

UNIVERSITÀ PONTIFICIA SALESIANA – ROMA

IUSVE ISTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO SALESIANO VENEZIA

Aggregato alla Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione – UPS



MASTER'S DEGREE IN
WEB MARKETING AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

The evolution of emotional marketing: the "Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response" (ASMR) phenomenon as a marketing tool for creating unique and memorable experiences for target audiences.

Candidate: Elisa Masiero
Supervisor: Walter Macorig

2021-2022

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Abstract

This project focuses on the phenomenon of Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response or more commonly called ASMR. This is a phenomenon that has been given a specific name since 2010, after several years of uncertainty.

This is because, prior to that year, the subject of ASMR wasn't something so simple and straightforward to explain and understand. However, after the creation of several groups of people who felt they would benefit from this phenomenon, it was decided to gain a better understanding of its characteristics and potential.

Therefore, scientific tests were conducted, and are still being conducted, to further investigate the topic, as it is thought that it could become a scientific phenomenon given its ability to cause both physical and emotional benefits to people who are 'sensitive' to it, helping them to overcome personal difficulties.

This study will explore what ASMR is and its connection to the discipline of marketing.

In addition, it will be investigated whether people who are not sensitive to the phenomenon, to whom it normally causes annoyance and irritation, may, on the contrary, become sensitive after seeing ASMR commercials.

The study of the phenomenon related to the world of marketing and advertising will eventually lead to the production of guidelines for the construction of ASMR marketing campaigns for all those brands that want to differentiate themselves from their competitors

Introduction

During a sleepless night due to anxieties and stress accumulated in the previous days, I typed into the Youtube application on my cell phone the words 'Relaxing Sounds for Sleep'.

Among the first choices of videos, alternating with nature, are ASMR videos. I see on the cover a young girl who with her words promises to put me to sleep, so I open the video, watch it, listen to it, and in no time I fall deeply asleep.

Intrigued, from that evening I start looking for information about this phenomenon unknown to me, before that moment, and I begin to understand that many people feel and perceive the same sensations as me: well-being, relaxation, tranquility and chills.

ASMR is a phenomenon that has always existed but it was only in 2010 that research and studies on it began and, more than anything else, it was given a name.

Its history does not follow the traditional canons in which science discovers the phenomenon and then, after several studies, it is presented to the community, but rather the other way around: which led individuals, in the early years, to feel totally disoriented when they perceived sensations due to a phenomenon that was not known and discussed.

ASMR therefore formed a community, a community of curious people who love all the gestures and elements that are part of the phenomenon and cause physical and mental well-being in them.

The idea of discovering in depth and detail this new and unexplored phenomenon prompted me to create this thesis research in which I tried to describe it as best I could.

While researching the phenomenon on the various social channels, I discover the existence of ASMR marketing and a number of brands that have begun to want to learn about and explore the topic, departing from traditional advertisements to give viewers new and unusual sensations.

But in addition to creating a sensitive and active community, ASMR is also divisive. Indeed, there are many individuals to whom ASMR does not appeal and who even perceive the phenomenon as something negative and annoying.

Therefore, I asked myself some questions, "Why are some people 'sensitive' to the phenomenon and others 'not sensitive'?", "Why do some people have a totally different perception of these sounds than others?"

In my research I delve into elements of psychology and neuromarketing in which we determine how everyone's brain reacts differently to certain sensory stimuli.

And that is why many scholars and researchers have been engaged in solving puzzles about the phenomenon that, many believe, can become scientific.

Specifically, several topics having ASMR marketing as their focus will be addressed during my research.

The first chapter will discuss the evolution of marketing, from 1929 to the present, going through all its phases to finally understand how brands have approached it, changing the way they approach their audiences, which has also evolved at each stage.

In the second and third chapters, I address the topic of ASMR in detail, what it is, its history, who creates and what ASMR videos are like, what are the foundational elements to remember, its peculiar characteristics, and the gains of those who decide to take this path for passion or work.

From the fourth chapter, the scientific issue is introduced, in which the tests and research conducted by researchers with, attached, their findings are investigated. The focus will then return to the topic of marketing and its connection to the human brain.

The crux of the thesis research takes place in the fifth chapter in which various advertisements, and ASMR productions, will be exposed, some of which will then be taken up within the anonymous questionnaire created to answer an important question: 'Can people who are not sensitive to ASMR become ASMR-sensitive by listening to and watching ASMR advertisements?'

Some of the answers collected will be useful for the seventh and final chapter, in which I will go on to suggest guidelines for all those brands that want to include within their campaigns the phenomenon of ASMR, and the strategic actions they should take to create relaxation-based marketing strategies.

CHAPTER 1: The Evolution of Emotional Marketing

1.1 From traditional Marketing

The origins of marketing date back to 1910, when the first industry bodies began to be established, such as the National Association of Teachers of Advertising, composed of professors and scholars in the discipline.

The real expansion of marketing, however, occurs in 1929, the year of the Great Depression, initiated by the Wall Street stock market crash on October 29, and the birth of "The American Way of Life"-a new understanding of life and commerce.

At that time people began to look at marketing from a different perspective: large retailers were studied and the first basic principles of marketing were codified.

Marketing comes from the English verb 'to market,' with the meaning of 'to place in the market' or, more precisely: 'to be in the market.'

When we talk about marketing, we are talking about a process that is closely linked to history and constantly evolving with it, describing markets and the people within and participating in them: businesses, consumers, stakeholders.

This is precisely why there is no single definition of marketing, as, over time, the word has become loaded with different shades of meaning, having to adapt to changes in the socio-economic environment.

Initially defined as 1.0, marketing was product and sales oriented, which led to overproduction relative to the demand generated by the market.

In the second phase, identified as 2.0, companies take a step forward by understanding that it is important to inform the public about the dynamics of production and product characteristics to try to make them more aware. From that moment on, consumption becomes massive and companies, despite only talking about the product, production and aiming at an undifferentiated community, understand the importance of listening to their audience to understand their needs and desires and define production according to precise rules so as to avoid overproduction.

It was during those years, precisely in 1954, that psychologist Abraham Maslow in his book 'Motivation and personality'¹, categorized by means of a pyramid the needs of people. The pyramid consists of 5 floors, and only once the lower floor is satisfied can one reach the next one.

At the base of the pyramid are human physiological needs, then, moving up the pyramid, are the needs for security, socialization, esteem and finally self-actualization.

Human physiological needs are the biological requirements for human survival, e.g., air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, sleep. If these needs are not met, the human body cannot function optimally, which is why Maslow considered them the most important.²

The security needs, which became salient after the first, concern the need for emotional security, financial security and law.

The third level is the social level and concerns feelings of belonging to a group and creating interpersonal relationships.

Esteem needs are the fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy and include self-esteem, achievement, reputation and respect from others.

The last level includes needs for self-actualization, personal growth, and ambition- Maslow describes this level as the desire to achieve everything one wants and become the best one can be.

¹ Maslow A. H., *Motivation and personality*, Manhattan, Harper & Row Publishers Inc, 1954, pp. 35-59

² SimplyPsychology, «Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs», URL: simplypsychology.org/maslow.html (08.07.2022).

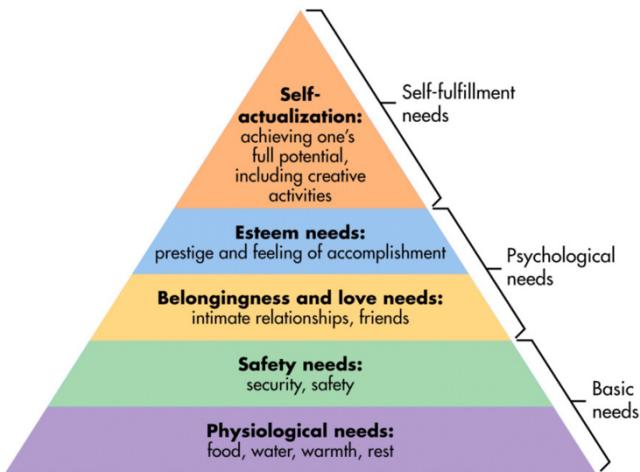


Fig. 1: Maslow's pyramid of needs ³

In 1967, the father of modern marketing Philip Kotler first explained in his book "Marketing Management" what marketing is. He writes, "Marketing is the identification and satisfaction of human and social needs."⁴

This definition, however, can be better redefined depending on the role marketing plays or the point of view from which one wants to analyze it. For example, if the focus is on the role marketing plays within society, then Kotler states that it is: "the social process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need through the creation, supply and exchange of valuable products and services."⁵

Since that time, many definitions have been formulated, including one created in 1985 by AMA, American Marketing Association, which brings together marketing professionals and experts. The definition read, "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of goods, ideas, and services designed to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals."⁶

³ Fonte: simplypsychology.org/maslow.html (08.07.2022).

