

THE MIND SPEAKS:

The effect of radio ads on the brain



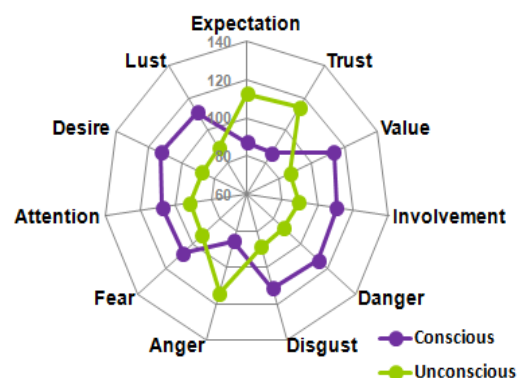
For the first time in history neuro science has been used for researching the impact of radio ads on the brain. For this research, 538, Mindshare and a neuromarketing agency scanned the brain activity of 25 male subjects aged between 20 and 49, all listeners of 538. While laying in the fMRI scanner they listened to radio ads. They believed they were participating in a language study and were asked to carry out tasks with letters. One task kept their attention away from the ads only slightly while a more difficult task simulated the situation of radio listening as a background activity. This allowed a conscious and an unconscious situation to be created. 32 different commercials were tested with different characteristics. This also gave insights about the effectiveness of humor, sound logos, visual transfer and about the differences between tactical ads and brand ads. This research gives us insights which advertisers, media agencies and sales houses can use.

The results

1. Radio Works, both consciously and unconsciously

The way an ad enters the brain (consciously or unconsciously) determines strongly the way it is processed. During conscious listening the listener weighs the value of the facts in the commercial. During unconscious listening the brain is busy with something else and has less capacity to evaluate the arguments given by the commercial and trusts the ad based on prior knowledge of the brand. In other words: it is easier to activate the brand promise of the product in the brain. Also, the listener is 'off guard' as he is not aware that a commercial message is being received. It's not all positive as expected there is more irritation when auditive stimuli are distracting from a difficult task.

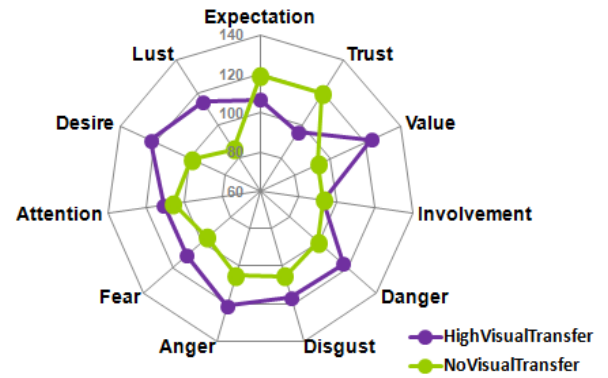
i Brand ads have to create a positive brand awareness. So it may be better to advertise at moments that the listener is busy and 'off guard'. Sales driven ads could benefit more from a conscious contact as more rational arguments must be transferred. Conscious contact means more capacity to process the offer.



2. Visual Transfer is really Emotional Transfer

When there is Visual Transfer the radio ad fits a corresponding TV ad. Listening to the radio ad will bring back the image of the TV ad in the brain, according to established assumptions. However this research shows that this is not how transfer works. The transfer doesn't take place in the visual part of the brain (visual cortex), nor in memory areas (hippocampus). Instead, emotions connected to the TV ad, are recalled in the brain when exposed to the radio ad, whether they are positive or negative. This means that TV ads that were not strong on the relevant emotions are better not used for visual/emotional transfer.

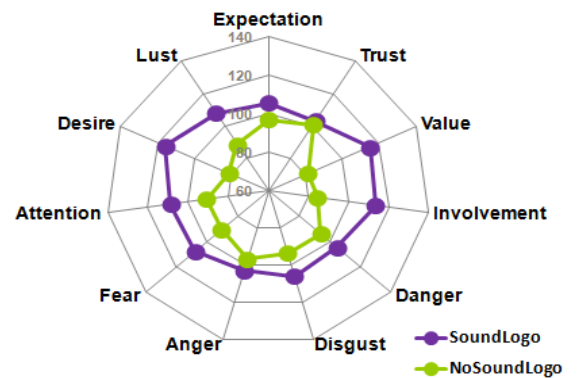
📌 These findings suggest that radio is much more than expected a relevant medium for building brands, extending or intensifying the effect initially built by TV.



3. Sound logo increases effect

A sound logo increases the potential effect of the commercial. There is a better reaction on attention, emotional response and effect. This goes for all brands but especially strong well-known brands.

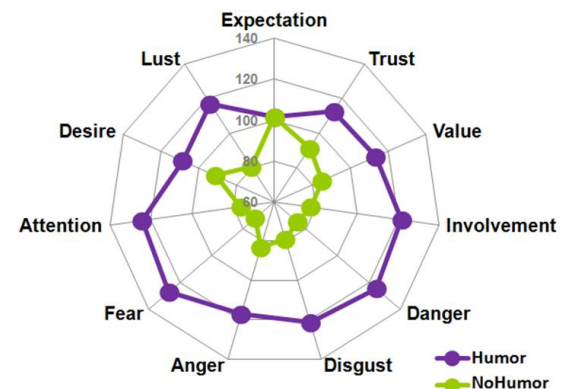
📌 Therefore, all advertisers should use a sound logo, for any media channel with an auditive component. This includes TV and pre-rolls.



4. Humor increases the attentiveness but also polarises.

Commercials with humor are given more attention and show more activity in the brain than commercials without humor. Commercials with humor show extreme results, positive and negative. In terms of effectiveness, humor may not always be helpful.

📌 If primary awareness and attention are the objectives, humor is a great instrument. For brand building campaigns it may be better to stay away from humor.



5. Action gets more reaction than brand advertising

A commercial with a concrete call to action gets more attention and triggers the expected reward and other positive dimensions more easily than ads for brand building purposes. This is probably because of the 'what's in it for me' effect: listeners can easily judge the relevance of the message in their personal situation. This results in lower 'advertising suspicion' too.

📌 Promotional campaigns can benefit from conscious contacts more, as rational arguments need to be transferred and judged. Brand building ads benefit most when the brain is 'off guard' and implicit brand images can easily be transferred. Emotional transfer with a TV ad and the use of a soundlogo greatly enhance this effect.

