicated must be reliable. This is the reason why information must be both verifiable and verified by the company itself or by third parties. Due to the evolution in the digitalization experienced in the latest years, data and documents to support the reliability of the information may be provided to the target audience without overloading the green claim thus leading to a scarce attention by the consumers and ineffectiveness. As a matter of fact, organizations can insert a QR code on the packaging, that is, “a pattern of black-and-white squares that is printed on something and can be read by some types of mobile phones to give information to the user of the phone”⁶⁴. This code is a useful device which could be exploited by companies in order to provide further details about the sustainable characteristics of their products or of the manufacturing processes.

To ensure even more reliability, it is preferable to use third parties’ certifications in order to have a further proof of what the company is claiming. Indeed, ISO 14021 suggests to explicitly indicate the source of an environmental certification of the product or the claim.

⁶⁴<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/qr-code>

Ecolabel (see Figure 2.3.) is an example of European trademark used to proof and communicate to the customer base the effective sustainability of the products.



Figure 2.3. Ecolabel logo

In Figure 2.4., it is possible to notice an example of correct communication which uses the renowned trademark (lower left) in order to ensure the compatibility with sustainable standards.



Figure 2.4. Ecolabel certification on a detergent

This is a further proof not only of the relevance of both verbal and visual language in advertising as previously said in the first chapter of the current dissertation, but also of its importance for the communication of sustainability.

Everything we discussed up to now leads to comparability of information: it does not stand for comparability among the communication choices adopted by competitors, but it is about the data which underlie communication. Comparability plus the truthfulness of information will lead the consumer to evaluate in an objective way the validity of the solutions proposed by an organization⁶⁵.

As a matter of fact, companies will need to explicitly report data and information which won't generate mistaken or ambiguous interpretations, as for example:

- indication of the time period to which the comparison refers;
- the environmental parameters to which the comparison refers and the related processing and calculation methodology;
- the terms through which the comparison is expressed, absolute and relative⁶⁶.

To better understand this last concept, let us analyze a concrete example. The company Powderlight Spa has created a new model of battery which can be recharged up to five times, while the precedent one was not rechargeable. In this case, the claim could not be based on a comparison because it is not possible to quantify a benefit which was not present in the other model. So, the environmental information should be suitably expressed in the following way: "Now rechargeable up to five times". This example, again, clearly shows the relevance of the right language chosen for the advertising claim.

If, instead, a company produces a new model of battery which lasts for fifteen hours, five more than the duration of the previous model, the difference will be of 50%. An adequate claim, indeed, should be: "It lasts 50% more than the previous model".

⁶⁵ M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità, Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, p. 51

⁶⁶ F. Iraldo, M. Melis, *Oltre il green washing, Linee guida sulla comunicazione ambientale per aziende sostenibili, credibili e competitive*, Milano, Edizioni Ambiente, 2020, p. 168

2.2.2. Clarity

Environmental communication must, firstly, deliver information which is clear and easy to understand. This requisite does not imply that the impacts and benefits related to a sustainable product or an organization need to be expressed in a simplistic way. If, for example, a company had to advertise a product targeted for families, it is better to avoid highly technical terminology which might result difficult for the comprehension of the end users. In addition, ambiguity of interpretation is not contemplated: a clear information must be clear also in the “object” to which it refers. Sometimes, indeed, it may happen that there are claims which declare certain characteristics that consumers find difficult to understand to whom they refer, since for example, these may be properties of the product itself or characteristics linked to the packaging.

In this regard, the Us Federal Trade Commission developed the “Green Guides”. First issued in 1992, the Green Guides were updated in 1996, 1998 and 2012. They propose general guidelines in order to avoid ambiguity problems and are concerned with general concepts relevant to all environmental marketing statements, with how consumers are likely to view specific claims and how marketers are able to substantiate such claims, and, lastly, with how marketers are able to qualify their claims in order to avoid deceiving customers⁶⁷.

For example, the guide of the Federal Trade Commission highlights some possible aspects which can be avoided, and they are the following:

- the term “recyclable” written on the packaging of a product may lead consumers to find difficult to understand if it is addressed to the whole product, or to a component of it or even to the packaging. The Green Guides “advise marketers to qualify recyclable claims when recycling facilities are not available to a “substantial majority” of consumers or communities where a product is sold. They clarify that “substantial majority,” as used in this context, means at least 60 percent. They also emphasize that the lower the levels of access to appropriate facilities, the more strongly the marketer should emphasize the limited availability of recycling for the product⁶⁸.”

⁶⁷<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/media-resources/truth-advertising/green-guides>

⁶⁸Federal Trade Commission, *Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims*, Federal Register, p. 62123

- Another example regards the so-called “free-of” claims. This section in the Green Guides advises that, “even if it is true, claims that an item is free of a substance may be misleading if the item contains substances with an environmental risk equal to or similar to that of the substance not present; or the substance has not been classified as a product. A marketer can only make a claim for a product that still contains a certain quantity of a substance if the amount of the substance mentioned is not greater than that found as a known trace contaminant or background level, or if the presence of the substance does not cause material harm that is usually associated with that substance by consumers or, lastly, if the substance has not been added voluntarily to the product⁶⁹”.

Let us analyze a concrete example to better understand how the principle of clarity applies to green claims. If an agricultural company which produces eggs wants to emphasize the organic characteristic of its product, then it must pay a lot of attention to which words it uses to formulate the green claim to put on the packaging or in an advertisement. We can compare two claims to understand which one among the two is the most suitable to adopt.

Company A, as an example, may write “These eggs were produced by free range chickens”, while company B says “Our eggs were produced by free range chickens”. The difference between the two claims lies in the use of “these” and “our”. In the first example, the use of the demonstrative “these” clearly means that the eggs consumers are going to buy are organic. On the other side, the second claim is deceptive due to the use of “our”: generalized claims might lead the customer base to think that all the products from the same brand are covered by the claim. The use of “our”, indeed, rather than “these” may cause ambiguity problems because consumers might think that all eggs from that organization are organically produced.

Clarity of environmental communication does not only refer to the claims, but also to the graphical aspects and logos used. In essence, the message must be understandable in relation to the recipients, clear both from the syntactic point of view and from that of the object to which it refers: it may happen that the consumer perceives a specific certification of the packaging only as referring to the entire product. From the point of view of form

⁶⁹Federal Trade Commission, *Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims*, Federal Register, p. 62123

and visibility, there is a strong need to guarantee greater immediacy of understanding to the consumer, both for labeling and certification systems and for unregulated messages.⁷⁰



Figure 2.4. The relevance of QR codes to communicate more, (Iraldo, Melis, 2020)

As already underlined in the first chapter of the present thesis, people do not want to lose time in reading long concepts, rather, they prefer concise and short sentences. As a matter of fact, information which arrives straight forward to the point invites the recipients to be interested in discovering more of what is written and to pay more attention, whereas, on the other hand, prolixity can discourage or be viewed as boring. Here it is possible to find a connection with Grice's maxim of manner.

Grice says that the contribution made by the speakers are expected to be clearly and intelligibly formulated, to avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity, and to be brief and orderly. These "norms" also apply to the principle of clarity when developing a communication strategy focused on sustainability. In Figure 2.5, it is possible to notice an example which witnesses this pillar. Marketers, indeed, must think about how not to bother consumers in reading a lot of information. For this reason, they insert only a piece of information about the sustainable side of the related products, and close to it, they insert a QR Code which, instead, sends people to a web page in which they can find more about their steps toward a greener world.

⁷⁰W. Sancassiani, L. Manicardi, *La Comunicazione Green, Guida alla comunicazione green di prodotti, processi ed impegni nell'industria ceramica*, Focus Lab, 2012, p. 35

In addition, information must be clearly readable in the sense that characters must be visible, for example on boxes or packaging of products. In this regard, the UK Minister issued a “Green Claims Guidance” which does not recommend using lowercase characters and/or located on the back of packs or, more generally, in hardly visible places⁷¹.

To sum up, information must, thus, be communicated clearly also in the use of terminology, acronyms and symbols used. Environmental claims are not only composed of words, but also of symbols which must be used carefully so as not to mislead consumers. ISO 14021 suggests that “symbols used to make an environmental claim implying a sweeping environmental benefit, should be simple, easily reproducible and capable of being positioned and sized to suit the product to which the symbol is likely to be applied⁷²”.

2.2.3. Accuracy

An effective environmental communication must also satisfy another requisite: information must never be generic, but it must always refer to concrete and specific aspects. Recently, also due to the advent of the sustainability “phenomenon”, we have witnessed an abuse, so to speak, of the prefix “eco” to accompany products and to convey the message of a company which takes a stand with respect to the issue of sustainability.

In this regard, we must mention another rule provided by the ISO 14021. Namely, it does not allow for the use of generic terms in environmental claims. As a matter of fact, it asserts that “An environmental claim that is vague or nonspecific or which broadly implies that a product is environmentally beneficial or environmentally benign shall not be used. Therefore, environmental claims such as “environmentally safe”, “environmentally friendly”, “earth friendly”, “nonpolluting”, “green”, “nature’s friend” and “ozone friendly” shall not be used⁷³.”

⁷¹ Green Claims Guidance, DEFRA UK, 2011

⁷² Green Claims Guidance, DEFRA UK, 2011, p.23

⁷³ Green Claims Guidance, DEFRA UK, 2011, p.21

The terms mentioned above, which should be avoided, are, instead, often used in order to catch the attention of the recipients, but especially to emotionally involve them. The use of language connected to nature or to the environment is, thus, used to leverage on the personal well-being or on the values of the audience. It must be highlighted that an accurate and successful communication does not completely forbid the use of evocative terms in order to capture the attention and the hearts of consumers. On the other side, it is not correct the use of a language full of these emphatic expressions which do not have a real content to communicate in terms of benefits or performances which bring positive effects to the environment.

An example of environmental claim which aims at hitting the emotional sphere of the consumer is the following: “You will know also the face of those who cultivated you”. These words, which may be found on the pack of an agricultural product, are catchy, and also they prospect the opportunity for the customers to have a direct touch with how the organization works. It is, thus, a kind of rhetoric promise which the brand makes to its clients, but without communicating effective advantages brought by their sustainable choices.

As a solution, expressions like “green” or “eco-friendly” must always be accompanied by “claims of support” which specify and clarify the environmental benefit which is declared with respect to the recipient’s ability to understand.

“International Standard ISO 14021 states that self-declared environmental claims:

- shall be accurate and not misleading;
- shall be unlikely to result in misinterpretation;
- shall not, either directly or by implication, suggest an environmental improvement which does not exist, nor shall it exaggerate the environmental aspect of the product to which the claim relates;
- shall not be made if, despite the claim being literally true, it is likely to be misinterpreted by purchasers or is misleading through the omission of relevant facts⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ Green Claims Guidance, DEFRA UK, 2011, p. 17

Too often companies make the mistake of communicating exclusively through claims based on absolute expressions which aim at asserting the total absence of a specific substance in a product which may create damages to the environment. On the other side, organizations may also use “general” expressions in order to show off the sustainability level of their actions. Let us analyze some recurrent examples, which we are frequently showed on, in advertisements.

As a matter of fact, brands tend to use emphatic and absolute claims which essentially aim at intensely involving the target audience which lack a real informative content if used alone and not accompanied by further specific details.

Examples of these suggestive expressions are the following:

- zero plastic
- zero Co2 Emission
- zero impact
- 100% eco-friendly

As can be noticed by looking at Figure 2.6, which summarizes few examples of absolute green claims, emphatic expressions are broadly exploited in advertising to capture the recipients’ attention due to their high power of involvement.

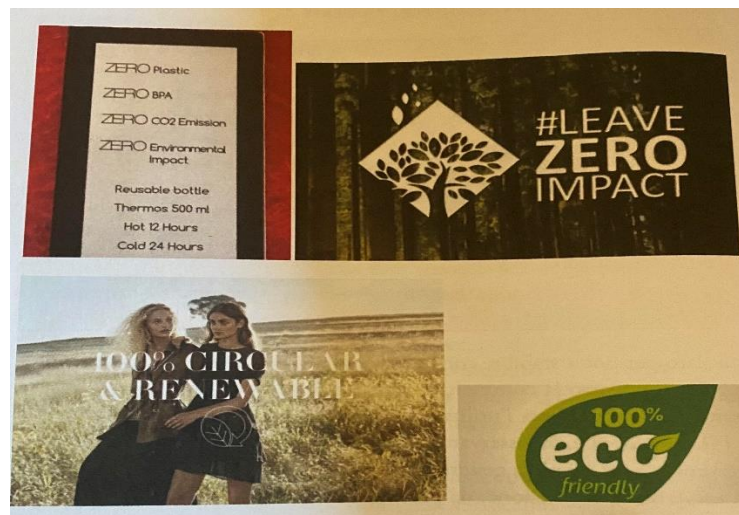


Figure 2.5. Absolute Green Claims, (Iraldo, Melis, 2020)

Absolute green claims will certainly attract consumers since they convey through the use of few, simple and effective words a message which can be easily understood by everyone,

but, on the other hand, it must also be said that they do not comply with the accuracy criterion. As a matter of fact, absolute claims, despite the advantages mentioned above, turn out to be incomplete: instead of being supported by detailed indications or data as support to the benefits declared, they are vague.

As the ISO 14021 asserts, “self-declared environmental claims shall be accompanied by an explanatory statement if the claim alone is likely to result in misunderstanding. An environmental claim shall only be made without an explanatory statement if it is valid in all foreseeable circumstances with no qualifications. Moreover, they shall be presented in a manner that clearly indicates that the environmental claim and an explanatory statement should be read together. The explanatory statement shall be of reasonable size and in reasonable proximity to the environmental claim it accompanies.”⁷⁵

The majority of times we are exposed to incomplete adverts. Despite this fact, there are possible ways in which brands can address the current issue. As a matter of fact, for example, a product that purports to be “recycled” must be accompanied by a clear indication of the percentage of the recovered material that it contains. Moreover, when taking into consideration the “extended life” of an item, it must be specified, for example, the number of guaranteed uses before the breakage. Lastly, a biodegradable product should specify how long the decomposition process will take in order to be considered as complete⁷⁶.

As an example of accurate advertisement of sustainability, we can analyze the video posted by Nespresso, the famous company producing coffee in capsules, on its official Instagram account. The spot deals with the project “Da chicco a chicco⁷⁷” whose main aim is to derive rice from recycled coffee for those who are mostly in need. Indeed, consumers are invited to bring their used capsules, which are said to be 100% recycled, to the Nespresso point of sales since the residual of coffee will turn out to be compost to be used in an Italian rice field. So, this is why the project is called “Da chicco a chicco”, from a coffee bean to a grain of rice. It is thus possible to reckon this advert as accurate since at the end

⁷⁵ Green Claims Guidance, DEFRA UK, 2011, p.22

⁷⁶ F. Iraldo, M. Melis, *Oltre il green washing, Linee guida sulla comunicazione ambientale per aziende sostenibili, credibili e competitive*, Milano, Edizioni Ambiente, 2020, p. 154

⁷⁷ <https://www.nespresso.com/it/it/caffè-sostenibile>

Nespresso inserts the number of donations made thanks to the implementation of this sustainable project.