⁴ Keller K. L., Kotler P., *Marketing Management*, Londra, Pearson, 2015 (prima ed. 1967), p. 27

⁵ The marketers club, «PHILIP KOTLER: IL PADRE DEL MARKETING MODERNO», 2015, URL: marketersclub.it/philip-kotler-il-padre-del-marketing-moderno/ (08.07.2022)

⁶ Bonomi A., «Una nuova definizione del marketing», 2013, URL: educationmarketing.it/strategia-di-marketing/nuova-definizione-marketing/ (08.07.2022)

Product, Price, Place, Promotion are the "4 P's" of the marketing mix, a concept introduced by Jerome McCarthy in the early 1960s and later taken up and evolved by Kotler, who shifts the focus from the company to the customer, creating a new dimension of marketing: the 3.0. He lays out the new concept in 2010 in his book "Marketing 3.0" in which he changes the vision of marketing from the 4Ps to the 4Cs: Consumer, Cost, Conviniience, Communication.

In the new model, the focus is shifted from the company to the customer, and the product becomes capable of responding concretely to the customer's needs.⁷

Also associated with this new model is the American Marketing Association, which, in 2013, renews the definition of marketing for the third and final time, explaining that: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions and processes to create, communicate, deliver and exchange offerings that have value to consumers, customers, partners and society at large."⁸

Businesses that apply Marketing 3.0 aim to satisfy the consumer and possess missions, visions and values aimed at providing real benefit and solutions to an audience that is, unlike Marketing 1.0 and 2.0, differentiated according to specific needs.

Marketing 3.0 elevates the concept of marketing, related to product and production, to the sphere of emotion, aspirations and values. In addition, the development of technology and social networks has made the consumer more participatory and immersed in the processes of creating products and services, becoming from consumer to prosumer: producer and consumer.

Kotler, in his book⁹, founds the ten commandments of Marketing 3.0 that go to outline the essence of this new model that changes the vision of marketing forever:

1. Love your customers and respect your competitors;
2. Attentive to change, ready to change;
3. Protect your name, be clear about your identity;

⁷ The marketers club, "PHILIP KOTLER: IL PADRE DEL MARKETING MODERNO", 2015 URL: marketersclub.it/philip-kotler-il-padre-del-marketing-moderno/ (08.07.2022)

⁸ Lepore A. (a cura di Taccolini M.), *Lineamenti di Storia del Marketing*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2009, pp. 233-237

⁹ Kotler P., Kartajaya H., Setiawan I., *Marketing 3.0: From Products to Customers to the Human Spirit*, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, 12 aprile 2010

4. Customers are diverse: address first and foremost those to whom you can offer the greatest benefits;
5. Always offer the most at a fair price;
6. Always be helpful and spread the good news.
7. Get a clientele, maintain it and increase it.
8. Whatever your business is, it is a service;
9. Constantly refine your business processes in terms of quality, cost and results.
10. Gather all the appropriate information, but then make decisions based on common sense.

Since 2008, when the first social network was introduced, social media has been taking more and more space in every person's life, and businesses see the opportunity to grow and evolve through the Internet. Regarding this, Kotler publishes, in 2017, 'Marketing 4.0' with the aim of defining a new era for companies, in which marketing activities work on both online and offline planes.

The name 'Marketing 4.0' indicates, therefore, a new way of relating by companies, which sees brands 'humanize' themselves in order to establish an emotional connection with the customer, but above all to communicate 360 degrees through a multichannel approach.¹⁰

The last Marketing model defined by Kotler was in 2021 when he published the book "Marketing 5.0. Technology for humanity." He defines it as, "[...] the application of technologies that mimic humans to create, communicate, deliver and increase value along the Consumer Journey"¹¹, demonstrating how technology is increasingly relevant for companies to transfer and convey value.

Accompanying the evolutions of marketing over time are the different approaches of marketing. The transactional marketing model, the first, coincides with the very concept of marketing as it was developed in its earliest formulations, at the turn of the first and second decades of the last century, at the initiative of some large American companies.

¹⁰ Digital Coach, «Marketing 4.0: evoluzione nell'era digitale», URL: digital-coach.com/it/blog/case-studies/marketing-4-0/#Marketing_40_definizione (08.07.2022)

¹¹ Kotler P., Kartajaya H., Setiawan I., *Marketing 5.0: Technology for Humanity*, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, 2021

It suited the early evolution of marketing in which companies produced goods and focused exclusively on mass sales. Later, as the competitive environment, society and consumer behavior changed, the transactional marketing approach related exclusively to production and sales shifted to a relationship marketing model focused on building transparent, lasting and loyal relationships with the public.

Relationship marketing aims to develop and sustain relationships with existing customers rather than acquire new ones. This is because the cost of acquiring new customers is higher than the cost of retaining current customers, and most importantly, a satisfied customer repurchases from the same company over and over again and spreads a positive image.¹²

Next comes relationship marketing: experiential marketing (see Chapter 1.2) and unconventional marketing. The latter aims to unhinge traditional advertisements by choosing unconventional strategies that attract attention and stay in the consumer's mind.

Unconventional marketing comes in many forms, the most widely used and well-known of which are: guerrilla marketing (one attracts the viewer with surprise effect when he or she least expects it in common places), ambient marketing (takes full advantage of urban spaces and the elements they offer to convey the message of the advertising campaign, appropriating and modifying it according to one's needs of the moment), ambush marketing (a brand gains visibility by taking advantage of a specific event but having no ties to it), viral marketing (unconventional marketing strategies designed to go viral on the web), street marketing (unconventional marketing strategy created on the streets of a city and privileges the body and action of performers as tools).

1.2 To Experiencial Marketing

Experiential marketing, unlike traditional marketing which primarily attaches importance to the characteristics of a product or service, turns its attention to the customer and to making their consumer experience unique.

¹² Glossariomarketing.it, «Marketing relazionale», URL: glossariomarketing.it/significato/marketing-relazionale/ (08.07.2022)

The term 'experience' is an event that originates from a response to a stimulus. It involves the human being and often arises from participation in or observation of an event (whether real, virtual or fantastic).

The way of experiencing is not universal, but changes from culture to culture, even from individual to individual.

Culture, therefore, is closely linked to experience, and as B Schmitt, professor at Columbia University in New York and one of the leading experts on customer experience, said, "Experiences are the making of culture."¹³

This paradigm shift on the part of individuals, compared to the early 1900s, has as its most immediate translation the orientation to *carpe diem*, to "everything and now," and the pursuit of pleasure, which is embodied in the pursuit of states of well-being and happiness.

According to Fabris, this evolution was born in the 1980s with hedonism and has permeated to the present day. In his book, he relates that the pursuit of immediate gratification, pleasurable sensations and physical fulfillment now constitutes the constant structure of the action orientations of increasingly large segments of the population. Instead of otherworldly happiness, 'the hypothesis of an all-worldly happiness' understood as a summation of many small pleasures to be pursued in daily life is gaining ground.

In marketing, there are 4 domains of experience that companies can pursue to bring fulfilling feelings to their audiences.

These realms are arranged in a Cartesian plane divided by two dimensions: the vertical one indicates the consumer's participation (which can be active or passive) and the horizontal one their relationship and/or connection to the experience (psychologically absorbed or totally immersed).

Combining the two dimensions creates the 4 domains, each with different characteristics.

¹³ Schmitt B., *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT, and RELATE to Your Company and Brands*, New York, The Free Press, 1999

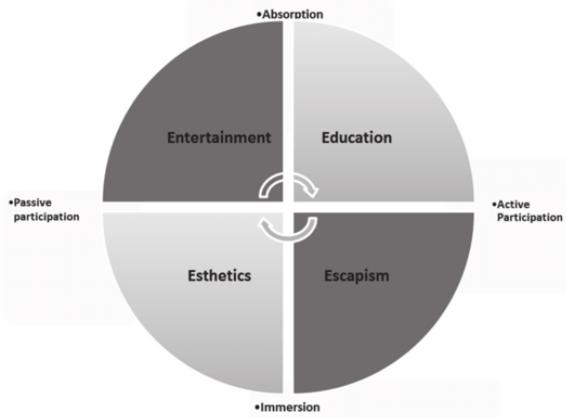


Fig. 2: 4 domains of experience¹⁴

Starting from the left, the first level found is "Entertainment" in which the audience is passive and absorbed: the classic movie theater experience in which they watch an assorted film without having the opportunity to interrupt the experience.

Continuing clockwise, the second area "Educational" involves active participation by the audience even without being an integral part of the experience. The third, "Escapist," offers a complete experience to the viewer who not only observes but also participates and is part of the experience itself.

An example of an Escapist experience was created by Bamboola¹⁵, a 28,000-square-foot entertainment center for children from infancy to about nine years old, which opened in 1997 in San Jose, California. It is the first interactive cooking area for children, where they can prepare the food they will later eat, and the first outdoor adventure garden that includes an excavation where they can search for dinosaur bones: animal to reconstruct once the remains are found.

