



ARTICLE

## Effectiveness of radio spokesperson's gender, vocal pitch and accent and the use of music in radio advertising



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Received 20 June 2013; accepted 18 June 2014

Available online 6 August 2014

### JEL CLASSIFICATION

M1;  
M3

### KEYWORDS

Advertising effectiveness in radio;  
Spokesperson's voice;  
Spokesperson's gender;  
Vocal pitch (low–high);  
Accent;  
Background music

**Abstract** The aim of this study is to analyze how certain voice features of radio spokespersons and background music influence the advertising effectiveness of a radio spot from the cognitive, affective and conative perspectives. We used a  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$  experimental design in 16 different radio programs in which an ad hoc radio spot was inserted during advertising block. This ad changed according to combinations of spokesperson's gender (male–female), vocal pitch (low–high) and accent (local–standard). In addition to these independent factors, the effect of background music in advertisements was also tested and compared with those that only had words. 987 regular radio listeners comprised the sample that was exposed to the radio program we created. Based on the differences in the levels of effectiveness in the tested voice features, our results suggest that the choice of the voice in radio advertising is one of the most important decisions an advertiser faces. Furthermore, the findings show that the inclusion of music does not always imply greater effectiveness.

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## Introduction

The importance of radio as a means of communication is reflected in the upward trend in audience and the increasing number of radio listeners registered in 2012 by AIMC-EGM (Spanish Association of Communication Media Research-Study on Media Audiences). The number of listeners of bigger stations increased in over a million compared to the previous year (AIMC-EGM, 2012), reaching a historical maximum in Spain. However, this fact is not reflected in advertiser's media planning. In Spain, despite the radio being the second media with higher penetration, it still ranks number four in terms of advertising investment with 453.5 million Euros and 9.8% of investment earmarked for conventional media in 2012 (Infoadex, 2013). Its qualities as an advertising mean are well documented (Arens, 2008; Kelley and Jugenheimer, 2004; Belch and Belch, 2001), and the following are worth highlighting: (1) its high penetration (61.9%) (AIMC-EGM, 2012), which despite being a highly fragmented media allows high levels of coverage for different target audiences and has a great capability to segment audiences through several radio station convergence; (2) its ability to generate mental images in the audience (Soto Sanfiel, 2008; Bolls and Muehling, 2007) and to personalize the message, which in turn leads to greater effectiveness in terms of persuasion and action (Ingram and Barber, 2005); and (3) its high credibility as a means of information, which according to Metroscofia's latest study (Toharia, 2011) situates it among the top 10 institutions trusted by Spaniards, and this trust is transferred to its advertising messages (Muela Molina, 2010). However, this great communicative potential is underused by the agents involved in advertising communication and its high levels of audience and credibility are not reflected in advertising investment, particularly when everything seems to be limited to the online world. This situation requires studies that provide advertisers with the key to guarantee effectiveness in a media whose inherent qualities seem stable, unlike other means like television, or even the Internet, where changes in the environment affect the process of advertising planning making it more and more difficult to achieve the communication's targets.

Radio advertising effectiveness depends on several factors related to its macro and micro-structure (Rodero, 2011). On a micro-structural level, "phonoaesthetic function" has aroused great interest in the literature, as the effect of a message depends not only on the strict meaning of its words, but also on the way it is transmitted. Therefore, some studies focus on the role of phonoaesthetic function in the effectiveness of messages and analyze the oral expression transmitted through acoustic features, which can reveal information such as the shape, size, texture, movement of what is described as the spokespersons' physical appearance, mood and personality. Thus, by manipulating the features of phonoaesthetic function (vocal pitch, timbre, intensity, etc.) one can complete, alter or change the meaning of the same semantic content.

Apart from music, sound effect and silence, the spokesperson's voice is one of the main elements of advertising language used to transmit the sense and affective dimension of messages (Rodero, 2007). In advertising, where there is no visual component, the voice becomes crucial, as it is the only tool to evoke additional information (Krauss

et al., 2002). Therefore, the voice's nonverbal features have to be taken into account when the communication is persuasive, as established in a report from the Radio Advertising Bureau (RAB) (2013) that considers that the briefing should include the type of voice intended to use. In this line, Whipple and McManamon (2002) highlight that choosing a spokesperson is one of the most important decisions faced by an advertiser, where it is of utmost interest to identify the voice characteristics that can enhance advertising effectiveness.

The literature on advertising has dealt with both the importance of the voice and its characteristics through content analysis (Rodero, 2011; Muela Molina, 2010; Perona Páez, 2007), but the same has not been done with the analysis of its advertising effectiveness. That is why the aim of this paper is to identify and analyze the factors regarding the vocal element in radio spots that have an influence on their effectiveness in the cognitive, affective and conative levels.

More specifically, we intend to (1) evaluate how certain voice features affect the evaluation of a spokespersons and their voice, and (2) analyze how these features affect radio advertising effectiveness using cognitive (unaided recall, aided recall and recognition), affective (liking, attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand) and conative measures (intention to act). Via an experimental design, we analyzed the micro-structural qualities of the voice regarding the phonoaesthetic function, namely vocal pitch, gender and accent of the spokesperson. In addition, given the importance of music in the advertising industry as a generator of emotions and thus as a factor which can positively influence effectiveness, this paper also deals with the influence of music on effectiveness.

## Background and hypotheses

There are two closely linked lines of investigation in the literature aimed at identifying the qualities of the radio as a means of advertising. The line which has drawn more attention analyzes the ability of a sound message to stimulate the creation of mental images in the listener, as opposed to audiovisual media, where the inclusion of an image limits the possibility of activating the receiver's imagination (Bolls and Lang, 2003; Bolls and Muehling, 2007; Potter and Callison, 2009; Potter and Choi, 2006). The second line focuses on the factors affecting their effectiveness, not only on a macro-level, mainly through the study of serial position (the position of the spot within the advertising block) analyzed by Rodero (2011), advertising density and the effects of primacy and recency contrasted by Riebe and Dawes (2006) and then analyzed by Potter et al. (2008) but also on a micro-structural level, where this paper is framed and further developed. Generally, when dealing with advertising effectiveness people refer to the ability of the advert to achieve its advertising goals and it is measured within the framework of a model on response to advertising. There is no single universally accepted model of advertising effectiveness, but rather a number of different models which deal with the same process from different perspectives and which take into account the influence of a great number of variables in the process (Beerli and Martín, 1999). These models contemplate a multi-stage advertising response process with

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