The consistency and accuracy of information can, thus, also be assured by indicators that relate the actions that trigger long-term positive environmental effects to the actions that cause them. Information must be explicit and specific with respect to the necessary conditions needed in order for the environmental benefit linked to the product to be able to manifest itself. As can be noticed in Nespresso’s example, people are taught how to contribute to the sustainable project: they are asked to bring their already used capsules in the closest point of sales and then they are showed the concrete benefit they will provide by behaving responsibly.

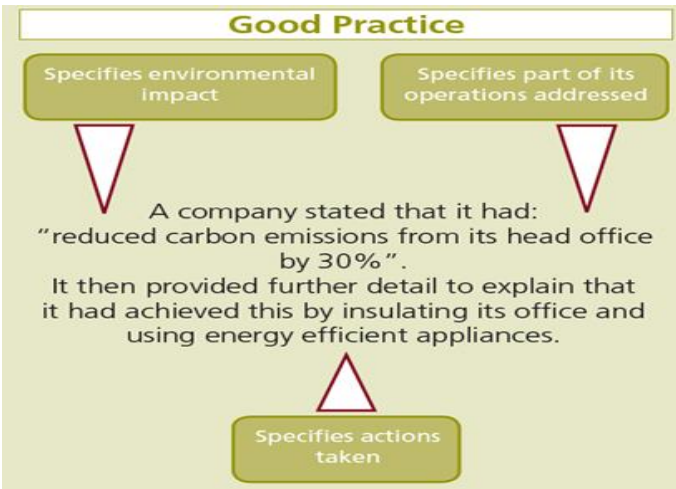


Figure 2.6: Example of an accurate green claim which shows a direct relationship with benefits obtained and the actions taken to achieve it. Picture taken from the Green Claims Guidance

Moreover, another characteristic which must not be underestimated is the “designed for disassembling”. Producers, as a matter of fact, must not only use these words to attract the attention of the customer base, but, on the other side, they must provide customers with the instructions about the process of disassembling.

As an example, we can take into consideration BioTable recent commercial⁷⁸ aired on Sky and LA7 for two weeks in November 2020. The Italian brand, producer of 100% compostable crockery, in collaboration with Legambiente, launched a communication campaign whose main objective is to direct the consumers' choices towards more sustainable products in order to preserve the planet in which we live. The advertisement emphasizes the idea that people can sustain their lifestyles while respecting the environment thanks to BioTable: in fact, we see a parallelism between different scenes of everyday life in which disposable BioTable bioplastic dishes are used, which do not pollute if properly disposed of, and mountains, trees, and the sea, whose beauty and purity are unaffected. At the end of the spot, the recipients are showed the simple passage of putting BioTable items into the garbage containers for the wet and, doing so, it disposes itself and becomes compost.

2.2.4. Relevance

Another characteristic that information must possess is that it must be relevant with respect to environmental aspects which are really meaningful for the object to which it refers, namely both the product and the process itself. Moreover, it must be relevant in the sense that information must be meaningful for the area or the recipients where the impact of something is produced.

In addition, the issue of relevance has been paid attention by the International standard ISO 14021. The ISO, indeed, addresses the topic by developing some guidelines and asserting that an environmental claim must possess the following characteristics:

- “[It] shall be relevant to that particular product, and used only in an appropriate context or setting;
- [It] shall only relate to an environmental aspect that either exists or is likely to be realised, during the life of the product;

⁷⁸ <https://www.engage.it/campagne/biotable-lancia-uno-spot-per-sensibilizzare-all-uso-di-materiale-compostabile.aspx>

- [It] shall be relevant to the area where the corresponding environmental impact occurs⁷⁹.”

Making an argument appropriate means making sure it addresses the environmental concerns that are most important to the type of product, service, or organization, as well as customer and business interests.

Let us analyze a practical example in order to better understand what it means for a green communication to be referred to as relevant.



Figure 2.7. Philips SENSEO example of relevant environmental communication

Figure 2.8 represents an example of environmental communication which aims at informing consumers about all the relevant environmental aspects of the product. The company, in this case Philips, provides to the customers an “eco-passport”, a sort of document in which it declares environmental characteristics of the products. For example, the organization can inform the customers about the energy consumption, property and characteristics which regard the packaging, the substances employed, the percentage of recycled material and durability. As can be noticed in Figure 2.8, Philips says to “have developed an eco-passport which explains the environmental performance of their products in the six Philips Green Focal Areas, developed through their eco-design process since 1994, enabling consumers to make conscious, informed decisions.” The

⁷⁹ Green Claims Guidance, DEFRA UK, 2011, p.12

company provides relevant information since it offers data and explicative sentences to its target audience.

On the other side, companies need to pay a lot of attention while developing their environmental claims, otherwise they might incur in committing the “sin of irrelevance”. As a matter of fact, company may declare “an environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant and unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products. It is irrelevant and therefore distracts the consumer from finding a truly greener option⁸⁰”.

The most common example of a non-relevant argument involves chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are a major contributor to ozone depletion. There are no goods made with CFCs since they have been legally banned for nearly 30 years. Nonetheless, we discovered a number of goods that touted CFC-free claims as a distinct environmental profit. They included the following:

- CFC-free insecticides,
- CFC-free lubricants,
- CFC-free oven cleaners,
- CFC-free shaving gels,
- CFC-free window cleaners,
- CFC-free disinfectants⁸¹.

As it had been established by the Montreal Protocol, International Treaty, signed on the 16th of September 1987 and aimed at reducing the production and use of substances which may damage the Ozon layer, CFC must not be present anymore in products. In this case, if we happen to see the writing on the logo in Figure 2.9, this represents an example of irrelevant information since keeping the green claim related to the absence of CFC after the entry into force of the law is impertinent.

⁸⁰ TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, *The “Six Sins of Greenwashing”, A Study of Environmental Claims in North American Consumer Markets*, 2007, p.4

⁸¹ TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, *The “Six Sins of Greenwashing”, A Study of Environmental Claims in North American Consumer Markets*, 2007, p.4



Figure 2.8.CFCs logo as an example of irrelevant claim

2.3. Storytelling: explicit and implicit

As we have underlined through the present dissertation, there exist numerous ways of communicating the same thing, person or brand. What must be absolutely remembered is that individuals do not want to be bored by long stories and, this is the reason why, organizations need to find a quick and catchy way to express themselves, their business proposals and the values on which they base their practices.

Even though the main objective and requisite that green communication must respect is the informative pillar, on the other side, it must maintain a certain degree of creativity and sentimentalism in order to capture consumers attention and consensus. Nowadays, to be on the top of the markets, companies must know how to narrate themselves. Storytelling marketing means using a narrative to communicate a message. The aim is to make the viewer feel something – enough that it will inspire them to take action. Storytelling in marketing helps consumers to understand why they should care about something, and it works to humanize your brand⁸².

Many brands committed to making their manufacturing system more environmentally friendly use storytelling to tell the tale of their journey from the acquisition of raw materials to the delivery of the product in the consumer's hands. This is a way for them to make their business more well-known and to present to customers the principles that define the brand, such as environmental concern and the love and security of all

⁸² <https://www.askattest.com/blog/marketing/12-top-storytelling-marketing-examples>

stakeholders (from those in charge of production to those in charge of quality control of ingredients, up to the customer⁸³).

Brands might narrate their stories through explicit communication, but, as already analyzed in the first chapter, they broadly exploit implicit language devices in order to capture people attention and to develop serious content with also an emotional appeal which enables the target audience to be involved and join in the message which is being vehiculated.

Also, brands which want to go green and which have made sustainability as a corporate driver use implicit techniques to unleash reactions. Although environmental communication must be clear, truthful and relevant, to communicate such important messages it must also combine advertising with a touch of originality. Let us analyze some examples in order to better understand this concept.

This Nissan green advertisement dates back to almost a decade ago, but is still relevant today because of the topicality of the content. The main question which underlies the commercial is what would happen if all the things we use went to coal. The register used is that of irony and absurdity, with everyday situations that are made unreal by the paradox of a world where electricity does not exist. The focus was on pushing the Nissan Leaf, one of the first full electric cars in circulation.

Thanks to the use of irony and its humoristic effects, viewers of the advertisement are not only pushed to memorize the brand and its message, but they will also be motivated to discover more about the issue proposed which is implicitly unveiled. As regards Nissan advertisement, it concludes with the following promise: “Innovation for the planet, innovation for all”. Even though, at the very beginning, the recipients might have been distracted by the exaggerations used, at the end, they understand the sustainable commitment of the famous car company.

Going on with another more recent example which dates back to 2020, let us analyze Apple advertisement about their sustainable strategy for the following ten years. The company, as a matter of fact, does take the stage and make its announcement, which is a pledge in every way: to become fully carbon neutral over the next ten years. Apple's essential and minimalist advertisement and communication style is taken to extremes in

⁸³ <https://www.insidemarketing.it/glossario/definizione/green-marketing/>

this ad. With the final promise, we just see the sleeping baby and the narrating voice in the background which says the following words: “We will fulfill our promise for your tenth birthday”. As we already saw throughout this analysis, it is not enough to say it; on the contrary, words must be accompanied with facts and concrete results. Not surprisingly, Apple has chosen not to provide a charger with the new iPhone 12, instead urging users to use the ones already provided.

As for what occurs in Nissan advertisement, at the very beginning the recipient does not immediately understand the message the company wants to communicate. As a matter of fact, it employs a child in order to sell a phone and to inform its target audience about their environmental commitment to save the planet. The child can, thus, be considered the metaphor of the future and the young generations, but this becomes clear thanks to the words used by the brand. Only when they utter their promise, implying again the first person indexical “we” to lessen the distance between them and the consumers: this interpretation of “we” is made possible by the use of the other indexical, “your”. Normally, if an advertisement says “we” and “you” (or “your”), “we” is interpreted as referring to the brand and “you” as referring to the public. But in this case, moving the reference of “your” to the child facilitates the inclusion of the public in the “we”. Moreover, “we” is used to make clear that everyone is involved and must take its stand to help the planet, it is, thus, intelligible for people what is the real intent behind the advertisement. Also, in this case, the non-said combined with an explicit statement at the end is exploited to attract the attention of the customer base.

To conclude, let us analyze another example of implicit messages sent by an advertisement of an Italian trademark. Coop Italia, a system of Italian cooperatives, which manages a network of superettes, supermarkets and hypermarkets, for years committed to the protection of the environment, launched an advertisement in 2019 which is really explicative about their sustainable campaign.

The protagonist of the spot is a shopping cart which encompasses several situations which are representative of the actions we should take in order to improve the planet where we live and, therefore, the living conditions of its inhabitants, both human beings and animals. Here, personification, a rhetorical figure, which means “the impersonation or embodiment of some quality or abstraction; the attribution of human qualities to

inanimate objects⁸⁴” is exploited in advertising to make it more attractive and familiar to the potential clients who can easily relate to the advertised personified objects and memorize the slogan or the advertisement.

The shopping cart, as a matter of fact, is thus the personification of everyone’s choices which have direct consequences on the surrounding environment: Coop does want to implicitly invite us to reflect on our actions and their effects on the planet.



Figure 2.9. Coop Italia example of implicit storytelling

The story behind the spot tells us not only about plastic in the oceans, but also about human rights with breakthroughs of collectors in the fields, animal treatment of "freed" hens, and pesticide usage when the trolley stops the tractor, to help people understand how daily decisions, made by each of us, can have a direct impact on the world on a wide scale. It is the full manifestation of a philosophy close to our hearts: being concerned about the consequences of our choices and actions.

As it can be noticed looking at Figure 10, Coop exploits also the non-verbal language to clarify even more the meaning beneath their campaign called “The shopping Coop changes the world”. Words matter, but, as said in the first chapter, also visual context, with the right images, turns out to be a point of difference for a brand. As a matter of fact, with those evocative photos Coop wanted, again, to highlight the message that it is in the first positions with its business to make steps ahead towards a sustainable future, but every one of us must make their part.

So, in order to narrate a sustainable story it is fundamental to have green motivations at the basis and it is important for brands to be aware that, when they tell a story about

⁸⁴P. Skorupa, T. Dubovičienė, *Linguistic characteristics of Commercial and Social advertising slogans*, *Phylology, Educology*, 2015, p. 114

themselves, they take existential positions and indicate both for them and for the world in general destinations of life for which they become responsible⁸⁵.

2.4. Packaging: the importance of verbal and visual language

Language, as said many times along the current dissertation, comes in many forms beyond words: verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal. Non-verbal language, thus, includes the gestures, sounds and images employed while communicating something. As we previously said, also for brands which want to communicate their sustainable business approaches it is important to combine words, which must be clear, truthful and reliable with evocative elements such as images or videos in order to attract consumers.

In this regard, packaging is undoubtedly an excellent tool for the communication of sustainability, which can follow two paths.

The first one starts from the choice of the materials to use for the packaging itself. This decision becomes symbol of the attention towards the environment if the company adopts recycled and recyclable materials and, more generally, solutions that allow for an easy reuse thus leading to a greater lifecycle of the products.

On the other hand, packaging serves as an important driver for consumer when making a purchase decision. Mostly in the B2C sector, where the proximity with the customer can influence directly the purchase process, packaging is, thus, used as a “medium” to communicate further information about sustainability to the audience. Sustainable packaging becomes an integral part of the overall product portfolio and improves brand positioning as customers become more mindful of the environmental effect of their buying decisions. Companies that use sustainable packaging in a way that consumers understand and that accurately represents their commitment to sustainability will boost their brand profile and win consumer loyalty, even at a higher price. Furthermore, using

⁸⁵ L. Garosi, *Green Branding*, Strumenti, consigli e strategie per una comunicazione ecosostenibile, Palermo, Dario Flaccovio editore, 2018, p. 74

packaging as an educational tool to increase awareness of environmental issues and sustainable sourcing will reinforce and enhance a brand's sustainability efforts⁸⁶.

Indeed, in 2015, according to a study conducted by Nielsen, the famous auditing society, in the 30000 respondents in 60 countries across the globe ⁸⁷, the 66% of consumers is willing to pay a premium price for sustainable products, while the 55% of the interviewed asserts to control packaging to search for messages related to environmental sustainability both of the product and the pack itself. On the other side, percentages are lower when it comes to developed markets such as Latin America, Middle East, and Africa where only 23-29% are available to pay a premium price for sustainable goods.

Thus, packaging must respect all the principles⁸⁸ of accuracy, clarity, truthfulness, correctness, and reliability mentioned above when talking about the pillars that information about sustainability must observe. In addition, we can divide packaging into three categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary one. Let us give a definition of all the three kinds in the following list:

1. Primary packaging: it is also known as packaging of selling. It includes the cladding of each individual sales unit which arrives to the end user. Its main goal is to contain, protect and keep the integrity of the product up to moment of consumption. Examples of this kind can be the bottle of a beer, a pack of chips etc etc.
2. Secondary packaging: it also called multiple packaging, it covers the primary one and favors the movement within the store of multiple products whether it is sold to the final consumer or used to replenish the shelves. It can be removed from the product without altering its characteristics. Examples which can be mentioned under this category are cans of corn, cardboard boxes etc etc.
3. Tertiary packaging: it is also known as packaging of transport, it wraps both the primary and secondary packaging and it is used for the manipulation and transport

⁸⁶ <https://www.mestieridelmarketing.it/come-il-packaging-sostenibile-crea-valore-per-il-marchio/>

⁸⁷ Nielsen, *The sustainability imperative, New insights on consumer expectations*, 2015

⁸⁸ M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità, Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, p. 80

of several products in order to avoid that they get damages during logistics processes (e.g. pallet⁸⁹).