¹⁴ Fonte: researchgate.net/figure/The-four-realms-of-an-experience_fig1_312950279 (11.07.2022)

¹⁵ White Hutchinson, «Bamboola», URL: whitehutchinson.com/leisure/bamboola.shtml (11.07.2022)

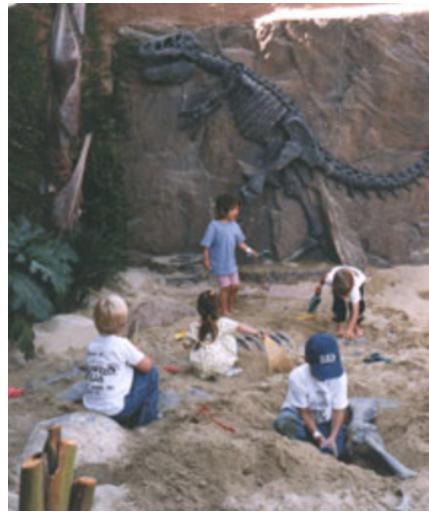


Fig. 3: Bamboola¹⁶

Finally, the last area is "Esthetic" in which the viewer is passive but immersed in a stimulating environment: 3D cinema.

To ensure and seek a complete experience what companies should do is to involve all 4 domains of the experience.

In 1998 Pine and Gillmore¹⁷, the founders of Strategic Horizons LLP, a company dedicated to designing new business ventures and supporting managers in taking on a more creative and innovative worldview, predicted that experience design would become a commercial art.

As a result, they identified five key principles to use in designing experience design:

1. Theme the experience.

To enable people to have a complete experience, a space with a unified storyline must be built and designed. The most famous is Disneyland, which has created a remarkable reputation by optimizing the user experience. As a themed city, it includes eight independent themed areas that offer visitors a complete fairy tale world experience.

2. Harmonize impressions with positive cues.

¹⁶ Fonte: whitehutchinson.com/leisure/bamboola.shtml (11.07.2022)

¹⁷ Pine, J. B., Gilmore J. H., *L'economia delle esperienze*, Milano, Etas, 2000

The designer should design enough cues for a space or product so that people can find their own way to experience the object. The most important point of this principle is that the cues be consistent with the user's desired experience.

3. Eliminate negative ones.

Any cues that are not related to the theme would be a negative clue that could distract the consumer. Therefore, it is also important to consider eliminating cues that do not relate to or detract from the theme.

4. Mix in memorabilia.

People are willing to pay a higher price for an item that reminds them of an experience. Therefore, a company would satisfy consumers' pleasure by providing them with a service or product paired with a memorable event.

5. Involve all five senses.

Experience is an intangible thing that exists in people's minds. Stimulating the five senses can enhance it and turn it into something memorable.¹⁸

1.3 Strategic Experiential Modules

In the same years, Bernd H. Schmitt¹⁹ divides human experience into five different types, each with its own inherent structures and processes, which he calls SEM, Strategic Experiential Modul.

The strategy is to find the experience that best helps people's experiential process.

Schmitt defines these 5 elements, calling them modules, with the aim of combining them together whenever possible to create a memorable experience for customers.

The five strategic experiential modules are: Sense, Feel, Think, Act, Relate.

1.3.1 Sense

¹⁸ Silvia in london, «Five key experience-design principles & My experience (BS W1) », URL: silviainlondon.wordpress.com/2016/01/17/five-key-experience-design-principles-my-experience-bs-w1/ (11.07.2022)

¹⁹ Ferraresi, M., Schmitt, B., *Marketing Esperienziale*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2006

As the word itself says, the 'Sense' experience module seeks to activate sensory experiences through sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell.

By stimulating the 5 senses, it is possible to give the consumer a memorable experience. Creating a multisensory experience can convey a pleasant memory that will last longer in the consumer's mind, prompting them to repeat the act of purchase.

An example of sense-related marketing is that developed by Illy, the famous coffee company, which, through its advertising campaigns and corporate communications, aims to delight and activate its customers' senses.²⁰

1.3.2 Feel

The experiential module 'Feel' targets the inner feelings of consumers, seeking to activate affective experiences. These are emotional experiences that attract the consumer from within: that is why advertisements of this type are favored.

An example of Feel happened with Red Bull Stratos, the most famous and most watched space launch of all time with the parachutist Baumgartner who, live, exits from inside his space capsule to travel at a speed of 833.9 km/h and touch the earth's ground. With this experience Redbull once again conveyed its positioning: to be the energy drink brand that is present at every sporting event, especially extreme ones.

1.3.3 Think

'Think' marketing is used in a special way for high-tech products and is mainly aimed at public funders and the business community.

It aims to stimulate the consumer's imagination and creativity. It is related to surprise, curiosity and provocation.

An example of a think experience is the one offered by IKEA in which it tells, in three 40-second and six 10-second commercials, the story of a pretentious designer named Van

²⁰ Silvestri A., «Il Marketing Esperienziale Sense Feel Think Act Relate», URL: endelab.com/il-marketing-esperienziale-sense-feel-think-act-relate/ (13.07.2022)

den Puup, an elite designer like so many, who believes that design should be exclusive, for the few and therefore very expensive. IKEA with these ads is keen to expose its business idea: "We believe that well-designed furniture should be affordable for everyone. The idea of creating an opposite universe in which elite designers reflect the antithesis of Ikea's values gives us a unique and compelling means of refreshing the brand and continuing to reinforce Ikea's distinct and irreverent status in the furniture market."²¹

1.3.4 Act

'Act' marketing is linked to the lifestyles (demographics and psychographics) of consumers and seeks to understand their respective needs to guide their future choices.

Action-oriented experiences offer patterns of behavior to which each customer can adapt, and this allows the individual's experiential dimension to be interacted with, strengthening the communication and relationship between brand and customer.

Through Nike's 'Just do it' campaign, the concept can be fully understood.

With the claim 'Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything,' Nike urges ordinary people to compare themselves to champion athletes and take positions in life, just like the face of the campaign Colin Kaepernick. The former National Football League quarterback made history for kneeling during the U.S. national anthem that precedes the start of football games in protest of discrimination against ethnic minorities in the United States.²²

1.3.5 Relate

'Relate' marketing combines aspects of the four points previously listed.

It is a much deeper approach, as it relates the individual to his ideal self, to other individuals or to other cultures.

²¹ Grant J., «Pompous designer rails against Ikea in new ad campaign», URL: campaignlive.co.uk/article/pompous-designer-rails-against-ikea-new-ad-campaign/223726 (13.07.2022)

²² Altieri A., «La campagna Nike che sta facendo il giro del mondo, spiegata», URL: ninemarketing.it/2018/09/10/nike-sfida-trump-la-nuova-campagna-just-do-it/ (13.07.2022)

The emblem of Relate is Harley Davidson; it is not just a motorcycle brand, but a way of life: in fact, consumers consider Harley products as part of their identity.²³

1.4 The Emotional Marketing

Linked to experience and experiential modules, emotional marketing plays a major role. Etymologically, the word emotion is derived from the Latin verb 'moveo,' 'to move,' with the addition of the prefix 'e-' to indicate that implicit in every emotion is a tendency to act. Goleman, in his book 'Emotional Intelligence,' argues that emotions are impulses to act, that is, plans of action with which evolution has endowed us to handle life's emergencies in real time.²⁴

Moreover, emotions are shaped by personal experience and the social culture in which one is immersed.²⁵

There are two types of emotions: primary emotions and secondary emotions.

The former is innate and found in any other human being (fear, sadness, surprise, disgust, contempt, anger, and joy), as recounted by American psychologist Elkman in 2008 after his trip to Papua New Guinea. The aim of the study was to test the possibility of the existence of the same basic emotions for all living individuals.

And so it was: Elkman photographed the highlighted expression on a tribe member's face as he ate a novel food, and behind the photo he wrote, "The photograph illustrates that humans are disgusted by the sight and smell of food that I considered appetizing."²⁶

Primary emotions over time develop and change with social interaction going on to create the secondary emotions: more complex and activated by external elements.

All our actions initially come through the emotional mind, which is automatic, unconscious and difficult to control, which is why 95 percent of purchasing decisions are

²³ Marketing col cuore blog, «Marketing Esperienziale», URL: marketingcolcuore.com/marketing-esperienziale/ (14.07.2022)

²⁴ Goleman D., *Intelligenza emotiva*, Milano, Bur Saggi, 1996.

²⁵ Porro A., «Cervello razionale e cervello emotivo», URL: stateofmind.it/2015/02/emozioni-primarie-secondarie/ (14.07.2022)

²⁶ Ekman, P., *Te lo leggo in faccia. Riconoscere le emozioni anche quando sono nascoste*, Torino, Editore Amrita, 2008, p.177

dictated by emotions.²⁷ The rational system, in contrast, is slower, controlled and processes all elements before a choice is made.

Emotions are always active in us and, by actively involving us, allow us to act completely spontaneously. Precisely for this reason, the goal of emotional marketing is to make consumers live real experiences that involve their deepest emotions and lead them to feel part of the story conveyed by the brand and then, over time, build loyalty and repeat the buying process.

Engaging the deepest emotions of one's audience is not an easy challenge, and to do it best, it is necessary to use the technique of storytelling, the art of storytelling through narratives.

'Storytelling' means using precise tools and techniques to tell the dramas, fears, and obstacles that each person faces in life. It is through these stories that one increases the imagination and emotional involvement of the audience by educating them about morality related to the present. This is because all tales, stories are told in a specific time and space and are placed in a specific culture.²⁸

In order to create stories and immerse the audience within them, it is necessary to use the experiential strategy modules, among which Sense marketing plays a particular function in this type of story (see ch. 1.3.1). Within this module are the 5 senses that comprise it and create real penetrating and immersive experiences.

1.4.1. Sight

The first and most stimulated sense is sight. It allows us to attract the audience, to amaze them with images of different shapes and sizes and plays of light and color to create a positive first impact with the brand.

Colors play an important role in communication: brighter and warmer ones tend to make individuals more active and energetic, while cool colors bring people to a state of calm and reflection.

²⁷ Centofanti G., «Marketing emozionale: cos'è e come funziona», URL: shopify.com/it/blog/marketing-emozionale#cosa (14.07.2022)

²⁸ Fontana A., *Manuale di Storytelling. Raccontare con efficacia prodotti, marchi e identità d'impresa*, Rizzoli Etas, Milano, 2016, p. 28

1.4.2. Hearing

Hearing is the sense that allows the user to recognize a brand even without observing it. It has high power because sounds, music become ingrained in the memory and cause positive or negative feelings that are reflected in the perception of the brand. The sense of hearing is mainly used in retail where music determines not only the atmosphere of the store but, in the positive case, an increase in the stay inside.

1.4.3. Smell

The sense of smell is closely related to memory: visual memory is effective, but over time it tends to fade before olfactory memory, which instead remains in the mind.

The use of fragrances within the store, causes a pleasant experience in the customer and, in addition to increasing the stay in the store, contributes to a better perception of the product.

1.4.4. Taste

Taste is the sense that distinguishes the food and beverage industry. Usually, companies create events and experiences related to cooking or tasting to bring the public closer and involve them in their direct product trial offerings.

In some cases, however, this is not necessary. Brands, through effective storytelling based on memories and emotions can stimulate the sense of taste in the consumer and can bring back memories of something they already know about.

1.4.5. Touch

The sense of touch is also important in identifying and making a brand recognizable in the public's mind. Product packaging is one example: it plays an important role because it not only serves to protect the product, but also to give it a unique and distinctive appearance.

Therefore, the choice of materials becomes crucial in expressing the company's value and identity to its consumer customers.

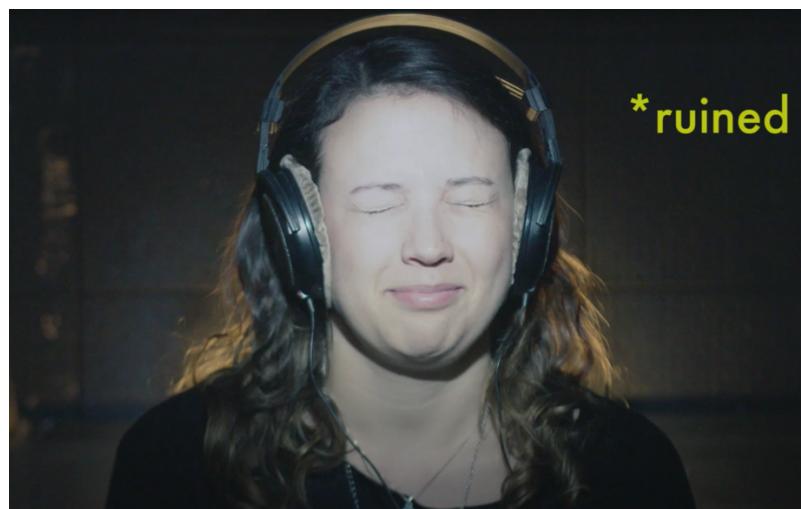
1.5 Sensploration

In the past, researchers in neuroscience and psychology universities studied each sense individually. In recent years, however, scholars have understood and reasoned about the actual cross-media interaction of the senses: this is because sensory processing by one sense is actually modulated according to the others.²⁹

If you think about when while watching a movie you notice that the voice acting is not perfectly synchronized to the video: this brings enormous distraction because you no longer focus on the sound of the words and the story but on the discordance between the lip movements and the words heard.

Or again, think of yourself as being immersed in a particular experience inside a dark room in which a video is being filmed on a wall. One is asked to watch the video while wearing professional headphones and listening to classical music that makes the atmosphere immersive and pleasant.

Suddenly, in the middle of the experience, an intermittent bright spotlight shines its light at your eyes: the experience is completely ruined.



²⁹ Ferrari R., «Marketing sensoriale: oggi non si vendono prodotti, ma emozioni ed esperienze», URL: smartalks.it/blog/marketing-sensoriale-oggi-si-vendono-emozioni-ed-esperienze/ (15.07.2022)

*Fig.4 Screenshot of the video 'Sensploration'*³⁰

These examples demonstrate how perception and immersion within an experience comes from the union of multiple senses and not just one, and how the intensity of these, if dosed inaccurately, can completely ruin it.

Spearheading this new discovery is Charles Spence, who coined the term 'Sensploration' or the act of stimulating multiple senses in new ways to enhance the overall experience and presented it, in 2016, at the 'FOST' Future of Storytelling.

Charles Spence heads the 'Crossmodal Research Lab' at the University of Oxford.

His research on multisensory experiences has laid the foundation of knowledge for neuroscientists, leading to numerous applications in experience design.

His findings have changed the way we approach the objects around us, the environment in which we live and the ways in which we interact, because, as Spence explains, "the reality is that you can't consider vision without also considering hearing; tasting without also thinking about smell."³¹

People are hungry for experiences that stimulate their senses simultaneously, and it is critical that those creating immersive experiences take note of this new phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2: Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response

2.1 The phenomenon of ASMR

Every day we are inundated with billions of stimuli that our brain assimilates and sometimes listens to, leading us to take actions, while at other times it eliminates. These are loud, punchy, noisy and in the long run disturbing messages.

And this is where, in a world of noise, silence triumphs.

Imagine yourself inside a city library where you are required to remain silent for the duration of your stay. Minutes pass and you become totally immersed in the atmosphere:

³⁰ Charles Spence, «Sensploration», URL: futureofstorytelling.org/video/charles-spence-sensploration, 6 luglio 2016 (15.07.2022)

³¹ Future of Storytelling, «Charles Spence – Sensploration (Future of StoryTelling 2016) », URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=kszzJjtV2oo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kszzJjtV2oo), 26.07.2016 (15.07.2022)

two people at the next table begin whispering, others are typing gently on their computer keyboards then, as you look up, you observe people intent on gently flipping through the pages of a book and others fiddling with a pencil by tapping it on the surface of the book repeatedly.

For several people these sounds might be disturbing but for others they are relaxing and soothing.

Some of the latter people might experience a feeling of warmth, tingling, and pleasure that starts at the crown of the head and spreads down the body, like the chills when listening to pleasant music.³²

This newly described experience has a name: Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response or, more commonly and easily called, ASMR.

The phenomenon is officially defined on February 25, 2010 by a New York-based digital security expert, Jennifer Allen, who has experienced ASMR since 2007 without knowing what it was.

After the proliferation of videos on various social networks, Jennifer Allen founded the first Facebook group (still present today) where people interested in learning about or learning more about the sensations of the phenomenon, which had not yet been studied scientifically, could confront each other.

The spark that allowed her to create the Facebook group and name this phenomenon was a post within an American forum in 2007, titled 'Weird Sensation Feels Good,' which read:

i get this sensation sometimes. theres no real trigger for it. it just happens randomly. its been happening since i was a kid and i'm 21 now. some examples of what it seems has caused it to happen before are as a child while watching a puppet show and when i was being read a story to. as a teenager when [...] a friend drew on the palm of my hand with markers. sometimes it happens for no reason at all that i can tell, though. i'll just be sitting or whatever doing whatever and it happens. its like in my head and all over my body. [...] i also like to trace my fingers along my skin because it feels good when experiencing the sensation. sometimes my eyes will water. when the sensation is over i will sometimes feel nauseous, but not that bad. just a slight hint of nausea. what is it?? i'm not complaining cause i love it, but i'm just wondering what it might be... help.³³

³² Grawe O, Kopiez R, Altenmüller E., *The chill parameter: Goose bumps and shivers as promising measures in emotion research*. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, University of California Press, 2009, pp. 61–74.

³³ okaywhatever51838, «Weird Sensation Feels Good», URL: steadyhealth.com/topics/weird-sensation-feels-good (27.07.2022), Trad: A volte provo questa sensazione. Non c'è una vera e propria causa scatenante,

That post was important for a great many users who, from that moment on, began to compare themselves to each other to seek the same answer and to create such videos.