In general, a product is composed of all the three typologies of packaging mentioned above. This classification identifies the main function of packaging, which is to protect the unit of sales, but this function is not enough to describe it. As previously anticipated, packaging represents a fundamental part of the communication strategy of a brand. It is, thus, part of the 4 Ps (and specifically of the 4th one) which are at the basis of marketing. Since the 4 Ps also apply to green marketing, it is useful to provide a brief characterization of each one of them:

1. Product: organizations must supply ecological products which must not damage the environment or the whole community.
2. Price: the cost of these products must not be higher with respect to the non-green products, but it must be correct with respect to the quality of the product and the integrity of the workforce.
3. Place: the distribution and the trade of these products must follow their seasonality, as, for example, in the case of fruits which are not available in nature all over the year. Moreover, the packaging, as mentioned above, must be chosen by analyzing which are the best recyclable or reusable materials.
4. Promotion: this P deals with the communication strategy of a sustainable company which must not only promote its products but must inform and educate customers towards a sustainable life. Packaging is one of the tools available to organizations to realize their communication goals: they can both attract consumers and inform them through specific certifications and trademarks.

According to the European Organization for packaging and environment, a trade association that represents the views of Europe's packaging supply chain on issues relating to packaging and the environment, without endorsing any particular packaging material or scheme, sustainable packaging must possess the following characteristics:

⁸⁹ L. Garosi, *Green Branding*, Strumenti, consigli e strategie per una comunicazione ecosostenibile, Palermo, Dario Flaccovio editore, 2018, p. 91

- “be designed holistically with the product in order to optimize overall environmental performance;
- be made from responsibly sourced materials;
- be designed to be effective and safe throughout its life cycle, to protect the product;
- meet market criteria for performance and cost;
- meet consumer choice and expectations;
- be recycled or recovered efficiently after use⁹⁰.”

To sum up, a sustainable packaging must not only protect the product at his inside and being environment friendly, but it must also take care of the consumers’ needs and expectations in terms of design, certifications, price and quality. In the following sections, we will analyze better in detail the importance of both verbal language, that is, the words used on the packaging, and visual language, namely the design of it.

2.4.1. “Ethics charter of packaging”: 10 principles for a sustainable packaging

In 2015, lately updated in 2020, with the patronage of the Italian Packaging Institute, the “Ethics charter of packaging⁹¹” was born. It is a document which consists of ten principles which the several actors, namely designers, must observe while designing packaging. These principles are the following:

1. Responsible: This is packaging that is viewed as a joint duty between all parties involved in its design, manufacture, and implementation. The bearer of quality is responsible packaging, which blends environmental sustainability with consideration for the needs of all consumers.
2. Balanced: Packaging is balanced when it is intended and planned to be in proportion to the material, and it is the product of what is required for its proper distribution. Moreover, if the sole purpose of the packaging is to ensure product exposure, balanced packaging means avoiding overpackaging. In addition, a

⁹⁰ <https://euopen-packaging.eu/sustainability/packaging-environment.html>

⁹¹ <https://fondazionecartaeticapackaging.org/>

balanced packaging does not overpromise, but it is able to find an equilibrium between what it says and what it contains and communicates. It, thus, prevents information overload, which can be confusing to the recipient, by determining the appropriate content to satisfy the information requirements. Again, it is fundamental that communication complies with the maxim of relevance as Grice suggested.

3. **Safe:** A packaging can be referred to as “safe” when it protects in all its lifecycle both the individuals and the community. Moreover, it is entirely traceable throughout the supply chain; it is safe in terms of material safety and non-contamination; and it is safe during transportation and use throughout the entire lifecycle. When it comes to selecting a product and its packaging, customers value it and put their trust in it. As customers, we must be told, but we also have the right to believe what the packaging says: packaging establishes the brand's "implicit agreement."
4. **Accessible:** Packaging is accessible when it is user-friendly and intuitive, and therefore respects each customer's right to approach, comprehend, and use a product. It, thus, must be easily readable by everyone, with clear information and with a plain language.
5. **Transparent:** Packaging is transparent when it is genuine, when it says the facts in complete accordance with the law, and when it does so in a straightforward manner. It is able to establish a trusting relationship with the recipient due to its clear quality. Moreover, if adhering to the concept of error tolerance, it should not establish any mode of communication that should mislead or appear ambiguous. Thus, it must comply with Grice maxim of manner since a contribution to be cooperative must be formulated clearly, intelligibly and avoid obscurity of expressions which may confuse the recipients. To ensure efficient communication, it must use a common language.
6. **Informative:** It delivers clear and useful information. Since it helps us to connect to the product, packaging becomes our knowledge device. It enables us to learn about the material and its container.
7. **Up to date:** Where packaging is often in tune with the culture whose ideals it serves. It reflects our society's culture and, as a result, contributes to its development. It does so by transmitting messages through its form, graphics, and

symbols, thereby transferring values and messages and contributing to the evolution of contemporary social life. Again, it is possible to recognize the relevance of both the linguistic and the visual context while communicating.

8. Forward-looking: The packaging is the one that has a balanced relationship with its own future.
9. Educative: Packaging is a tool that is completely incorporated into everyone's everyday lives, and it is still in conversation with its user. As a result, it has a broad educational potential; its widespread distribution makes it a useful tool in this regard as well. In addition, it must communicate by using a standard language rather than distorted languages. It should have an educational purpose, inducing virtuous behavior with its messages and increasing the user's knowledge and understanding on issues that are deemed important or true emergencies, as the case may be.
10. Sustainable: It is the packaging that is environmentally friendly. Packaging is sustainable if it is built holistically, in harmony with the commodity and its intended use, in order to maximize its overall environmental performance.

The principles mentioned above deal with the characteristics that an ethical packaging must own. It is, thus, possible to notice again the relevance of a simple, clear, and unambiguous language in order to inform people. Furthermore, the use of evocative and catchy images will contribute to reach the informative aim of the green communication.

2.4.2. Verbal and visual language through certifications

Packaging, as we may all recognize, is the first touchpoint between the customer base and the product. In addition, it is the tool which provides information about the product itself, about all its components and, especially, about the environmental approach followed by that organization. In this regard, certifications assigned by third parties play a crucial role. The more they are recognized by consumers at the international and national level, the more they gain relevance for their purchase decisions at the customers' eyes.

As a matter of fact, labeling refers to the communication by labels and/or statements, and "Green labeling" refers to the communication about green properties of goods, processes,

or the organization itself. Environmental labels and tags for products and processes have been used in different countries and on a community and international scale for many years. Green tags, also known as environmental labels, are labels that are applied directly to a product or service that provide information on the product or service's overall environmental efficiency, as well as one or more unique environmental aspects. They can be classified in the following way⁹²:

- **Mandatory labels:** In the European Union, they require manufacturers, consumers, dealers, and other parties concerned to comply with legislative requirements, and they relate primarily to the following categories of goods: harmful and hazardous chemicals, household appliances (energy label), food products, packaging (packaging label), and renewable energy (green certificates).
- **Voluntary labels:** In this case, the application for a trademark is entirely voluntary, so manufacturers, importers, and distributors can choose whether or not to enter the labeling scheme after the products' compliance with the system's requirements has been tested. Voluntary labels can be distinguished using the meanings given by the 14021: 2012 set of international standards.

Voluntary labels can be further subdivided into three types of green labels⁹³. The first group deals with all the voluntary eco-labels, based on a system that considers all the environmental impacts of a product at 360 degrees and its entire life cycle. Under this category, it is possible to mention few famous examples of green labels: the European Ecolabel, the most popular national brands such as Blauer Engel (Germany), Environmental Choice (Australia), Green Seal (United States), NF Environment (France), Milieukeur (Netherlands), Umweltzeichen (Austria).

Green labels of Type II, on the other side, include all the self-declared environmental claims provided by producers on particular product characteristics that are not approved by an impartial body and therefore serve solely as informational and communicative tools. Among this group, some examples of Type II certifications are those that certify the origin of the wood material from sustainably managed forests (e.g. FSCE and PEFC).

⁹² W. Sancassiani, L. Manicardi, *La Comunicazione Green, Guida alla comunicazione green di prodotti, processi ed impegni nell'industria ceramica*, Focus Lab, pp. 44-45

⁹³ F. Iraldo, M. Melis, *Oltre il green washing, Linee guida sulla comunicazione ambientale per aziende sostenibili, credibili e competitive*, Milano, Edizioni Ambiente, 2020, p. 218

Lastly, green labels of the third type are also known as “Eco-profiles” or “Environmental product declarations”. They, indeed, report declarations based on established environmental parameters which contain a quantification of the impacts associated to the lifecycle of the product. They are subjected to the control of an independent body and presented in a clear and comparable form. An example of this category includes EPD.

All these forms of certifications, used as a marketing tool to convince consumers about the credibility of their brand, reflect the importance of both symbols and linguistic devices. Some typologies of certifications of the product may be applied directly on the packaging, or to accompany advertising claims or self-declarations with the goal of attracting potential buyers thus orienting their choices.

2.4.3. Ecological trademarks: Green labels type I

As previously anticipated, environmental certifications of type I come in the form of symbols or logos which point out the best environmental performance of the product with respect to those of competitors which had not been awarded the same acknowledgement. We have already discussed about how influencing symbols are in the communication process, since people reason by association and it is easier to recognize images. The same principle holds for the issue of sustainability.

The ecological trademarks of type I are usually to be found on the packaging of the product, but they can also be used for advertising informative and promotional campaigns to support the marketing strategies of a company. A very famous example of trademarks of this kind is Ecolabel European green label, which we mentioned in the previous section when talking about the relevance of third certification to ensure reliability of the information communicated. Let us now analyze it better in detail.

The EU Ecolabel is the European Union's ecological quality mark for goods and services that, while maintaining high performance levels, have a lower environmental impact over their entire life cycle. Regulation (EEC) no. 880/1992 established it in 1992, and it is now regulated by Regulation (EC) no. 66/2010, as amended by Regulation (EU) no. 782/2013. It applies to the 28 member states of the European Union as well as the countries that

make up the European Economic Area (EEA) (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein). EU Ecolabel has the characteristics of a voluntary Type I label as defined by the ISO 14024 standard⁹⁴.

An interesting and explicative case, as it had been reported in the book *Oltre il greenwashing*, considers the sustainable approach and the communication strategy adopted by Baldini Vernici, a trademark of Cromology Italia.



Figure 2.11. Green Label of type I

Baldini has been the first organization in his industry to be awarded of Ecolabel. It developed a marketing campaign focused on involving the end users, writing on the package of his products, to accompany Ecolabel trademark, some instructions in order to inform accurately customers both about the use of paints and on the relevance of such a certification as a guarantee of their low impact on the environment.

2.4.4. Ecological trademarks: Green labels type II

As previously anticipated, green labels of type II include all those self-declared claims that companies make with respect to certain characteristics of their products. Moreover, an

⁹⁴ <https://www.minambiente.it/pagina/ecolabel-ue>

important difference with labels of the first type is that they are not certified by an independent body and, therefore, have an exclusively informative-communicative purpose. In addition, they must contain accurate, verifiable, relevant and non-misleading information.

Some examples of Type II certifications are those that certify the origin of the wood material from sustainably managed forests like FSCE and PEFC. Let us analyze some concrete applications of these symbols.

As you can notice in the Figure 2.12, TetraPak Italia witness their commitment toward the sustainable issue by making use of FSC which stands for “Forest Stewardship Council” certification. It means that all their packs have been obtained by sustainable sources.



Figure 2.10. FSC: Green Label II

As a matter of fact, the company in an interview released to the online website of FSC Italia said the following words about the use of this label on their products: “ We recognize FSC as a universal and rigorous standard and also know that nearly a quarter of consumers recognize the FSC logo, so we actively encourage our customers to display it on their packaging. The FSC logo becomes a symbol of guarantee of the commitment in environmental terms to the market⁹⁵”.

Consumers, whether or not they recognize the logo, can easily understand that it is related to the environment due to the presence of a tree. Moreover, companies tend to accompany

⁹⁵ <https://it.fsc.org/it-it/news/certificazioni-01/id/594>

the symbol with explicative sentences: as it occurs in Figure 2.12, TetraPak writes “This TetraPak carton is mainly made from natural resources that grow back”.

Furthermore, under the category of labels of type II, it is also possible to mention the Circle of Moebius, already seen in the previous section when talking about the correctness principle to be respected by the sustainable communication. On the other side, there is another symbol, which is widely exploited by companies on their packaging, and it is the compostable one, as Figure 2.13 shows.



Figure 2.11. BPI: Example of Green Label II

BPI, Biodegradable Products Institute, developed an ambitious certification program in 1999 to ensure that the items you purchase, and use are fully compostable. The symbol is intended for use on packaging and goods. Consumers, composters, waste haulers, and government officials can now easily identify plastic items built to biodegrade rapidly, fully, and safely in well-run municipal and commercial composting facilities. There would be no plastic contaminants left behind to detract from the finished compost's worth. In the lower right corner of the BPI logo, there is now a specific certification number that can be used to identify the manufacturer or distributor of an authorized product⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ <https://bpiworld.org/BPI-Public/Program.html/>

2.4.5. Ecological trademarks: Green labels of type III

Environmental product declarations, EPD, or Eco-profiles fall under the category of the third type of green labels. This certification, indeed, is “an independently verified and registered document that communicates transparent and comparable information about the life-cycle environmental impact of products in a credible way⁹⁷”.

What is important to highlight is that contents communicated by means of an EPD are just informative, contrarily to what occurs for labels of Type I, they do not provide evaluation criteria, preferability or minimum levels that the product should respect. However, their final objective is to give the opportunity to the end consumers to make an informed and conscious choice at the purchase stage.

The structure of an Environmental Product Declaration ⁹⁸is, thus, organized in the following way:

- An initial section which contains general information about the organization and the product itself;
- Then, in the second section, data and results after the Life Cycle Assessment are reported through indicators as, for example, the consumption of renewable and not-renewable resources, electric energy, waste produced etc etc;
- Lastly, the third section is dedicated to additional information which the recipient could view as interesting as, for example, indications about the use of the product in order to adopt behaviors which reduce the environmental impact while using it and information about the disposal of the product itself.

In Figure 2.14, it is possible to notice the logo of the EPD certification that companies can use to strengthen their communication strategy.

⁹⁷ <https://www.environdec.com/all-about-epds>

⁹⁸ F. Iraldo, M. Melis, *Oltre il green washing, Linee guida sulla comunicazione ambientale per aziende sostenibili, credibili e competitive*, Milano, Edizioni Ambiente, 2020, pp.230-231-232



Figure 2.12. EPD: logo of a Green Label III

Among the companies which decided to promote the environmental benefits related to their products and services thanks to the EPD, we can mention multinationals as ABB, Tetrapak, Carlsberg, but also big Italian companies like ENEL, Barilla and Granarolo. Let us analyze the example of Carlsberg Italia to see how EPD works in a company communication of sustainability strategy.