According to research in recent years³⁴, interest in watching ASMR videos has increased by 200% and this is a figure that will continue to grow in the future.

Worldwide, the states where there are the most searches for ASMR-themed videos on Youtube are (in order): South Korea, Finland, New Zealand, the United States of America, France, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Italy ranks 15th, but considering the small number of inhabitants compared to the other mentioned states, we are one of the countries most interested in the phenomenon.³⁵

Interest in ASMR by Region

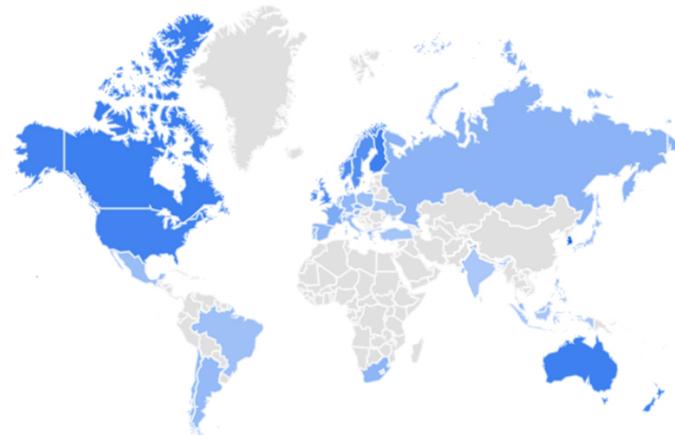


Fig. 5 Interest in the phenomenon of ASMR in various countries around the world³⁶

succede in modo casuale. Succede da quando ero bambina e ora ho 21 anni. Alcuni esempi di ciò che sembra averla provocata in passato sono stati da bambina mentre guardavo uno spettacolo di marionette e quando mi leggevano una storia. Da adolescente quando [...] un amico ha disegnato sul palmo della mia mano con i pennarelli. A volte succede senza alcun motivo che io possa dire, però. [...] Se mi viene un prurito mentre provo questa sensazione, non mi gratto perché il prurito contribuisce a intensificarla. Mi piace anche tracciare le dita sulla pelle perché mi fa sentire bene quando provo questa sensazione. A volte mi lacrimano gli occhi. Quando la sensazione finisce, a volte ho la nausea, ma non così forte. Solo un leggero accenno di nausea. Cos'è? Non mi lamento perché mi piace, ma mi chiedo solo cosa possa essere... aiuto.

³⁴ Mooney A., Klein J., «ASMR videos are the biggest YouTube trend you've never heard of», URL: thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/asmr-videos-youtube-trend/ (27.07.2022)

³⁵ Chiara ASMR, op. cit., pp. 36-37

³⁶ Mooney A., Klein J., «ASMR videos are the biggest YouTube trend you've never heard of», URL: thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/consumer-trends/asmr-videos-youtube-trend/ (27.07.2022)

2.2 Hearing and binaural sounds

The actual act of communicating involves our voice automatically generating physical waves that, thanks to the air, come to solicit mechanical sensors in the ears of the person listening, namely the eardrums, which translate the vibrations into electrochemical signals that are routed to the regions of the brain responsible for processing sounds and words.³⁷

Therefore, when we speak 'we are already inside the other person',³⁸ and the ASMR artists decide to enter them as gently as possible, with whispers, inaudible and light words, having learned empirically that the human ear of the listener of their words instead of diverting attention, pays more attention.

Sounds have the ability to stimulate listeners' emotions and perceptions, which are in turn linked to neurons. In fact, brain waves are generated by electrical impulses working in unison, by masses of neurons interacting with each other.

Listening can be made more intensive and immersive through binaural sounds, sounds discovered in 1839 by the doctor Heinrich Wilhelm Dove in Prussia, who discovered that these are able to bring our brain into a certain vibrational state³⁹, because if our brain is given two different frequencies from one ear than the other, it creates a difference frequency in the center.⁴⁰

A recent scientific study published in the European Journal of Neuroscience states that auditory stimulation using binaural tones may indeed be a useful non-invasive approach to influence the electrical activity of the brain.⁴¹

The discovery of binaural sounds is made official in 1973, when Gerald Oster published in the journal *Scientific American* an article entitled 'Auditory beats in the brain' in which

³⁷ Mozzoni M., *ASMR. La rivoluzione dei sussurri*, Milano, Tecniche Nuove, 2019, p. 35

³⁸ Ibid., p. 36

³⁹ Termine con il quale si indica un fenomeno energetico sperimentato spontaneamente da persone che ottengono esperienze di una intensa vibrazione che non si può definire come fisica e facilmente riconoscibile. Descritto come vibrazione all'unisono di tutti i chakra, allo stato vibrazionale vengono riconosciuti numerosi benefici fisici, emozionali-psichici ed esistenziali.

⁴⁰ Diotto M., «Suoni binaurali: cosa sono e come funzionano nel nostro cervello», URL: mariandonotto.it/suoni_binaurali/ (27.07.2022)

⁴¹ Becher A., Höhne M., Axmacher N., Chaieb L., Elger C., Fell J., *Intracranial electroencephalography power and phase synchronization changes during monaural and binaural beat stimulation*, European Journal of Neuroscience, Volume41, Issue2, pp. 254-263, Gennaio 2015

he explains how binaural sounds stimulate listening and influence the state of mind by bringing the person to a state of concentration and relaxation.⁴²

These two states are the consequence of experiencing ASMR and are achieved primarily through listening to and seeing particular sounds (such as binaurals) and movements called triggers.

2.3 Triggers and Tags

ASMR stands for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response and means Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response.

When we speak of 'Autonomous Response' we mean a totally subjective human body reaction outside rational control to specific man-made external stimuli called triggers.

Continuing, the term 'Meridian' refers to the flow of vital energy in the human body and the highest point of arousal, while, finally, 'Sensory' refers to all types of nerves that transmit information to the brain.

When we talk about triggers, we are talking about stimuli that can provoke, to users, a different response to the same stimulus repeated at different times, places and circumstances. Nevertheless, studies and investigations by researchers to date have found the most effective triggers and common effects of those who experience them.

According to U.S. physiologist Craig Richard, professor of biopharmaceutical sciences in Virginia and founder of ASMR University, the most efficient triggers consist of:

- Sound stimuli produced by humans through the lips and mouth and voice shaping;
- Sound stimuli produced by objects and triggered by humans (the flipping of book pages, tapping one's fingernails on an object);
- Visual stimuli through hand movement and direct, fixed eye contact;
- Tactile stimuli such as hair stroking or massage.⁴³

⁴² Diotto M., «Suoni binaurali: cosa sono e come funzionano nel nostro cervello», URL: mariandoniotto.it/suoni_binaurali/ (27.07.2022)

⁴³ Mozzoni M., op.cit., pp. 3-4

Each stimulus is different from the other, and every day a new ASMR artist perfects the mechanism by inventing new forms, but what they have in common is the repetitiveness of the gestures or sounds, their gentleness and mild intensity.⁴⁴

There are currently about 25 million ASMR videos on YouTube, piquing the interest of audiences almost all over the world⁴⁵, but how do users recognize which video is right for them?

The people in charge of answering this question are the ASMR video tags that allow them to identify what kind of triggers the web artists will present.

There is a veritable glossary of ASMR tags, which by describing the category of the video, allow users to select only what they want to see and increase the views of the most liked videos.

The glossary is composed as follows:

- *Whispering*: whispering technique will be used in the video;
- *Soft spoken*: means 'to speak softly'. The ASMRtist in the video speaks softly, but without whispering;
- *Tapping or Stropping*: one of the most popular and appreciated triggers, refers to the gentle tapping of fingers on a variety of surfaces;
- *Brushing*: 'rubbing' in Italian. In this type of video, various objects (e.g., makeup brushes) are used to rub on the microphone;



⁴⁴ ibidem

⁴⁵ Dr. Richard, «How many ASMR channels, ASMRtists, and ASMR videos are on YouTube?», URL: asmruniversity.com/2022/04/26/how-many-asmr-channels-asmrtists-are-on-youtube/ (07.03.2023)

Fig. 6 Screenshot of an ASMR brushing video.⁴⁶

- *No Talking: tag referring to videos without human voices, but in which only object (or environment) noises are present;*
- *Cupping: a very distinctive trigger, it is the noise made by 'cupping hands' or other similar instruments, placed and moved gently to the ASMRtist's microphone;*
- *Touching-Face Touching: the ASMRtist, by touching the camera and microphone with its own hands, pretends to touch the user;*
- *Stippling-stipple: the ASMRtist utters the word 'stipple' and simultaneously creates a finger movement in front of the camera;*
- *Scratching: literally 'scratching,' in which the ASMRtist scratches objects with its fingernails;*