Carlsberg Italia dates back to the 1876 under the initial name of “Angelo Poretti & C.”, then it is in 2002 that the danish Carlsberg Breweries acquired the 100% of the company thus becoming known as “Carlsberg Italia”. It is the third producer of beer in Italy and is also known for its attention to the sustainability issue, both the environmental and social one. As a matter of fact, the Corporate Social policy of the company is based on stakeholder’s engagement and on sustainability, which is certified by the Environmental Product Declaration.

In this regard, Carlsberg innovation mainly consists in the new kegs in which beer is contained. As a matter of fact, beer is no longer contained in the traditional steel kegs, but, on the other side, it is enclosed in PET kegs, fully recyclable which allow for a tapping of the drinks without CO₂. The benefits related to this process are several, but the most relevant ones regard the lower impact on the environment. The LCA of the company, indeed, underlines that the absence of CO₂, no transports related to the renders of the steel kegs, the recycle of the PET kegs contributed to make the organization highly sustainable. Moreover, after the LCA, the company has been the first producer of beer worldwide to be assigned the EPD certification.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità, Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, pp. 139-140-141



Figure 2.13. EPD of Carlsberg Italia available on its official website

As it can be grasped by the picture above, the EPD of Carlsberg is available online at the website of the company, thus providing the opportunity to consumers to read a detailed analysis of the Life Cycle Assessment which has been carried on in order to test the effective level of sustainability.

To conclude, certifications are not only useful to ensure the truthfulness of the environmental claims asserted by the organizations, but also, thanks to the famous logos, symbols and icons, we can consider them as a further evidence of the relevance of verbal and nonverbal language to communicate, in an effective and direct way, desired contents to the consumers who will recognize and memorize them in their minds.

2.5. How to prevent greenwashing and ambiguity: the principle of modesty

As we have anticipated in the previous sections of the current dissertation, environmental communication must be clear, true, accurate, and relevant thus avoiding sending messages which may be viewed as fallacies of communication or sound ambiguous and not representative of their actual commitment toward sustainability, which is also known as “greenwashing”. This word is a neologism which is built from the terms “green” and “whitewash” which literally means “whitening”, but also intended as the action of “disguising, or partially covering” something.

The first definition of “greenwashing” appears in 1999 in the Oxford English Dictionary as “Disinformation disseminated by an organization¹⁰⁰”. It is, also, defined as “the process of conveying a false impression or providing misleading information about how a company's products are more environmentally sound. Greenwashing is considered an unsubstantiated claim to deceive consumers into believing that a company's products are environmentally friendly¹⁰¹.”

The most frequent cases ¹⁰²of greenwashing can be classified in the following list:

- Vagueness and absence of information: providing data or information which are general and vague may sound as a greenwashing behavior. If the company, indeed, owns that information, it must communicate it accurately through the use of languages, styles and suitable channels;
- Irrelevant characteristics: it occurs when advertisements emphasize only a certain characteristic classifying it as “green”, but totally ignoring other more relevant aspects;
- Inconsistency of the commitment towards sustainability: communicating green initiatives as if they were representative of the real actions taken by the company. A single initiative, indeed, is not enough to communicate sustainability and, therefore, classify the brand as such;
- Fake trademarks and certifications: it may happen that companies put on their packaging Ecolabel trademarks while they have not been awarded them by third independent bodies;
- Self-celebration: it occurs when companies communicate both their commitment and generosity in supporting an environmental cause, which may also be uncertain; moreover, organization often self-celebrate themselves when presenting their products as “greener”;
- Visual and lexical suggestions: as we have said along this analysis, communication of sustainability must, firstly, be true and technical thus avoiding using terms, colors and images for the only purpose of being evocative. On the other side, companies must combine creativity with veridicality of technical information;

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/greenwash>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp>

¹⁰² F. Iraldo, M. Melis, *Oltre il green washing, Linee guida sulla comunicazione ambientale per aziende sostenibili, credibili e competitive*, Milano, Edizioni Ambiente, 2020, p. 38

- Avoid abuse of technicisms: communication of data, information with a technical language may be intentional to make the comprehension of messages difficult for the end users. Moreover, it may occur when companies overestimate their knowledge about tools and languages.

Some companies actively invest in environmentally conscious actions, while others focus their attention only on claims as the following matrix shows.



Figure 2.14. Greenwashing Matrix (Horiuchi et al., 2009)

Misguided communication includes companies who have made significant efforts to enhance the environmental performance of their goods and processes but are unable to effectively communicate these efforts. These businesses may use broad generalizations in their claims to appear "environmentally friendly," or they may use language that turns off potential customers.

Unsubstantiated category, instead, include all those businesses that, at first glance, seem to be doing good work and presenting evidence to support their claims. A closer examination reveals, however, that the organization does not deserve as much praise as it seems. It could be lobbying against the very environmental policies it appears to

support, or it could be devoting more money to public relations than to actual projects. False attempts will finally be revealed as the audience becomes more aware of greenwashing, and it will only be a matter of time before these businesses are relegated to the "Greenwash Noise" quadrant.

As a matter of fact, under this group fall companies which claim, "We're green," but do not have anything to back up the argument, therefore customers are less likely to believe it. Moving these businesses to the top right quadrant would take a lot of effort, but it is possible. Effective environmental communication is, indeed, the objective that all businesses aim to achieve. Thus, it is possible for all those companies which are enhancing the environmental and social performance of their goods and coordinating their activities around the organization. They are able to articulate their efforts in such a way that customers are aware of the consequences, and other businesses look to them for leadership.¹⁰³

2.5.1. The “seven sins” of Greenwashing

False and misleading environmental claims causing greenwashing can, thus, be classified as the “seven sins¹⁰⁴”.



Figure 2.17. The Seven Sins of Greenwashing

¹⁰³ R. Horiuchi, R. Schuchard, L. Shea, S. Townsend, *Understanding and preventing Greenwash: A business guide*, 2009

¹⁰⁴ <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/other/greenwashing/>

Figure 2.17 summarizes the seven sins of greenwashing which we will analyze better in detail in the following list:

1. The sin of the Hidden Trade-Off: It is committed by claiming that a product is “green” based on a single environmental attribute (for example, the recycled content of paper) or an unreasonably limited collection of attributes (for example, recycled content and chlorine-free bleaching) without regard for other equally significant, if not more important, environmental concerns (such as energy, global warming, water, and forestry impacts of paper).
2. The sin of No-Proof: Claims regarding the climate that are not backed up by reality or third-party certification. Products that say that a certain percentage of the product is made from consumer-recycled material without presenting any credible data or information are an example.
3. The sin of Vagueness: It occurs when any argument that is so poorly described or broad that its true meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the intended user.
4. The sin of Worshipping False Labels: To deceive customers, false certifications or labels are developed. Creating a fake credential, for example, to deceive customers into thinking the product has gone through a valid green screening process.
5. The sin of Irrelevance: Giving an environmental argument that may be true but is unimportant and unhelpful to customers looking for environmentally preferable goods can be considered as an irrelevant green claim.
6. The sin of Lesser of Two Evils: There are "green" statements that may be valid within the product category, but they risk diverting the consumer's attention away from the category's overall environmental effect. Here are some examples: green insecticides and herbicides, as well as organic tobacco.
7. The sin of Fibbing: It occurs when an environmental claim is false. Saying, for example, that a diesel car emits no carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

These sins may also be compared to the semantic fallacies, widely exploited in advertising, as, for example, *anfibolia* which consists in using misleading terms to attract the attention of consumers as what can occur to companies that commit the sin of vagueness because of the ambiguity of the language used.

Generally, if companies adopt greenwashing strategies to describe things as they are not and to deceive the customer base, they implement two techniques known as decoupling

and attention deflection. The former stands for the communication of a commitment which is only apparent and aimed at satisfying the instances of all the stakeholders, while no real changes are done. The latter, on the other side, occurs when companies develop practices that aim at misleading the attention on sustainable issues which are really relevant, shifting the focus to secondary aspects also by declaring selective self-certifications¹⁰⁵.

Companies which do not want to incur in the risk of being accused of greenwashing must pay attention to how they behave and how they communicate their contents. As a matter of fact, they must respect some principles. Firstly, they must be authentic, meaning that their sustainability and, therefore, their communication must effectively mirror the business value propositions of the firm.

Moreover, transparency must be the driver of an organization's communication strategy. In effect, companies must not declare enormous accomplishments if they are not representative of the reality of facts. As we have already said through this chapter, communication of sustainability must both vehiculate correct and technical contents and be creative to attract consumers and retain their consensus. What companies must remember is that they must not self-celebrate themselves, otherwise people may take the distances from them because of the fear of being deceived about the real benefits that are declaimed in such a way. Companies which want to leverage on their sustainable activities and the related achievements, must not scream to claim the merits: market and the whole customer base will recognize them. It is, thus, possible to assert that the communication of sustainability must comply with the principle of modesty.

In the first chapter of the present dissertation, we discussed a lot about the conversational maxims developed by Paul Grice to find some "norms" which regulate conversation and communicative acts. Having said that, it is now time to analyze Geoffrey Neil Leech politeness maxims which find a correlation with the principles that communication about sustainability must follow in order to be considered as credible by consumers.

As a matter of fact, Geoffrey Neil Leech, a famous expert in English language and linguistics, is also known for his "Politeness principle and maxims". He, indeed, enlists a

¹⁰⁵ M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità, Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, p. 63

series of maxims to be observed while communicating with others and they are the following:

1. Tact maxim: it prescribes to minimize cost for the hearer and maximize benefits to him. It is the reason why we ask for permission. For example, when pronouncing the following utterance: "Do you mind if I smoke?";
2. Approbation maxim: it is recommendable to minimize the dispraise of others and, on the other side, maximize their praise. The degree of politeness also depends on how praise or dispraise are expressed. If you express your disapproval in an indirect manner, it sounds more respectful. Conversational maxims and politeness maxims at a certain point collide: the Conversational Maxim of Quality needs the speaker to be honest and genuine, but honesty may clash with the Politeness Maxim of Approbation. There are, indeed, some possible strategies to avoid this collision. The speaker can choose to ignore the Conversational Principle and tell her interlocutor a lie or has the option of choosing honesty over politeness at any cost or, lastly, he can even use an indirect tactic, in which he encourages the listener to infer his true feelings.
3. Agreement maxim: it prescribes to minimize disagreement between self and other and maximize agreement between self and other. Partially agreeing is more courteous than absolutely disagreeing. Disagreement that is expressed directly is less respectful than disagreement that is expressed indirectly. Mitigation increases the politeness of conflict.
4. Modesty maxim: it is the reverse of the approbation principles. It means to minimize the praise of self and maximize the dispraise of self. This is what we were asserting when talking about self-celebration of sustainable organizations.

Companies that want to celebrate their green successes must be careful in not running into the trap of greenwashing. They must, for example, reveal their best practices and achievements through the voices of others. It is an occasion to thank people who had believed in your project and sustained your organization.

As a matter of fact, organizations must celebrate their successes in order to update consumers about the attainment of the objectives that they had previously prefixed, but also to update the interested subjects about the progresses made: the important thing is

that organizations do not exaggerate and remain modest and humble to be viewed as credible and trustworthy by the whole community¹⁰⁶.

An interesting example is Sant'Anna¹⁰⁷ case history. Let us analyze it to better understand what happens to companies which inflate and exaggerate their data.

For the message that appeared in numerous newspapers from February 2010 to April 2011, as well as on the company website from 2010 to July 2012, the company that bottles Sant'Anna water will now be required to pay a fine of 30,000 euros. The environmental qualities of the new Pla INGEO® bottle dubbed "BioBottle," according to the promotional slogan, ensure responsible use when you buy Sant'Anna water. "650 million Sant'Anna Bio Bottles allow a saving of 176,800 barrels of oil, enough to heat a city of 520,000 inhabitants for a month and reduce CO2 emissions equal to a car that travels around the world 30,082 times in a year," according to the text published.

In reality, "the number of" 650 million bottles" listed in the advertisements refers to the entire annual production of Sant'Anna bottles, manufactured both in plastic (Pet) and in Pla, as stated by the antitrust (" Bio Bottle ").



Figure 2.15, Sant'Anna Bio Bottle advertisement accused of Greenwashing

¹⁰⁶ L. Garosi, *Green Branding*, Strumenti, consigli e strategie per una comunicazione ecosostenibile, Palermo, Dario Flaccovio editore, 2018, p. 190

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.greenme.it/informarsi/green-economy/multa-sant-anna-pubblicita-greenwashing/>

This example confirms what we were previously saying: the company exaggerated and heralded environmental merits that turned out to be false and, for this reason, could be considered as an example of greenwashing phenomena. These kinds of events surely risk damaging the brand image and reputation of the organization since, at the majority of consumers' eyes, it will lose credibility. As a matter of fact, greenwashing is a powerful threat to the "face", meaning the reputation of the companies which commit it.

So, to conclude, the message is clear: to be green, you must act on it and truly believe in it. Green marketing must be based on a concrete, transparent, and documented commitment. Sustainability must be genuine; otherwise, green marketing will become nothing more than a boomerang, destroying the company's brand reputation.

In order to avoid greenwashing occurrence and related risks, a checklist¹⁰⁸ with nine guidelines has been published and they are the following:

1. Does the content of the message represent a significant goal / result?
2. The problems addressed through the actions object of the message are significant for the production sector to which they belong?
3. What is the relationship between the resources invested in the operations and those used for communication?
4. Have the results already been achieved?
5. Is there consistency between the message and the other activities conducted by the company?
6. Can the message be confirmed by an independent body?
7. Is the message understandable by the majority of the interlocutors?
8. Do the stakeholders consider the company reliable?
9. Is there data and information to support the message?

It is, thus, possible to stem the phenomenon by avoiding using a generic language or words which are connected to nature by association, while not mirroring a real and effective benefit linked to the product and the organization itself. Moreover, using images which connect by analogy to plants, green and nature in general, in order to build catchy

¹⁰⁸ W. Sancassiani, L. Manicardi, *La Comunicazione Green, Guida alla comunicazione green di prodotti, processi ed impegni nell'industria ceramica*, Focus Lab, pp. 41

advertising won't again reflect a concrete advantage related to that specific brand: they must be justified.

Advertising sustainability is not an easy task, but companies must do it through the most adequate and correct language to convey correct and transparent information which is what the end users, nowadays always more aware about the environmental and social issues, expect from the organizations. It is, thus, better to use one less word than more which can sound as useless. Communicating with transparency and coherence will be the key to gain successes and demonstrations of confidence by consumers.

Furthermore, the verbal language used to communicate must be accompanied by easily recognizable symbols and logos in order for the target audience to have the proof of the sustainability level of the companies.

CHAPTER 3 – ANALYSIS OF COOP ITALIA CASE HISTORY

3.1. Where to communicate

In the previous chapters of the present dissertation, we analyzed the different trends, both in communication in general and in environmental communication in particular, which are affected by the power of language. As a matter of fact, we saw how language, which can be verbal and not, can influence the effectiveness of an advertising campaign and, especially, regarding the communication about sustainable advancements made by the companies.

In this third and last chapter, we will now approach better in detail where organizations can communicate, that is, through which channel they can send their green messages. We will take into account a real case history which will describe the green communication strategies applied by the organization in question.

Companies have at their disposal several channels of communication which include the point of purchase, traditional media, social networks, the packaging, dedicated events and conferences or official documents such as, for example, the social balance sheet.