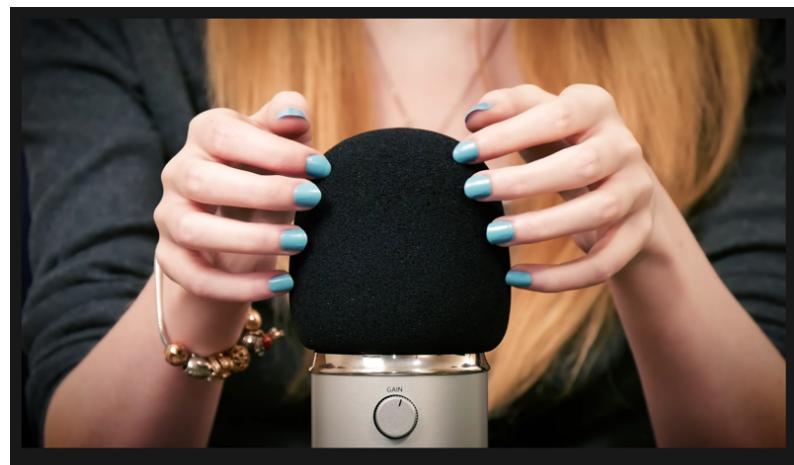


Fig. 7 Screenshot of an ASMR scratching video⁴⁷

- *Keyboard: the sound of keys being pressed on a computer keyboard;*
- *Tongue clicking: an uncommon trigger, in Italian it translates to 'clicking your tongue';*

⁴⁶ LauraLemurex ASMR, «ASMR Intense Microphone Brushing, Scratching & Stroking - (No Talking) Binaural 4K», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=DQgDQ8MFjsk, agosto 2017 (05.08.2022)

⁴⁷ LauraLemurex ASMR, «ASMR Intense Microphone Brushing, Scratching & Stroking - (No Talking) Binaural 4K», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=DQgDQ8MFjsk, agosto 2017 (05.08.2022)

- *Crinkling or 'crinkle': the typical noise that packages or wrappings make when they are crinkled or rubbed;*
- *Stereo or Ear to Ear: refers to the use of a microphone to diversify the sound between the left and right channels of the headphones;*
- *Binaural: refers to a specific type of recording that simulates human ears or head;*

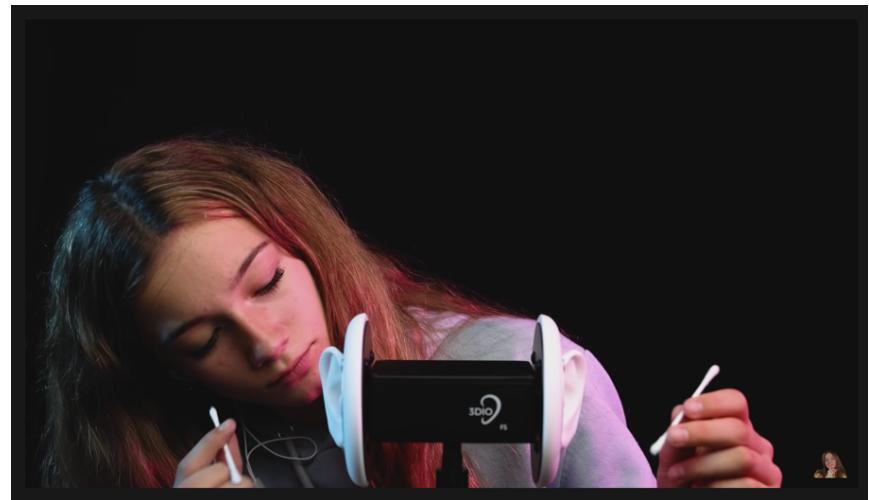


Fig. 8 Screenshot of a binaural ASMR video⁴⁸

- Light: a light or flashlight is used in the video. This is a visual trigger;

⁴⁸ Nanou ASMR, «EXTREME TINGLY BINAURAL ASMR! », URL: youtube.com/watch?v=esnraAPzudk, Agosto 2021, (05.08.2022)



Fig. 9 Screenshot of an ASMR video light⁴⁹

- *Inaudible*: a human voice is heard in the videos, but the words are not understood;
- *Mouth sounds*: these are sounds produced with the mouth;
- *Hands movement*: the ASMRtist moves the hands to relax the user. It is a visual trigger;



Fig. 10 Screenshot of an ASMR hands movement video⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Abby ASMR, « ASMR Intense Light Triggers | Eye Exam For Sleepy Eyes», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=0rB7ET1EX3I, Luglio 2022, (05.08.2022)

⁵⁰ Giulia Grasso ASMR, «hands movement, rilassamento guidato per ansia e insonnia | asmr», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=lVBQKheOCNc, agosto 2021 (05.08.2022)

- *Affirmations: the ASMRtist pretends to talk to the user watching the video and utters positive and motivational phrases;*
- *Compliments: the ASMRtist gives compliments to the user watching the video;*
- *Close Up: the ASMRtist records himself with his face very close to the camera, framing only his face;*
- *Words: one or more words are repeated numerous times in the video;*
- *Reverse ASMR: the video is edited with words and movements in reverse;*
- *Italian/ITA: identifies an ASMR video in which people speak in the Italian language.*
There are two others widely used tags in the glossary: 'Eating' and 'Role play', which are described in depth in the next sub-chapters.

2.4 ASMR food

The world of food is also being rediscovered from an ASMR perspective.

A divisive trigger that of Eating: either like it or dislike it.

Artists in the ASMR world through the use of headphones or specialized microphones present tables laden with food in their videos and, again following ASMR logic, gently eat.

The sounds they make are related to the chewing and swallowing of all kinds of food: from the crunchy, crunchy to the softer.

There are some ASMRtists, so called ASMR artists, who can be defined as specializing in Eating triggers, who offer only such videos within their Youtube channel.

There is, however, a subcategory of ASMR food called 'Mukbang', even if sometimes it is not necessarily an ASMR content, which originated in 2008 on Afreeca Tv, a streaming platform in South Korea, which showed images of a stranger in front of an audience eating all the food that was on his table.

The practice of 'Mukbang', from the Korean 'mokta' (eating) and 'bangsong' (broadcasting), involves an ASMRtist positioned in front of a webcam equipped with a microphone and a table set with different foods placed in pans and trays and then beginning to eat everything nonstop. For each carefully framed piece, what it is, its texture and taste is defined by accompanying the sounds of chewing and swallowing.

Usually the performer appears to his audience with the table already set and the dishes ready to enjoy, but in case he also shows his cooking and preparation, it is called 'Cook-Bang', a genre already much closer to our 'Cooked and Eaten'.⁵¹

The most popular dishes are Pizza, noodles, sushi and McDonald's.

There are many artists who create Mukbang videos, the most famous being 설기 양SULGI with 10 million subscribers and an average of 80 million views, and Zach Choi ASMR with 14 million subscribers and an average of 25 million views.

I piatti più gettonati sono Pizza, noodles, sushi e McDonald's.

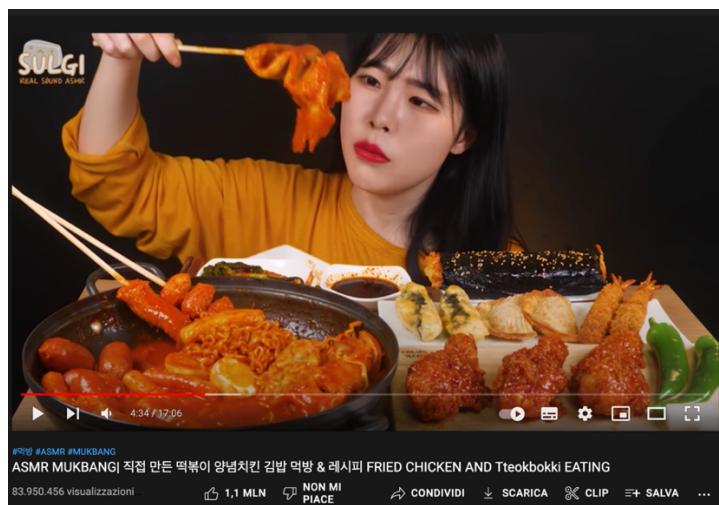


Fig. 11: Screenshot video on 설기 양SULGI's Youtube channel⁵²

⁵¹ Farnetti W., «Cibo guardato: il fenomeno coreano del Mukbang», URL: agrodolce.it/2016/05/09/il-cibo-guardato-il-fenomeno-coreano-del-mukbang/

⁵² 설기 양SULGI, «ASMR MUKBANG | 직접 만든 떡볶이 양념치킨 김밥 먹방 & 레시피 FRIED CHICKEN AND Tteokbokki EATING», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=EuySE6259wQ, agosto 2020 (05.08.2022)



Fig. 12: Screenshot video on the YouTube channel of Zach Choi ASMR⁵³

The two ASMRtists or Mukbang artists produce Mukbang videos using different ways of interaction with the viewer user. If 설기 양SULGI mostly eats oriental food and converses with their audience by explaining the texture and taste of the food they eat, Zach Choi ASMR prefers to make the viewer experience total immersion in what they are eating (Western junk food), enhancing only the sounds of chewing and remaining silent.

The two have millions of subscribers and just as many views, and it is therefore natural to wonder why and what drives people to watch and practice videos of this type.

Several researchers have tried to give answers to this question by varying in different areas: in the social one of the researchers defined Mukbang as 'a practice of eating together' that allows viewers to feel less lonely, fostering feelings of emotional connection with the video artists.⁵⁴

⁵³ Zach Choi ASMR, «MOST POPULAR FOOD FOR ASMR (KFC, ONION RINGS, MOZZARELLA CORN DOG, CHICKEN NUGGETS) NO TALKING», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=JkGx1vojCDM, agosto 2018 (05.08.2022)

⁵⁴ Spence C., Mancini M., & Huisman G., *Digital commensality: Eating and drinking in the company of Technology*, Frontiers in Psychology, 09 October 2019

Per saperne di più: <https://www.stateofmind.it/2021/11/mukbang-watching/>

Mukbang thus provides a sense of social unity to those who physically eat alone, and the Mukbanger in question is the bearer of 'collaborative eating' in which, through food, it engages viewers and overcomes physical distance.⁵⁵

Another area of research is food where different researchers have explored and explained different theses related to the Mukbang phenomenon.

Many viewers pointed out that they watch Mukbang videos to experience eating by proxy⁵⁶ because they are dieting and unable to enjoy all the food. Therefore, seeing other people consume food instead of them led users not only to feel as if they were savoring the food⁵⁷, but also to satisfy their cravings and reach satiety level in advance.

'Mukbang watching', however, in addition to having beneficial consequences, has some negative ones: the possible alteration of eating preferences and habits, the alteration of table manners (talking despite a full mouth), the spread of eating disorders, and the promotion of disordered eating based on excess that can be addictive.

Because of all these mentioned situations, the South Korean government in July 2018 launched the 'Comprehensive Obesity Management Measures' countering the Mukbang phenomenon because it was harming public health, as the obesity rate in South Korea had risen from 31.7 percent in 2007 to 34.8 percent in 2016⁵⁸, and negatively influencing younger people to adopt poor behavioral patterns because they were perceived as socially acceptable.

Abroad, this phenomenon has now become well known, seen, and practiced: in Italy it was introduced in 2015, and although it is also known and practiced by some web authors, the views do not reach the international numbers.

2.5 Role play

⁵⁵ Soraci P., Di Carlantonio A., Cimiglia R., «Mukbang Watching – Il nuovo fenomeno spopolato sul web», URL: stateofmind.it/2021/11/mukbang-watching/

⁵⁶ Hakimey H., Yazdanifard R., *The review of Mokbang (broadcast eating) phenomena and its relations with South Korean culture and society*, International Journal of Management, Accounting and Economics, Volume 2, pp. 443–455, Aprile 2015

⁵⁷ Choe H., *Eating together multimodally: Collaborative eating in mukbang, a Korean livestream of eating*. Language in Society, pp. 171-208, 22 Febbraio 2019

⁵⁸ Soraci P., Di Carlantonio A., Cimiglia R., «Mukbang Watching – Il nuovo fenomeno spopolato sul web», URL: stateofmind.it/2021/11/mukbang-watching/

Imagine being inside a beauty salon where the client's only task is to relax and let go of the hands of the body care professionals. The session begins and you feel your body slowly begin to relax as the hands of the professional create gentle movements to the rhythm of background music, which absorbs all thoughts.

This kind of feeling can also be achieved while lying on one's bed or couch at home thanks to the trigger of "Role play" in which the ASMRtist empathizes with a professional figure and interacts with the camera as if the camera were the client himself.

In Role play or role play, the ASMRtist plays a job figure such as a hairdresser, doctor, tattoo artist, or beautician by dressing in specific professional attire and builds the setting to make it all seem realistic, completely immersing the viewer within the video and leading them to have several benefits, including relaxation and sleep.

Role play is used not only in ASMR but also in the world of video games, in which one chooses the character to play and his or her characteristics by shaping them to one's liking, and then enters a journey formed by characters and stories to be experienced and interwoven.

2.5.1 Body involvement

Necessary for the Role play experience to be successful is the involvement of the body by the ASMRtist who shows himself to the viewer user totally cast in the shoes of the role he chooses to play.

During Role play videos the ASMRtist speaks to the camera and gives the impression that he or she is interacting directly with the viewer user. In doing so he uses the most common triggers: soft spoken, tapping, brushing, light in relation to the role he is playing.

In this way the user feels involved and an active part in the video, even though he or she is actually having an 'Esthetic' experience. (see ch. 1.2)

An example of an ASMR channel entirely dedicated to Role play is that of Lizi ASMR, a 25-year-old girl with 470,000 subscribers as of 2018, the year she joined the channel.

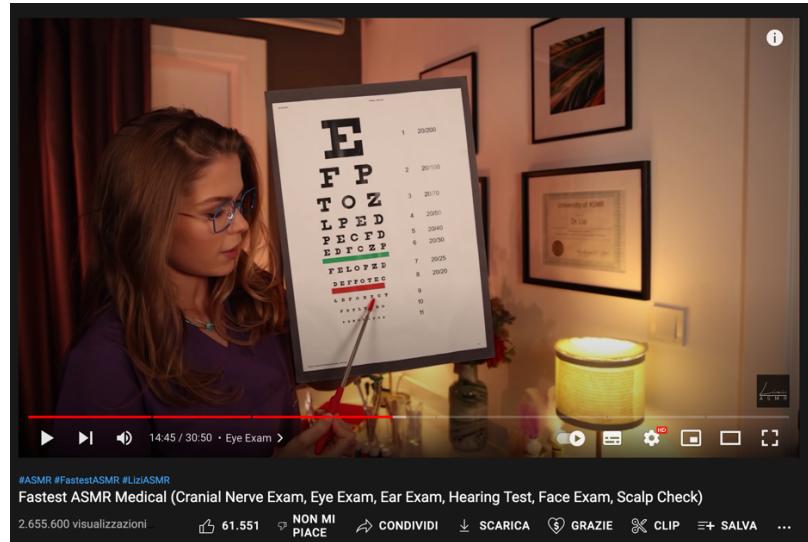


Fig. 13: Screenshot of Lizi ASMR's channel video⁵⁹

In this video, Lizi plays the role of a doctor conversing with a patient during an eye examination. The tone of voice is whispered and gentle, the atmosphere relaxed and immersive.

As can be seen, the environment is made up of elements, some faked, that, although not in the foreground, give insight to the role the artist is playing; such as the certificate from ASMR University declaring Lizi as a Doctor or the medical instruments above the cabinet. Her clothing and the accessories she is wearing are also consistent with the role.

⁵⁹ Lizi ASMR, «Fastest ASMR Medical (Cranial Nerve Exam, Eye Exam, Ear Exam, Hearing Test, Face Exam, Scalp Check) », URL: youtube.com/watch?v=wAhwTev170Y, settembre 2021 (05.08.2022)

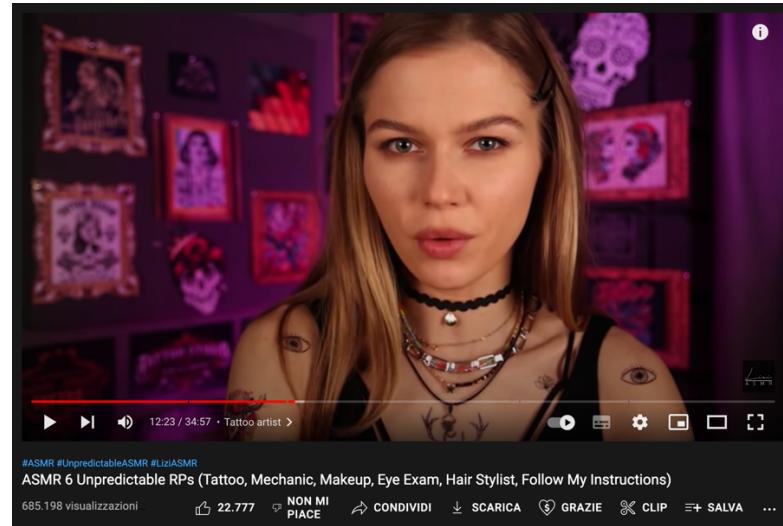
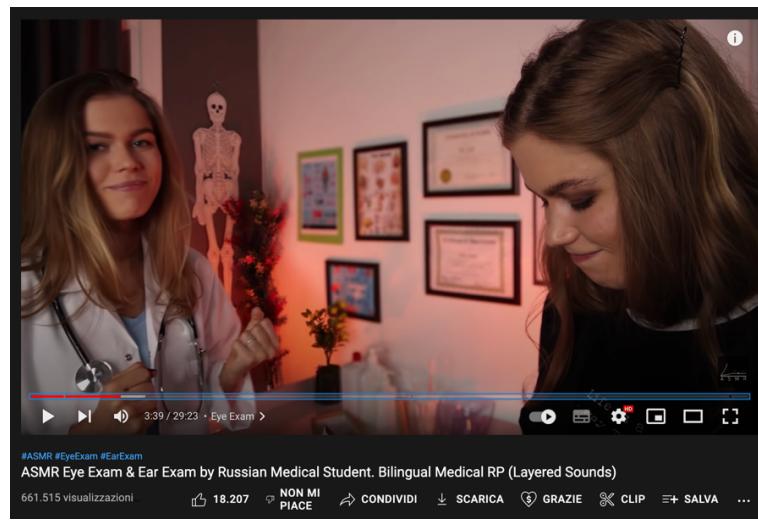


Fig. 14: Screenshot of Lizi ASMR's channel video⁶⁰

In this video Role play Lizi impersonates a tattoo artist. One can see how the environment and her style have changed from the previous video: tattoos are the soul of the video and are present everywhere.