Let us analyze the different communication mediums. Stores and showrooms represent one of the most strategic touchpoints with the consumers since they offer the opportunity to involve the audience and deliver to them a complete experience which can strengthen the brand identity. Moreover, companies can not only vehiculate explicit messages through billboards, display advertising, but also implicit messages which can be derived by customers, for example, looking at the packaging used. A brand which want to communicate its environmental commitment must, in fact, pay a lot of attention to the material used when thinking about its communication strategy instore. Packaging, indeed, is the “business card” of the green philosophy followed by a company, but, on the other side, forms of verbal communication play a crucial role: sales assistant or employees which deal with promotion activities must develop a good communication exchange with the potential customers who are present at the store location.

Moreover, companies may exploit the power of traditional media, such as the television, radio or outdoor advertising, to capture the attention of the masses. Thanks to the

digitalization explosion that our world has experienced in the latest years, new and more original forms of communication were born. As a matter of fact, these new communicative options represent an effective and quick way to deliver desired contents to the customer base. Social networks, as for example Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn, provide the opportunity to companies to establish a direct contact and dialogue with consumers: this is the reason why brands need to constantly monitor them, otherwise they may also lead to dangerous reputational problems. Beyond social media, companies may spread information, which must always be accurate and clear, through their own website: this option provides more control to the organization with respect to social networks as mentioned above.

Websites, indeed, constitute an advantage for companies since they have the possibility to segment the information. It is, thus, more and more frequent to notice the section “Sustainability” in almost all the online webpages where consumers can easily look at the Corporate Social Responsibility practices adopted by the company in question. Also in this case, communication of the goals achieved by organization must never be self-celebrative, but always concrete and sober.

Others forms of advertising strategies include events and conferences. Actually, due to the pandemic we are experiencing since 2020, communication through events has been forced to turn to another kind of meetings which includes online webinar with the presence of important speakers. Events, indeed, can be part of a strategy for developing a greater engagement with the target audience.

Furthermore, companies may communicate specific data and achievements through official documentations and tools such as, for example, the social and environmental balance sheets. The former, also known as “Corporate Social Responsibility Report” is a document with which an organization, whether it is a company or a public body or an association, periodically communicates the results of its activity on a voluntary basis, not limited only to financial and accounting aspects¹⁰⁹. The latter, instead, involves the “set of methodologies aimed at representing, from a quantitative and economic point of view, the complex interactions existing between companies and the external ecosystem”.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilancio_sociale

¹¹⁰ M. G. Persico, F. Rossi, *Comunicare la sostenibilità*, Comunicare il nuovo paradigma per un nuovo vantaggio competitivo, Milano, FrancoAngeli/Manuali, 2016, pp. 86-87

The communication media mentioned above are all examples of how a company can communicate its sustainable commitment to the customer base: let us now analyze the case history of an organization which strongly believes in the advantages provided by the circular economy.

3.1.2. Description of the company: “Coop Italia”

The history of Coop ¹¹¹starts in 1854 when the first “Provision warehouse” was opened, a shop that bought wholesale goods to resell to shareholders at cost price, protecting purchasing power in a phase of growing inflation. People, their needs and rights were at the basis of the original mission of the organization and still embody it nowadays.



Figure 3.16. Coop Italia's Logo

In 1945, the first logo was created: it was with an italic font, similar to those used in the postwar era, and it was limited to signing the product. In 1963, when the economy was booming, the need to refresh the brand name arose. Albe Steiner redesigned the logotype, based on Herbert Bayer's "universal" alphabet. He minimized the space between the four letters, visually reflecting collaboration by canceling any separation.

The Italian Alliance of Consumer Cooperatives (AICC), which would later become Coop Italia, was established in 1947. During these tough years, cooperatives guarantee savings

¹¹¹ <https://www.e-coop.it/noi/storia>

by eliminating wholesaler intermediation. The National Consumer Cooperatives Association (ANCC-COOP) was founded in 1955. Coop Italia, the national buying consortium of all Italian consumer cooperatives, was established in 1969. Moreover, Bob Noorda restyled the letter "C" and the letter "P" in 1985 with minor but effective changes: he greatly widened the lines and used the same crooked cut for both. The Advance agency was tasked with a restyling of the logo on Coop brand items in 2005: the logo was inscribed in a red figure in the form of an eye, and the packaging was also renewed.

Coop's role in the market today, as it was then, is to provide quality goods at reasonable rates to its members and, in particular, to respond to growing needs that are changing at a faster rate than in the past. To summarize, the weight of foodstuffs in the baskets of Italian families has decreased from 40% in 1970 to less than 15% today.

In 2018, Coop Italia celebrated its seventy years of activities and a lot of changes have shaped the new consumer journey. As a matter of fact, I decided to take into consideration this brand because of the attention it pays to the environment. Coop has now become synonymous with a transparent, democratic, supportive, and autonomous Cooperative: the emblem of a Cooperative dedicated to protecting the consumers' rights and interests in environmental protection, resource management, health protection, and the enhancement of work and solidarity relationships between people.

Coop Italia writes on its website the following promise: "We are committed every day, with an eye to the future, to guarantee good, affordable, ethical and safe products¹¹²."

3.2. Mission and values

Coop Italia, which stands for Consumers Cooperative, is a brand that identifies an Italian cooperative system that operates a network of supermarkets, hypermarkets, and convenience stores. Coop's mission, indeed, is to provide its members and customers with high-quality products at reasonable prices while ensuring food protection. In this regard, the values on which Coop Italia bases its mission are safety, ethics, environment,

¹¹² <https://www.e-coop.it/noi/storia>

convenience, goodness, and transparency. Let us analyze them better in detail in the following list:

- Safety: it is achieved in terms of continuous quality which is guaranteed to consumers through constant commitment, investments and rigid controls over production and selection of raw materials and suppliers. As the brand claims, “The relationship between us and branded suppliers is based on sharing the Coop values that distinguish branded products: only those who respect the high standards required can become a Coop product supplier.”¹¹³
- Ethics: Coop Italia had been the first company in 1998 to adhere to the SA 8000 Certification which is a management model that seeks to strengthen and protect all workers who come under the control and influence of organizations that follow it. Its basic issues deal with the improvement of the workers’ working standards by promoting ethical and equal treatment of employees and incorporating international human rights conventions¹¹⁴. The company, in this regard, writes the following sentences in its website: “We believe in fairer and more ethical work and we are committed to obtaining it every day together with our suppliers to combat gender inequalities, discrimination by race or religion, child and child labor, forced labor, illegal hiring, and guarantee contractual regularity, health and safety, optimal conditions of the working environment, freedom of association and contract.”¹¹⁵
- Environment: Coop Italia’s products are thought and realized with the objective to minimize wastes and emission of dangerous substances for the environment. Moreover, it uses certification programs in its goods, and it is committed to promote the implementation of techniques such as reduction, reuse, regeneration, and recycling¹¹⁶.
- Convenience: for Coop, convenience entails being able to combine more fundamental aspects of production, such as cost savings, protection, ethics, and environmental sustainability. As well as with goodness, of course. Every Coop

¹¹³ <https://www.e-coop.it/valori-attivita-sociali/sicuro>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.csqa.it/CSQA/Norme/Responsabilita-Sociale/SA-8000>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.e-coop.it/valori-attivita-sociali/etico>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.e-coop.it/valori-attivita-sociali/valori-prodotto-coop/ecologico>

action is driven by this vision, which is translated into concrete everyday behavior to ensure consistent quality at reasonable prices¹¹⁷.

- Goodness: this value is to be intended in terms of quality of products. As Coop writes on its website “Good for us means controlled quality: whether it is the research phase or the development phase or the refinement phase, control is always guaranteed and systematic, so as to guarantee constant quality¹¹⁸.”
- Transparency: Coop provides both to its customers and to its affiliates access through labels or dedicated websites to information regarding raw materials, productive processes, ended products¹¹⁹. Coop was the first to certify the origin and traceability of such foods deemed vulnerable to fraud or security risks, such as gasoline, tomato preserves, eggs, and milk, in the early 2000s. Over time, this operation has consolidated and expanded to include other items such as fresh meats, fish, preserved meats, and wine. Coop is able to recreate the path of each commodity, from the identification of the firms involved to the individual transition phases, thanks to the regulated supply chains.

Coop Italia’s environmental philosophy is, thus, based on the “3 Rs” – i.e. “Reduce, reuse and recycle” – which aim at accomplishing the following objectives:

- “Greener products and services with lower environmental impact;
- Waste reduction and resource recycling;
- Reduction of goods transport to minimize pollution into the atmosphere;
- Staff training: Coop offers awareness and environmental education resources to its employees and partners so that they can function in the most environmentally friendly manner possible;
- Members and consumers are provided with information and environmental education tools to increase their awareness and responsibility towards the sustainable issue;
- Experimentation, testing, and creativity for waste reduction;

¹¹⁷ <https://www.e-coop.it/valori-attivita-sociali/conveniente>

¹¹⁸ <https://www.e-coop.it/valori-attivita-sociali/buono>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.e-coop.it/trasparente>

- Knowledge and environmental education resources for members and customers to increase their environmental awareness. Coop promotes the creation and testing of environmentally friendly processes, systems, structures, and products;
- Refusal of genetically modified products;
- Protection of animal welfare. As a matter of fact, Coop does not carry out or request tests of its food and cosmetic products on animals, not even concerning the raw materials that compose them. Moreover, it does not use substances obtained through violence against living beings. Lastly, it promotes sustainable fishing and the defense of marine protected areas;
- Forest protection and management. Coop uses wood and cellulose from approved suppliers or recycled materials; Coop does not sell products made from endangered trees, genetically engineered seeds, illegal deforestation, or forestry activities that are detrimental to endangered areas.”¹²⁰

3.3. Communication strategy applied

In the next section we will analyze the different projects which Coop has developed throughout the years to effectively communicate its sustainable actions and educate its customers to behave in a responsible manner.

As a matter of fact, we will take into consideration the most recent and main activities developed both online and offline, related to sustainability to show how language is fundamental to convey the desired green claims in a creative and accurate way.

3.3.1. “A good shopping can change the world”: TV commercials

“A good shopping can change the world” is the title of one of the most famous campaigns launched by Coop Italia in 2019. This campaign marks a significant shift in the brand's positioning because, in addition to reminding people of all the relevant actions that Coop

¹²⁰ L. Marzulli, R. Paziienza, S. Zammartini, V. Macaddino, *Green Marketing*, Fondazione Istud

has taken since the beginning of its activity, it expands the brand's role as an encouragement for community participation in conscious, sustainable, and responsible consumption decisions. We have already mentioned it along this analysis when talking about the implicit storytelling strategies adopted by companies when advertising sustainability.

To sum up, the spot portrays the protagonist, which is a shopping trolley that, in order to follow and retrieve a plastic bag, breaks the chains that are blocking it and embarks on an ecological adventure. On his journey, he will gather plastic in the sea, bravely stop massive machinery that spreads pesticides on the fields, bring bottles of fresh lemonade to farm workers, cut the nets that trap a sperm whale, and, eventually, call all the other trolleys to join forces and close the enormous crack in a glacier.

As we already said throughout this analysis, both verbal and visual language play a crucial role when dealing with advertising, also in the communication of sustainability. In this case, the brands payoff which is “Coop is you” strengthens the slogan of the campaign. The use of the 2nd person indexical “you” allows the recipients to feel directly involved with the brand thus the distance between the them is reduced.

In addition, we must also notice the tone of voice which characterizes the commercial. As a matter of fact, the music and background song “Change the world”, evocative title, connote the tone of voice which sounds as mature, close, concrete, and credible. Paralinguistic devices, such as, in this case, music and tone of voice contribute to develop an effective and catchy commercial.



Figure 3.17. Coop Italia spot: “A good shopping can change the world”

The spot, realized by Havas Milan, has been broadcast on major television networks and later on the Rai Cinema circuit in 60, 30 and 15 second versions, as well as in a long format exclusive to the cinema and web. Moreover, it was the most popular commercial video on YouTube in the period October-December 2019 with 3.7 million views. The ranking was determined using some of the most significant satisfaction signals expressed by users on YouTube including: the number of views in our country, the percentage of viewing of each advertisement and the ratio between organic views and paid views¹²¹. Coop Italia with this campaign wanted not only to inform people about their sustainable commitment, but also to educate them towards a more responsible behavior. Thus, the message behind this commercial is explicit: Coop products are good, safe, transparent and environmentally friendly.

Another commercial which had been aired on Tv, YouTube and it is present in the company website and social media platforms is the one called “A good shopping is a gift for the world”. In the title the word “gift” is purposefully inserted due to the period in which the commercial was spread on, which was Christmas 2020. It lasts 30 seconds and the song which is heard in the background is the same of the commercial described above, thus highlighting the continuous commitment of the company towards these issues.



Figure 3.3. Coop Italia' spot: "A good shopping is a gift for the world"

¹²¹ https://www.adnkronos.com/lo-spot-coop-di-havas-milan-il-piu-popolare-su-youtube_4VHbCYMSXcNEdk0C0Pz4x4

The spot portrays several big gift boxes, as it can be noticed in Figure 3.3 above, in different locations as in the countryside, in the city and close to the glaciers: all the chosen places want to indicate that the world in general risks to be in serious danger if we do not make a “gift” to it. Moreover, we can hear a voice in the background which pronounces, with a calm and suave tone of voice, the following words: "If you do a shopping that respects the well-being of people, animals, the planet, you are making a gift to the world". Also in this case, the 2nd person indexical “you” is used and repeated many times to involve the recipients and make them conscious that their actions can make the difference: Coop Italia again inserts its pillars of sustainability, namely people, animals, and, lastly, the Earth in general.

In addition, another consideration could be made taking into account the word used to compose the slogan of the campaign. As we previously said, the term “gift” had not been selected without a logic behind. As a matter of fact, the campaign was aired during Christmas 2020. Moreover, there is another linguistic device which can be observed in the sentence: the metaphor. “You are making a gift to the world”, indeed, does not mean that people literally have to buy something or to deliver a present, instead, on the other side, it has an implicit meaning. It, thus, refers to everyone possible actions in order to improve the whole planet which, in turn, will benefit from a change in consumers’ minds. The spot is, thus, an invitation to select products which come from industrial and agricultural realities which are conscious and responsible.

In both the advertisements analyzed, it is possible to notice a further implicit: “A good shopping” is the one which is made at Coop. Indeed, it is not explicitly said, but, on the other side, it is suggested by the pertinence expectations, thus by the juxtaposition of the slogan and the Coop trademark.

Another project which deserves to be mentioned is the campaign “We give the environment a new imprint”. The claim emphasizes Coop's "doing" and "doing together" thanks to the use of the first person indexical *we* to indicate Coop's commitment to first person and inclusion. The video lasts 15 seconds and it had been posted both on the Instagram account and Facebook page of the company. It shows a tree formed by several imprints as it is possible to notice in the picture below.

Thus, Coop choice of the word “imprint” recalls the concept of the “Carbon footprint”, which deals with “the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of the activities of a particular individual, organization or community¹²²”. However, Coop interprets the “footprint” as “fingerprint”: it, thus, exploits the ambiguity of the term “imprint” given by the Italian language.



Figure 3.18. Coop Italia's campaign: "We give a new imprint to the environment"

There are two main goals: Coop's ongoing commitment to environmental protection in accordance with its history and values, and the enhancement of the distinctive contribution of Coop Products and Coop quality control in environmental actions. Along with the three "footprint" subjects of 2018, there are others such as the drop of water for Coop water bottles made of at least 30% recycled plastic, the recycling cycle for detergent bottles made of a variable percentage of 25 to 100% recycled plastic, and the coffee bean for Coop Fiorfiore compostable capsules¹²³.

Both in the caption for the Instagram and Facebook post, marketing and communication experts write the following words. “How do we help the planet? By reducing the plastic in all the product with Coop trademark. Read more...”. As we said discussing about the rules of communication and those of the environmental one, people must be accurately informed, but, at the same time, must be captured by short and concise sentences. Even in the case just mentioned, the recipients are invited to discover more by clicking on the

¹²² <https://www.goodenergy.co.uk/blog/2017/11/20/what-is-a-carbon-footprint/>

¹²³ Direzione Qualità, Prodotto a Marchio e Marketing e Comunicazione Coop Italia, *La forza del cambiamento, Rapporto sostenibilità e valori 2019*, Agra Editrice

link in bio which directly sends them to Coop Italia website where they can find detailed information about the achievements reached and about all the projects.



Figure 3.19. Examples of achievements thanks to “We give a new imprint to the world” campaign

As a matter of fact, as you can notice from Figure 3.5 above, there are several portraits which are drawn as if they were like digital imprints which symbolize the several areas in which the company is working to reduce the quantity of pesticides.

In this regard, people can find more information about the actions taken by Coop Italia at its online webpage. Coop promotes precision agriculture and relaunches the pesticide reduction strategy that began 26 years ago with the collection of signatures "Let's disarm pesticides" and will be completed in May 2019 with the gradual elimination of four controversial molecules (including glyphosate) because of their environmental impact. The organization writes the following words: “In the fruit and vegetable departments of the 1100 Coop points of sale, cherries, completely free from field to table of the four pesticides, arrive from May, the first of 35 chains of fruit and vegetables under the Coop brand that will be progressively involved in the further reduction of pesticides, up to the elimination, to a total of 116 suppliers and over 7,000 farms. 15 crops affected in 2019, including cherries, melons, grapes and clementines. All the families of Coop brand fruit

and vegetable products will be fully operational within 3 years for a total volume of over 100,000 tons of products involved¹²⁴.”

Communication about sustainable activities must, thus, adequately inform the customer base by providing them with comprehensible and readable data to prove them the effectiveness of what the brand claims in the advertising campaigns. As a matter of fact, people’s attention must be captured, but also maintained thanks to the truthfulness of the promises made with those catchy green claims. As it can be noticed in the example reported above, consumers are provided with concrete data about the tangible results achieved: verbal language is useful to convince people to develop trust towards your products, but words must be accompanied by facts.

3.3.2. Social media communication activity

Coop Italia is present online on Facebook with its official page which counts 209.915 likes, on Instagram with more than 45 thousand followers, on Twitter with more than 28 thousand followers and, lastly, on YouTube with 6300 subscribers. In addition, Coop manages other Facebook accounts which are dedicated to the different several product lines.

Nowadays, brands must understand that it is essential to be heard, to be known, to communicate your uniqueness, to enhance the characteristics of your products or services, to educate consumers, to generate engagement in order to sell. Thanks to the advent of social media platforms, companies can develop all the activities previously mentioned to involve the customers by providing them useful information in real time, therefore, establishing a relationship of trust and loyalty towards the brand.

In doing so, organizations must comply with the rules of communication previously analyzed in the present dissertation. As a matter of fact, companies must be brief and precise, but also creative to catch the attention of customers. Adopting a too specific language won’t provide the expected results, contrarily, people might find it of difficult

¹²⁴ <https://www.e-coop.it/campagne/stop-ai-pesticidi-la-tutela-dellambiente>

comprehension. Let us analyze some examples in order to better understand what Coop does to attract and retain its customers.

On the occasion of the national day “M’illumino di meno”, Coop published on its social networks the following post.



Figure 3.20. Facebook post in occasion of “M’illumino di meno” International Day

Translated from the Italian, the slogan of the campaign says, “We lower the light, but we light up the attention to the environment”. Thanks to a word pun which contraposes two contrasting verbs, the recipients’ attention is caught. In addition, the caption which accompanies the post, “Our commitment for the environment can be seen also when the lights are off”, exploits two other linguistic devices which are widely used in advertising to generate amusement in the audience: antithesis and hyperbole.

The former is a “rhetorical figure consisting of a juxtaposition of opposing words or concepts, which acquire greater importance from the proximity and the mostly symmetrical arrangement¹²⁵”. Indeed, in Coop’s Facebook post the contrast is between the visibility and absence of light. Moreover, it is possible to recognize the presence of an hyperbole, “a figure of speech and literary device that creates heightened effect through

¹²⁵ Definition accessed at Encyclopedia Treccani online

deliberate exaggeration¹²⁶". As a matter of fact, Coop seems to assert that its commitment is so visible that can be seen even in the darkness.

In addition, the words written in copy of the post are accompanied by concrete actions that Coop Italia will take in adherence to this important initiative. As a matter of fact, it claims to reduce the lighting level of all the stores. Another device which is exploited in this post is the visual language. As it is possible to notice from the picture above, it portrays a shopping cart as if it was a light bulb to show coherence with the initiative and with the campaign "A good shopping can change the world", sentence that is also reported at the bottom of the picture. Moreover, the color chosen, namely green, completes the meaning of the whole claim.

In addition, as we said before, posts on social media must be brief, so as not to bother the viewers. For this reason, Coop inserted in the first comment under the post the link which sends back to the online website and where people can have the opportunity to discover more about the project and about the related undertaken actions to achieve this result.

This is what the marketing and communication team of the company thought for the official Facebook account, whereas, on the Instagram one, they posted two "stories". The former is the simple image with the slogan and the shopping cart, the same which had been posted on Facebook, while the latter shows the post published by "Consumatoricoop", which is the magazine of the affiliates which informs about a responsible consumption, rights, environment and actuality, as it can be read on the bio of their Instagram profile. The post published by Consumatoricoop illustrates in detail the various actions taken to defeat the wastes and be more sustainable. In the official Twitter channel, Coop published the same tweet as in Facebook and a link which connects directly to the complete article in the website.

Another communication activity which has been transmitted on the web, both on Facebook and on YouTube, is the cartoon series signed by Makkox, pseudonym of Marco Dambrosio, an Italian cartoonist, illustrator, cartoonist and television author. Makkox asserts the following words which are reported on the official Coop Italia website: "Working for Coop was an honor and it was fun. But a little, let's face it, it ruined my life. To make the tables I had to" learn "how Coop works on the products it brings to its

¹²⁶ <https://literarydevices.net/hyperbole/>

supermarkets. While I was drawing the Coop ... the Coop, unbeknownst to me, was drawing something in me. It forced me to confront a world of new awareness from which I have always kept away! But nothing, now the damage was done. I started looking with different eyes the things around me when I went shopping¹²⁷. "

The cartoon videos on the theme of sustainability values and the Coop Product were circulated on the internet, featuring the two environmental mascots created by Makkox for Coop: the 7 videos earned approximately 7 million views on Facebook and Youtube¹²⁸. It is an odd and unorthodox web series with the development of a protagonist character: an uninterested and oblivious alter ego of the creator trying to achieve a goal, which is to be mindful of what he eats. An entire family surrounds him, from the enthusiastic and talkative grandmother to the politically correct and all-too-informed Coop brother-in-law to the hyper-technological but already shrewd grandson, in a light and satirical episode storyline and an obstacle course that will turn him in spite of himself.¹²⁹

Let us analyze some episodes of the series to notice all the communication devices adopted.

As an example, we can report the "Recycle" episode which sees a seagull and an owl as the protagonists of an ironic and educative story. As a matter of fact, the seagull embodies the personification of all those people who do not care about the effect of their actions on their environment, whereas, on the other side, the owl tries to explain and convince the friend about the relevance of recycling for the planet and all its inhabitants.

The episode, indeed, shows the seagull fishing at the seaside and collecting only plastic wastes. Therefore, the author through the ironic words of the other animal explains that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the sea if the situation does not change. The seagull seems to be indifferent towards the issue, but his mate reproaches him, thus highlighting the importance of recycling as a solution. Also, in this case, irony, a linguistic figure of speech which emphasizes extreme situations with a humoristic effect is useful to attract recipients' attention.

¹²⁷ <https://www.e-coop.it/news-media/spot-tv-pubblicita>

¹²⁸ Direzione Qualità, Prodotto a Marchio e Marketing e Comunicazione Coop Italia, *La forza del cambiamento, Rapporto sostenibilità e valori 2019*, Agra Editrice, p.85

¹²⁹ <https://www.mediakey.tv/news/archivio-news/leggi-news/coop-makkox-una-web-serie-originale>

At the end of the video, the sentence “Coop bottles are realized with the 30% of recycled plastic” closes the episode thus providing to the viewers a concrete data about the brand commitment to solve the issue.

In addition, another episode that we can analyze is the one called “Awareness of consumptions”. The cartoon starts with a grandson who brings the shopping to his grandmother. While he thinks to have done his good action and to have completed his task, the grandmother stops him and starts asking him a series of questions. As a matter of fact, she asks her grandson about the source of a box of eggs, and the man "reprimands" the grandmother for forgetting that eggs come from chickens with a big laugh. The woman, instead, is smarter than what her nephew thinks, and promptly answers asking him if he knows the story of those products, the productors, the processes and place of origin. Again, the grandson is astonished, and he is not able to understand why the grandmother cares about this issue. At the end, the guy discovers who is responsible in this change of thinking: the brother-in-law Coop affiliate.



Figure 3.21. Makkox web serie for Coop Italia

The author makes use of irony also in this episode in order to compare two extreme situations and to underline, on the other side, the path that consumers should follow even if it requires time and research. At the end of the video, the sentence “Eggs origin Coop, from free-range hens without the use of antibiotics” closes the episode providing the viewers with information about the traceability of the supply chain.

Makkox, the author and cartoonist who realized the web series, was asked by Coop to develop the 2021 calendar, and, as they assert on the official website it includes “Twelve stages that encompass all our values. A symbolic journey in which the protagonists are all of us, who with a good shopping can contribute to a better world¹³⁰”. As you can notice in the following picture which was used in the official Facebook account of Coop, the visual recalls the main issue of the campaign which is also reinforced thanks to the slogan at the bottom of the calendar.



Figure 3.22. Makkox calendar: “Everyday is good to change the world”

In addition, on the 17th of July 2020, date which is considered the “World Emoji Day”, Coop Italia posted on its official Facebook account a very evocative and catchy picture. The celebration, which began in 2014 at the initiative of Jeremy Burge, the London-based founder of Emojipedia, aims to encourage the use of emojis as a medium for sharing and amusement while also serving as a valuable marketing opportunity for new product launches. Nowadays, the majority of people easily use and recognize emojis. It may also happen that individuals use only them in their conversations in chat to communicate between each other. This again demonstrates the relevance of visual language to quickly arrive at the point when delivering a specific content. As it is possible to notice in the

¹³⁰ <https://www.e-coop.it/news-media/all/calendario-2021-di-makkox-coop>

following picture, all the symbols chosen by the marketing and communication team of the organization contribute to send a specific message.

Starting from the left side, there is a shopping cart which is accompanied by the thumb up whose meaning is usually associated in the western culture with something good and positive. The two symbols together, indeed, stand for the first part of the slogan of the campaign “A good shopping”. Then, it is possible to notice an arrow which indicates to go right, symbolically meaning the effect of the first action: the first symbols can, thus, be completed as “A good shopping can lead to...”. To conclude the sentence, it is necessary to look at the two last emojis. As a matter of fact, there is the one of the Earth, which can also be read as world or planet, associated again to the thumb up. Therefore, the slogan of the campaign is completed: “A good shopping can lead to a good planet”.



Figure 3.23. Facebook post for the WorldEmojiDay

Another example of communication created by Coop which demonstrates again the relevance of symbols, thus of the non-verbal language, can be noticed in the following example:



Figure 3.24. Facebook post for the World Environment Day

The picture above is taken from the official Facebook account of Coop. As is can be seen, in occasion of the World Environment Day on the 5th of June, Coop published a post in which it reminds its customers to remember the slogan “A good shopping can change the world”, but, on the other side, it adds some symbols in order to explain them how to achieve the objective. If you click on the single photos of the slideshow, there will be a brief description of every symbol. For example, buying seasonal fruit and vegetables is useful for a natural and sustainable feeding, then the Cycle of Moebius is accompanied by the following description: “Prefer products which have a packaging realized with recycled materials, compostable or reusable. On the box of Coop, you can find the instructions with all the information for the correct disposal”. Lastly, the third symbol represents a shopping bag which invites consumers to ask for bags made of compostable materials or reusable ones.

Another project linked to the environment commitment of Coop and which is advertised on its social networks is called “Re-generation”, partnership with three Italian brands of excellence: Berndes, Guzzini and Mirabello. As it can be grasped by the name of the campaign itself, the word Re-generation symbolizes a new more sustainable generation, but it can also be read as a clue which anticipates an important characteristic of the products promoted by the campaign. On the 15th of February, indeed, Coop published on its official Facebook account, a video which sees our shopping cart collecting the plastic cans left around the city and, then, a football team helps him with the collection. A voice in the background, then, says that “There are a lot of things to do together to help the environment. Coop thought for you a prizes collection made of recycled materials”. As it

can be noticed, the second person indexical “you” is present to reinforce the message and to speak directly to the consumer.

“The products of the new Re-Generation line are eco-sustainable and developed with recycled materials. Energy saving and emission reduction for a totally MADE IN ITALY collection¹³¹.” This communication campaign, indeed, aims at incentivizing consumers towards the adoption of sustainable choices thus providing them prizes to reward such an impactful and responsible choice.



Figure 3.25. Facebook post for the RE-GENERATION project

3.4. Certifications as a credible tool to communicate

In the second chapter of the present dissertation we mentioned the relevance of certifications and verified logos not only as a source of credibility at consumers’ eyes, but also as a direct and effective medium of communication. In this regard, due to the advancements of the latest years towards the spread of awareness about the importance of sustainability, the majority of people, indeed, decide to change their consumption choices thus privileging more informed ones.

As a matter of fact, since consumers care about their consumption choices and their effect on the surrounding environment, they know how to read symbols on the packaging and

¹³¹ <https://www.e-coop.it/collection-re-generation-2021>

are able to distinguish which products are truly sustainable from those which only claim it. A very famous logo which is widely known by the customer base is the following one:



Figure 3.26. Organic Logo

The logo portrayed by Figure 3.12 above represents the “organic logo”. The EU organic logo was introduced by Commission Regulation (EU) 271/2010 on March 24, 2010. Its use is governed by Article 57 of Commission Regulation (EC) 889/2008¹³². Organic goods sold in the EU have a clear visual identity thanks to the logo itself. It makes it easier for EU customers to recognize organic products and for farmers to sell them across the EU. Only products that have been accredited as organic by an approved inspection body or organization are entitled to use the organic logo. This suggests that the goods were made, shipped, and processed in compliance with strict guidelines¹³³.

Also, Coop has been awarded the organic logo. As a matter of fact, their ViviVerde line of products reports on the packaging the easily recognizable organic leaf. All of the food in the Vivi Verde Coop line comes from organic farming. This style of agriculture employs only natural cultivation and breeding techniques, avoiding the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), pesticides, and chemical fertilizers, and preferring crop rotation over monoculture, which depletes the soil. Biodiversity, soil, water, and air are maintained in this way, while animal health is respected, and plant parasites are combated without the use of chemicals. These are, therefore, safe products because organic farming is subjected

¹³² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/organic-logo-user-manual_it.pdf

¹³³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/organic-farming/organics-glance_it

to continuous checks carried out by certification bodies authorized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.¹³⁴

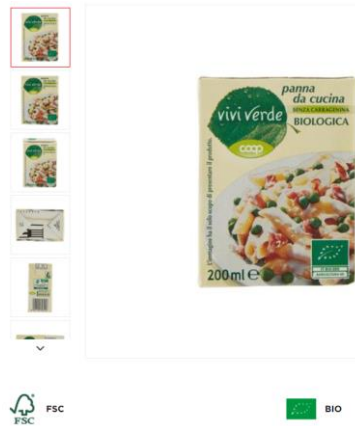


Figure 3.27. Logos of certifications on the packs of products

As it can be noticed in the picture above, the logo is easily readable and put in the foreground of the packaging. Moreover, the product in question is certified also by FSC, logo which we have analyzed when talking about the relevance of certifications. FSC, acronym which stands for Forest Stewardship Council, proposes itself as a point of reference in the legality and sustainability of the wood-paper supply chain, in accordance with the most current standards of responsible management of the forest resource¹³⁵.

Both the two certifications demonstrate the effective commitment of Coop with respect to environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the organization in 2015 received another remarkable acknowledgement. As a matter of fact, Coop Italia was awarded the 2015 EU Ecolabel National Award by the ISPRA (Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research) in Rimini, thanks to the contribution made in terms of communication and information through Vivi Verde Coop, a brand that makes recognizable organic food and non-food products.

¹³⁴ <https://www.e-coop.it/prodotti-coop/viviverde-coop>

¹³⁵ <https://it.fsc.org/it-it/chi-siamo#:~:text=Il%20marchio%20FSC%2%AE%20identifica,standard%20ambientali%2C%20sociali%20ed%20economici.>

The award follows the recognition that, at European level, the EU Ecolabel granted to Coop as Best Practice in Europe, "for the importance and incisiveness of the promotional, content, and communication strategies - both in-store and online - undertaken in relation to various groups of EU Ecolabel products, and to always meet the needs of a customer who is increasingly aware of sustainable buying choices and attentive to environmental issues¹³⁶".

Ecolabel, indeed, is an ecological trademark of type I, as we said in the second chapter of the present dissertation, which is both very famous and reliable since it is provided after having taken into consideration all the environmental impacts of a product and its entire lifecycle. It is, indeed, a voluntary ecological label based on a system of scientifically specified selective criteria that considers the environmental impacts of goods or services over their entire life cycle and is accredited by an independent body (competent body¹³⁷). Coop, for this reason, gains credibility at consumers' eyes which can easily recognize the Ecolabel logo on the products.

As it is possible to notice in the following picture below, the Vivi Verde brand detergent packaging reports on the right the Ecolabel green label in order to communicate to its customers that the product has been made following rigid standards which comply with the respect of the environment.



Figure 3.28. Ecolabel Logo on ViviVerde Line

¹³⁶ <https://consumatori.e-coop.it/a-vivi-verde-coop-il-premio-per-la-comunicazione-ambientale/>

¹³⁷ <https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/attivita/certificazioni/ecolabel-ue>

The detergent is only an example among all the products sold by Coop and certified by Ecolabel. As a matter of fact, also the paper line complies with the ethics standards recognized by that label.

In addition, another relevant certification which has been awarded to Coop and deserves to be analyzed is the “Fairtrade” one. Fairtrade is “an international organization that aims to improve the lives of agricultural farmers in developing countries on a daily basis. It does so by developing precise standards that enable farmers and workers to prepare for a more stable income and a more prosperous future¹³⁸”.

Products with the Fairtrade Mark have been certified according to Fairtrade Standards. When these criteria are not met, the producer organization is suspended until corrective measures are implemented and verified. Otherwise, it is decertified. The standards can, thus, be classified in the following way:

- “Economic criteria: A Fairtrade Minimum Price, which aims to give producers a safety net in case market prices collapse and allows them to make long-term plans, is established. Moreover, the Fairtrade Award, an additional sum of money that farmers and workers decide how to invest to improve the quality of their life and work, is provided to those which comply with all the standards. Lastly, access to capital to make producers' activities more stable, through long-term commercial partnerships and pre-financing paid by buyers to producers who request them.
- Environmental criteria: Producers must comply with good agricultural and environmental practices, including responsible water and waste management. Moreover, they must respect and care about the maintenance of biodiversity and soil fertility. In addition, there must be a reduction in the use of pesticides and a ban on the use of hazardous materials. Ban on the use of GMOs Organic certification is not required but promoted and supported with higher Fairtrade Minimum Prices for organic products.
- Social criteria: Small producers must be organized in a democratic way (typically in a cooperative form), they must follow participatory, transparent and inclusive decision-making processes (in particular regarding gender equality). In plantation contexts, where it is normal to have salaried employees, companies must hire on a

¹³⁸ <https://www.fairtrade.it/cose-fairtrade/>

non-discriminatory basis, pay wages equal to or higher than the legal or local minimum wages, ensure employees freedom of association and collective bargaining, safeguard workers' health and allow them to manage the Fairtrade Award. The standards prohibit forced labor and child labor”¹³⁹.



Figure 3.29. Fairtrade Logo

In this regard, in 1995 Coop introduced a line of products called “Solidal” in order to offer development opportunities to the producers who are in conditions of difficulty and disadvantage. In fact, all of the Solidal line's goods are purchased directly from producers in developing countries, removing the need for intermediaries and enabling producers in underdeveloped areas to grow independently. Producers may expect stable rates, preferential pre-financing, and long-term purchase contracts thanks to the Fairtrade certification¹⁴⁰.

Coop was the first large-scale retail trade in Italy to offer certified Fairtrade products on its shelves. Among the goods of the Solidal line which are awarded the Fairtrade certification, we can mention tea, coffee and roses. They come from around 50 cooperatives and producer groups operating in over 20 developing countries¹⁴¹.

¹³⁹ <https://www.fairtrade.it/come-funziona-fairtrade/gli-standard-fairtrade/>

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.e-coop.it/prodotti-coop/solidal>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.fairtrade.it/prodotti/banane/coop/>

Today on the Coop shelves there are more than 100 private label products with one of the Fairtrade labels. As a matter of fact, Fairtrade labels not only include the black one in the Figure 3.15 above, but also another one which is colored in white.



Figure 3.30. Other logos recognized as Fairtrade Labels

As it can be noticed in the picture above, Fairtrade cocoa in breakfast cereals, for example, has these white labels, indicating that the ingredient written on the side was purchased as Fairtrade. It varies from the black Fairtrade Label, which shows that all Fairtrade-certified ingredients are available¹⁴². The Fairtrade white label is, thus, present on Coop products in confectionery products as, for example, snacks, wafer etc etc.

Coop advertises both on its social media platforms and on its official website the line in order to educate customers toward an equal and ethic purchase journey. As a matter of fact, Coop shared both on its official Facebook account, in the occasion of the week of Fairtrade, a video which asks the following words to the recipients: “Will you buy a product which is good for everyone? If you buy Fairtrade, a lot of people will live better. When you buy, think about it. Money well spent with Solidal Coop”.

The advertisement repeated many times the 2nd person indexical “you” to speak directly to the consumers and to the heart of people since they are asked to make a responsible choice both for the environment that surrounds them and for those who have worked to produce the goods that they can find on the shelves of the supermarkets. In addition, the closing sentence, “Money well spent” has a double interpretation. In fact, it can be read as

¹⁴² <https://www.fairtrade.it/marchi/marchi-di-ingrediente-fsi/>

“Money spent well for the quality of products”, but also “Money spent to make a good action”: this is another example of how experts in communication build commercials thanks to word puns.

Furthermore, even if the video lasts only eighteen seconds, it manages to convey the desired message thanks to paralinguistic devices. As a matter of fact, the compelling background music punctuates the alternation of sentences written in capital letters with photos of products and people who work in developing countries. The choice of both the music and the character of the sentences is not casual: it is an ascending climax.

Thus, the video ends with an image portraying both the logos of the Solidal line and the Fairtrade one which are also reported in the packaging of products. As we already said throughout the present analysis, packaging is an important medium of communication since it is the first touchpoint that people encounter when choosing the products on the shelves of the supermarkets. Since certifications are to be found on packaging, the layout of the box must be designed in a such a way that consumers can easily recognize the logos which they remember and consider as credible.

In this regard, the brown color code is enhanced by a darker and more exotic tone at the pack system level. This color evokes feelings of safety and health, evoking associations with wood, stone, the hearth, and the Earth. The photographic images created for packaging communication are arranged such that the main product appears in color from the black and white backdrop below in the foreground. All of the photographic elements (backgrounds, containers, and decorations) were chosen to express the authenticity of the origins and, as a result, of the offer¹⁴³.

¹⁴³ <https://www.gdoweek.it/coop-offre-un-nuovo-look-per-la-propria-linea-solidal/>



Figure 3.31. Fairtrade logo on the pack of Solidal Line

In addition, as it can be noticed in the picture above, the packaging clearly emphasizes the logo of the line in the foreground which again is a further proof of the relevance of the visual language in communication. It, thus, represent two hands which seem to represent a handshake as if the brand wanted to highlight the reciprocal relationship of trust between them and the producers coming from the developing countries: the logo symbolizes a common commitment toward the improvement both of the world, and the environment, and also of the living and working conditions of the inhabitants of less advanced places. The logo, indeed, symbolically portrays the two hands which meet each other: Coop chose a visual which is part of human knowledge and memory thus leading to an easy recognition and comprehension of it by all those who encounter it on the packaging.

Furthermore, environmental communication must be based, as we saw in detail in the previous chapter, on the pillars of clarity, relevance, accuracy and transparency when providing information to the audience. As a matter of fact, Coop represents a good example of environmental communication also when posting on its social networks. Let us analyze the following picture taken from the official Instagram account of the brand.



Figure 3.32. Instagram post about Tea Fairtrade

As it can be noticed by the screenshot of the Instagram post above, the caption created by Coop communication experts complies with the standards that the environmental communication must observe. It, indeed, briefly describes the origin of the product and the process of collection which is developed by the harvesters of the Fairtrade community. In addition, the closing sentence “We are waiting for you in all the stores” is again accompanied by two emblematic symbols which characterize the brand identity that are the shopping cart and the world.

Organizations, as we said in a precedent section of this analysis, when communicating their environmental and sustainable commitment must not self-celebrate themselves and pursue the principle of modesty. On the other side, they must leave their customers or producers to talk in order not to incur in the risk of greenwashing sound phenomena. In this regard, Coop dedicates a space in its official website to the witnesses of producers which collaborate with them in the Fairtrade project. The following ones are just two of the examples which are reported online:

- “In our rose greenhouses there are many projects to conserve water and protect the environment. In this way we are able to ensure sustainable development for us and future generations. *Ester Munjiru, Ravine Karen Roses, Kenya.*”
- "In our country there was no tradition of cocoa fermentation. Thanks to Fairtrade we are now able to ferment cocoa and improve its quality. We have also managed to obtain organic certification for our products. All of this has improved our market position. Fair trade is truly important for the survival of our associates. *Isidoro de la Rosa, Conacado, Dominican Republic.*"¹⁴⁴

Another communication campaign which involves the Fairtrade certification is the one of the compostable capsules of coffee of the FiorFiore line. The Tintoretto Coop capsule,¹⁴⁵ indeed, completely supports this environmental strategy, and is now available in a new compostable material that allows you to throw the capsule (without separating its different parts) directly into the organic waste according to the Municipality's or collection service's conferment procedures.

This compostable material is made up of Mater-Bi, a versatile and innovative bioplastic created by Novamont, a leading international company in the sector of bioplastics and intermediates obtained thanks to the integration of chemistry, environment and agriculture, which promotes a model of bioeconomy understood not only as an efficient and sustainable use of renewable resources, but also as a factor of territorial regeneration.

Mater-Bi is made up of plant-based ingredients including corn starch and biodegradable polymers derived from both renewable and fossil-based raw materials. Certification bodies certify all MATER-BI grades in accordance with the most relevant European and international norms. MATER-BI has usage characteristics and properties that are very similar to conventional plastics, but it is also biodegradable and compostable, according to the European standard UNI EN 13432, which is the most relevant technical reference for material manufacturers, government agencies, composters and consumers.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.e-coop.it/prodotti-coop/solidal>

¹⁴⁵ <https://consumatori.e-coop.it/ecco-perche-la-nuova-capsula-da-caffe-coop-e-biodegradabile/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.novamont.com/mater-bi>

As it can be noticed in the following picture, verbal language is aided again through the visual one: the slogan of the campaign, “We give the environment a new imprint”, is realized through the drawing of a coffee bean as if it was a digital imprint.



Figure 3.33. Verbal and visual language for Coop Compostable Coffee Capsules

3.5. Packaging: verbal and visual language in action

Language, in all its forms, is also relevant when dealing with the packaging of products. As a matter of fact, it is the first touchpoint between consumers and the products and, for this reason, it must communicate the desired message in the right way, both thanks to the verbal language to be written on it and also thanks to the visual characteristics which compose it.

In this regard, Coop has been awarded at the "Call for the eco-design of packaging in the circular economy" promoted by Conai, "the National Packaging Consortium, a private

consortium that operates on a non-profit basis and it is a system that constitutes the response of private companies to a problem of collective interest, such as the environmental one, in compliance with the guidelines and objectives set by the political system¹⁴⁷”, which developed the “Call for Prevention” to offer financial benefits to businesses that want to invest in creative and environmentally friendly packaging solutions. The best results in terms of energy and water savings, as well as CO2 emissions reduction, obtained by participating companies through resource and production process optimization strategies, are evaluated and awarded. The problems of recycling, reuse, and therefore raw material conservation receive a lot of focus.¹⁴⁸

Let us analyze another campaign launched by Coop in order to show its concrete commitment to the sustainable issue.



Figure 3.34. Coop new packaging for bread

As it can be noticed in the written which accompanies the picture above, Coop says “We baked a plastic-free bag”. At the beginning it was a poly-laminated bag that joined the paper with a plastic (Polypropylene) or Pla (Bioplastic) window, then, after a petition on Change.org signed by 83000 adherences, Coop substituted the 30 million paper bags with a transparent window used for buying bread in the self-service counter or pre-wrapped with single-material carton bags.

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.conai.org/chi-siamo/cose-conai/>

¹⁴⁸ <https://blog.everli.com/it/premiato-impegno-coop-packaging-sostenibile/>

The slogan of the campaign “We baked plastic-free bags” is a perfect word pun which plays on irony to attract the attention of the recipients. As a matter of fact, the use of the verb “to bake” would be more suitable when dealing with the drafting of a cake recipe in a cookbook. However, Coop uses the verb “to bake” as a synonym of “to create”: the sentence “We created a plastic-free bag” would not have produced the same appealing effect. Thus, the word pun plays on the verb “to bake”, which is suitable for a bakery, applied to the invention of a sustainable packaging.

In addition, as it can be noticed by looking at the packaging in Figure 3.20, there is another sentence written by Coop which makes use of word pun to refer to something more. As a matter of fact, the utterance “Also our paper is transparent” wants to communicate to the customer base an implicit message. In this case, the adjective “transparent” does not only stand for a characteristic of the packaging, but also it wants to underline a pillar on which is based the organization philosophy. As it is reported on its official website “Coop provides both to its customers and to its affiliates access through labels or dedicated websites to information regarding raw materials, productive processes, ended products¹⁴⁹”. In this regard, Coop tries to narrate the story and the origin of every product in order to guarantee a high degree of transparency to let its customers trust the brand and make conscious and responsible choices. That is, it provides information and environmental education resources to its customers in order to raise their awareness of the environmental effects of individual and collective consumption choices.

In addition, to witness the constant commitment of Coop with respect to how products are packaged, the organization was among the first 107 signatories of the Circular Plastics Alliance in September 2019. As a matter of fact, since the launch of the campaign, Coop has articulated an action plan on packaging and products of defined categories, consistent with its policy, such as: the reduction of plastic from all branded products (absolutely and through the use of recycled), the non-use of microplastics added in branded cosmetics and detergents, the redesign of packaging so that they are recyclable, compostable or reusable, maintaining consistency and also refocusing on the historical 3R policy on the packaging.

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.e-coop.it/trasparente>

3.6. Other initiatives: Jova Beach Party and Lifegate Plasticless

Before Covid-19 pandemic, live concerts were part of our lives and constituted a big opportunity of communication window to be exploited by brands becoming partners of the events. In this regard, Coop participated in 2019 to the Jova Beach Party, the tour of concerts organized by Lorenzo Cherubini on the most famous Italian beaches, thus making known its commitment to environmental sustainability. Coop takes up the challenge of taking home an unforgettable experience, leaving the party places more beautiful than before, supporting the collection of bottles through volunteers who have taken care of the recovery to leave the beaches clean. For the occasion, the new Coop 500ml water bottle in 100% recyclable plastic was created in a special edition, made from 30% recycled plastic¹⁵⁰.

During the Jova Beach Party, nearly one million 500ml Coop water were distributed; today, those bottles have been transformed into sets of training shirts, each consisting of 20 t-shirts accompanied by a label with washing instructions and a sample of PET grit (demonstrating the intermediate step of the transformation from container original to t-shirt). The bottles collected by the Erica Cooperative, which collaborated throughout the recycling project at Jova Beach, have been regenerated thanks to the commitment of the Corepla Consortium, and the kits will be delivered by the Municipalities to the main selected youth sports associations operating in the locations where the Jova Beach Party was held¹⁵¹.

¹⁵⁰ Direzione Qualità, Prodotto a Marchio e Marketing e Comunicazione Coop Italia, *La forza del cambiamento, Rapporto sostenibilità e valori 2019*, Agra Editrice, p. 81

¹⁵¹ <https://www.tridentmusic.it/news/a-due-mesi-dallultima-tappa-del-jova-beach-party-la-consegna-ufficiale-delle-magliette-realizzate-con-le-bottigliette-di-plastica-riciclata-da-coop.html>

Let us analyze through the following pictures how Coop advertised on its social networks its participation at the Jova Beach Party.

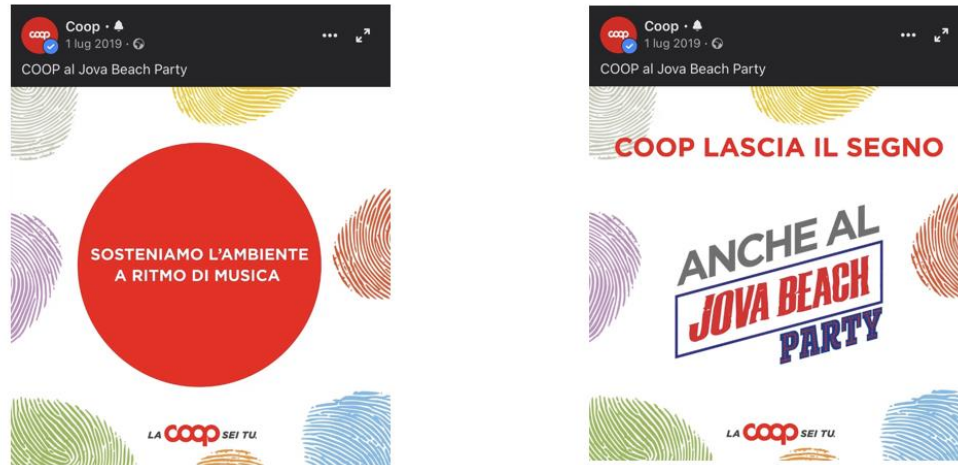


Figure 3.21. Frames of the video published on Facebook to announce the partnership between Coop and the Jova Beach Party

Coop, indeed, published on its official Facebook account a short video, from which I derive the screenshots above, with which it introduced to its followers the project realized in collaboration with the Jova Beach Party. In the first frame, as it is possible to notice in the figure above, the sentence says “We support the environment to the rhythm of music” and shows, once again, the relevance of language to advertising, especially to sustainable communication. As a matter of fact, thanks to the use of “we”, the invitation sounds more inclusive towards the target audience. In addition, the words selected show coherence both with Coop commitment towards the environment and also with the main aim of a concert, so that of amusing crowds with music.

Furthermore, the sentence in the second frame is aided by the visual context which contributes to render the meaning of the campaign. The utterance, indeed, is the following one: “Coop leaves the mark also at the Jova Beach Party”. As it can be noticed in figure 3.21, the imprints which are present as background of the post realize visually what it is said though the words of the slogan. Moreover, the colored imprints do not only want to literally represent what is written in capital letters by the company, but also, they can be read as a reminder of the “We give an imprint to the environment” campaign. Beside this

interpretation, Coop promises “to leave the mark”: by using such expressions, the company is making use of a linguistic device which is widely exploited in advertising and it is the so-called metaphor. As a matter of fact, a metaphor is “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them¹⁵²”. Taking into consideration the sentence that Coop proposes in the second frame of the video, “leave a mark” is used symbolically to make reference to the action of realizing concrete results to improve the environment and, therefore, the whole planet in which we live.

The project had been advertised also in the official Instagram account of the company: in the stories in evidence there is a dedicated section to the pictures of the various contests and activities in which people were asked to join.



Figure 3.22. Facebook post to show the result of the collection at the Jova Beach Party

Communication about sustainability, as we have seen throughout the present analysis, must be clear and informative about the achievements promised and, then, reached. As it can be noticed in the previous picture, Coop, indeed, after some months from the event, precisely on the 6th of December 2019, posted the result of their commitment during the tour. From the collection of the plastic bottles during the Jova Beach Tour, t-

¹⁵² Definition accessed at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor>

shirts for selected local team had been realized. Once again, the relevance of verbal and visual language is demonstrated as it can be read in the slogan reported in the t-shirt which is the following: “Recycling runs with you”. Even in this case, there is a linguistic figure of speech which contributes to create a sort of humourism effect. As a matter of fact, the action of recycling, which is the subject of the sentence on the t-shirt, is associated to the verb “to run” which, in turn, is something proper of human or living creatures.

Personifications are frequently used in advertisements to endow advertised objects with human qualities in order to make them more dramatic, interesting, attractive, and familiar to the potential customer. This is done to help the customer relate to the advertised personified objects and remember the slogan or advertisement¹⁵³.

Another initiative which must be mentioned is called “Our waters”: it consists in the installation of 25 Seabins throughout Italy to clean up seas, lakes and rivers from plastic and to promote conscious consumption. The meeting with the "PlasticLess" campaign promoted by LifeGate adds a further advancement to Coop's environmental objective.



Figure 3.23. Seabin installed by Coop

¹⁵³ P. Skorupa, T. Dubovičienė, *Linguistic characteristics of commercial and Social advertising slogans*, Philology, Educology, 2015, p.114

As anticipated previously in this chapter, Coop is among the signers of the Circular Plastics Alliance Declaration whose objective is that of promoting the reduction of plastics, increase the adoption of recycled plastic material and stimulate the market innovation. Thus, also with this campaign in collaboration with LifeGate, Coop demonstrates its primary commitment towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

Therefore, the installation of these Seabins will somehow contribute to reduce the amount of plastics present in the waters and which will later reach creatures in the sea thus becoming part of our food chain. As a matter of fact, a seabin is “a real basket that floats on the water's surface and 'captures' the trash it encounters, while a small pump expels the purified water. A system that can recover over 500 kilograms of plastic waste per year on average, including microplastics and microfibers. It can operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week and can pump up to 25,000 liters of water”¹⁵⁴.

Coop advertised the project in both its official Instagram and Facebook accounts. In the former, it posted the following picture to announce the partnership with LifeGate, but it posted also stories, which are saved in the evidence ones in their profile, to show the different stops of the “tour”.



Figure 3.24. Instagram post to announce Coop participation to Lifegate Plasticless project

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.e-coop.it/news/le-nostre-acque>

As it can be noticed in Figure 3.24, the visual context of the picture works as an introduction for people to understand the project undertaken by Coop. Indeed, words written on the photo are reinforced by the presence of the sea as a background. In addition, it is useful to analyze the copy of the post: “Coop participates to the project LifeGate PlaticLess: a sea of ideas against an ocean of plastic”. Also in this case, communication experts adopted a linguistic device, which is widely exploited in advertising to catch the attention of the recipients. As a matter of fact, it is possible to notice the metaphor “A sea of ideas” opposed to the “Ocean of plastic”. Thus, a metaphor is a figure of speech that suggests a meaning shift. It happens when the word in the sentence is replaced by another whose "meaning" or feature overlaps that of the original term, resulting in images with a strong expressive charge. In this case, Coop used the sentence “A sea of ideas” to mean that they have many initiatives to implement in order to implement their sustainable mission and to improve the whole planet.

In the official Facebook account, instead, the organization published several posts, as the same previously analyzed, in order to introduce the project to its affiliates, but it also posted articles which talked about it. In addition, Coop published a video showing the concrete results reached thanks to the installation of the Seabin.

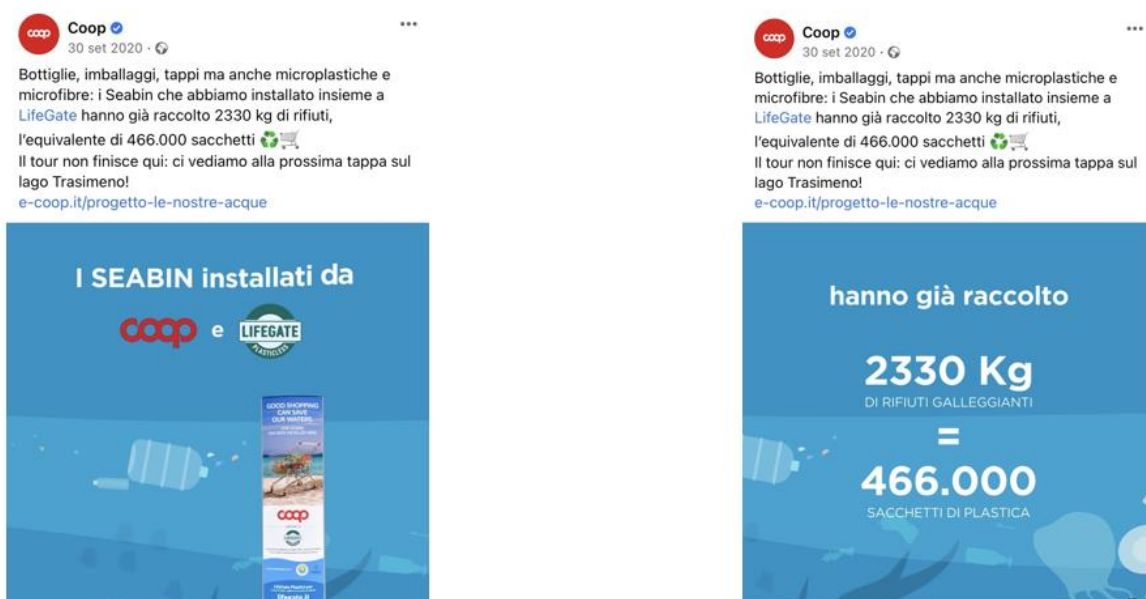


Figure 3.25. Frames taken from a video published on Facebook to inform consumers about the results achieved with Plasticless project

Communication about sustainability must, indeed, deliver true, verifiable, but especially verified information as the requisite of reliability recalls. In this regard, it is important to accompany the information communicated with numerical data which concretely witness the brand commitment and action taken to respect the promises asserted in their green claims. As it is shown by the previous photo frames taken by the video published by Coop in its official Facebook account, the organization writes in visible characters the results reached thanks to the installation of the various Seabins: “2330 kg of floating waste = 466000 plastic bags”.

CONCLUSION

Up to this point, the relevance and affecting power of language in its various forms have been analyzed in relation to advertising, especially with respect to a new emerging trend in communication, namely sustainability. Thanks to the theoretical models and studies conducted by the various remarkable linguists mentioned throughout the present dissertation, it has been possible to highlight the power of language in communication. As a matter of fact, several linguistic and non-linguistic devices influence advertising strategies.

In addition, the present analysis makes a comparison between commercial and sustainable communication. The results again show how language, which can be considered in its verbal and nonverbal form, affects the communication of desired contents.

Indeed, as it has been demonstrated, language plays a relevant role both in advertising in general and also in green marketing: many linguistic devices, both online and offline, can be used to come up with attention-getting slogans and commercial copy-texts. However, communication strategies must adapt to the advent of new paradigms. As a matter of fact, along the years, consumers have changed their “customer journeys” thus being more informed and aware of the impact of their consumption choices on the environment. Therefore, brands need to adapt to this change towards a more sustainable world and, consequently, also marketers must behave as such.

Communication of sustainability, as we have seen throughout this analysis, must maintain a balance between creativity and truthfulness and consistency in the messages it sends out. Thanks to the Coop Italia case history analyzed in the last chapter of the present dissertation, it is possible to demonstrate what we have previously said. As a matter of fact, the company taken into account is a successful example of communication of sustainability since it is able to deliver contents to its target audience with a clear and accurate language which complies with the pillars and Green Claims Guidance that must be respected in order not to incur in greenwashing problems caused by ambiguity of the language. Moreover, Coop also exploits the several linguistics creative tools such as metaphors, personification or irony that have been analyzed deeply in detail in the first

introductory chapter thus achieving the right balance between technicality of the language and creativity.

In addition, as we have seen, language comes in many other forms which include nonlinguistic devices, but rather symbols, icons and other visual tools which are used to grasp the attention of the recipients. Indeed, paralinguistic and visual context elements and strategies can be used to draw the audience's attention and convey important aspects of the marketed goods. The same observation needs to be taken into consideration by marketers which want to advertise sustainable products. As the case of Coop demonstrated, remarkable logos and symbols of certifications provided by third parties serve as communicating devices which ensure credibility and convince consumers of the truthfulness of the green claims asserted by companies.

To conclude, the widespread use of social media and other digital platforms has generated new contexts and environments that ask for a unique vocabulary, tone of voice, visual content, and other factors to be taken into consideration. Thus, learning how to communicate online is also critical for advertisers, as both branding and advertisement campaigns will benefit from the wide scope that digital areas now have.

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