In contrast, the atmosphere remains relaxed and immersive, with sounds and tools that harken back to the tattooing profession.



⁶⁰ Lizi ASMR, «ASMR 6 Unpredictable RPs (Tattoo, Mechanic, Makeup, Eye Exam, Hair Stylist, Follow My Instructions) », URL: youtube.com/watch?v=QSUj6DqEyfA, ottobre 2021 (05.08.2022)

Fig. 15: Screenshot of Lizi ASMR's channel video⁶¹

Another example of ASMR Role Play occurs when, being present in the video and interacting with the viewer user, are two people playing two different roles. The user in this case is not always the center of the scene, but also becomes a passive spectator.

2.5.2 *Mirroring*

Many people, watching Role play videos in media channels such as Youtube, are able to experience sensations formed by shivers and tingles throughout the body just by watching the scenes.

The action of 'caring' brought into play by ASMRtists activates neurons called 'mirror neurons' present in the human brain.

Mirror neurons are a type of neurons first discovered in the 1990s by Giacomo Rizzolatti, Gallese, Fogassi and Fadiga at the Department of Neuroscience, University of Parma, taking a nemestral macaque as a case study.

Through the use of micro-electrodes, the researchers observed that certain groups of neurons were activated when the animal performed a certain action, but also when it observed another subject performing the same activity.

Later studies also confirmed the same theory for mirror neurons present in the premotor cortex of the human brain.

However, this mirroring mechanism has a limitation: it only goes into action if it has already been experienced, as the authors Caruana and Borghi explain, "When we hear a knock at the door, what happens in our brain is the activation of motor representations corresponding to that action, as if we were simulating knocking ourselves."⁶²

The function of mirror neurons does not stop there: research has shown how they are extremely important in allowing us to 'learn by imitating,' that is, by observing someone perform a certain action we consequently come to know how to perform it.

⁶¹ Lizi ASMR, «ASMR Eye Exam & Ear Exam by Russian Medical Student. Bilingual Medical RP (Layered Sounds)», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=5Of9mmkYqKQ, agosto 2021 (05.08.2022)

⁶² Caruana F., Borghi A., *Il cervello in azione*, Bologna, Il Mulino Editore, 2016, p.166

Consequent to this, mirror neuron imitation is also linked to emotions, because when we observe in others a manifestation of pain, the same neuronal substrate related to first-person perception of the same type of emotion is activated by empathizing with other individuals⁶³. In fact, in the case of patients with neurological diseases, once the ability to feel an emotion is lost, one is no longer able to recognize it when it is expressed by others.

2.6 The creation of the video

When people talk about ASMR, the first thing they think of are videos.

These channels, most found in Youtube but also on the Twitch and TikTok platforms, are the basis and essence of ASMR and allow for the creation of interaction with the viewer user.

There are no schools or training courses for aspiring ASMRtists yet so anyone can try their hand at producing ASMR videos.

However, there is a basic methodology that must be followed to build an ASMR video.

First, one must 'differentiate' oneself. Just as a brand differentiates itself from others to increase its competitive advantage, ASMRtists must also have their own identity and try to express their uniqueness in a market full of other competing artists.

The second point is that 'you cannot please everyone': this is because each person has definite tastes and preferences that differ from others. It is necessary to position oneself in the right way in the mind of the viewer and specialize in precise triggers.

Having specified the personal brand, it is important to define a lineup: the words, the sounds, the movements, the role in the video, the framing. The beauty of the ASMR video is the sum of all the various details, and what makes the difference is passion, care, attention, and dedication.⁶⁴

Having defined the lineup, it is essential to take care of the audio recording by paying special attention to avoiding interference from ambient noise. When recording an ASMR

⁶³ Dini A., «Neuroni a specchio e capacità di relazione», URL: my-personaltrainer.it/fisiologia/neuroni-a-specchio.html (04.08.2022)

⁶⁴ Chiara ASMR, op. cit., p. 168

video, it is essential that the location be quiet and without any particular background noise. To technically remedy this problem, these steps can be followed:

- survey the environment to identify and eliminate all sources of disturbance;
- bring the mouth and objects as close as possible to the microphone, preferably equipped with a windproof sponge;
- direct the voice and sounds toward the microphone diaphragm;
- adjust the sensitivity of the microphone to optimize the signal-to-noise ratio.⁶⁵

Another important point relates to equipment: microphones, recorders, video camera, tripods, soundproof walls, and software are the basics for successful ASMR video. However, expensive equipment is not needed to get started; a smartphone with a good camera and recorder is sufficient.

Once the recording is finished, it is time for editing where you go to create the video in its entirety by going to adjust the various background noises that might be distracting and to select the best clips.

Once the editing is complete, we move on to rendering the video and finally uploading it to the chosen media channel, which should have an easily remembered and searchable name.

Not to be underestimated is the choice of the cover of the video called 'thumbnail', which must reflect the content and attract the user, and the title that must include the tags used to have the possibility of being placed among the videos recommended by the platform.

⁶⁵ Mozzoni M., op.cit., pp. 147-148

CHAPTER 3: Gli ASMRtists

3.1 Who the ASMRtists are

Looking at the ranking of both U.S. and global searches done on Youtube in 2020, ASMR occupies the second and third rungs of the podium.⁶⁶

To date, it is not possible to define numerically how many ASMR artists there are in the world because the numbers vary by the hour and they all have one goal: to achieve success. What is certain, however, is that there are a few ASMR artists who have routed the market, pulling away from the competition and remaining relatively insensitive to daily fluctuations.⁶⁷

The one who had the most success was Bob Ross, who elicited ASMR in people without even knowing the phenomenon.

Bob Ross was an American landscape painter who, from 1983 to 1994, ran a half-hour television program called 'The Joy of Painting' in which he taught viewers how to paint in an extremely relaxing way.

If one takes the time to watch an episode of the program, one is enraptured from the beginning by an atmosphere of concentration accompanied by a deep, calm and soft voice and the sound of brushes and palette knife on canvas.

Almost thirty years after his death, clips of his shows are still present on the web, attracting millions of viewers: consider that a video of Bob Ross painting has garnered more than 6 million views on YouTube with comments focusing on the melody and tranquility that shines through his voice.

As a result of listening to and watching Bob Ross in 'The Joy of Painting,' people began to experience the feelings of relaxation and well-being typical of ASMR.

From that moment, the community began to populate: active and co-creative, lively, purposeful and critical to the point, avoiding polemical and hateful tones.

Even among ASMR artists there is a good atmosphere, the only goal is to create as much quality content as possible without jealousy and controversy. There is no rivalry: although

⁶⁶ Youtubevalutazioni.com, URL: youtubevalutazioni.com/youtube-news/114-classifica-ricerche-su-youtube-questo-anno.html (13.08.2022)

⁶⁷ Mozzoni M., op.cit. p. 61

the objects and triggers within the videos can be repeated and taken over by other creators, it is unlikely to find the exact same content because each one contains the spirit and unique touch of the artist who created it.

Delving into the Italian ASMRtist community, vying for the top spot in channel subscribers and views are 'EL ASMR' and 'Chiara ASMR.'

The former, Elvira, started her career in 2014 with a video titled 'I racconti della buonanotte'⁶⁸ (bedtime stories) and, although she is Italian, she only uploads Spanish-language videos, since her viewing audience is 95% Hispanic; while the latter, Chiara ASMR, will be known later in the subchapter dedicated to her (see Ch. 3.4).

Other Italian ASMR artists with significant numbers are 'ASMR With Sasha,' Dani ASMR and ASMR Barber. The former, of Venezuelan origin, counts 500 videos of peculiar whispers in her Youtube channel: she reads poems, stories, legends and creates role-plays entertaining and relaxing the 520,000 of subscribers; 'Dani ASMR' with 200,000 channel subscribers and more than 600 uploaded videos relaxes users by creating hypnotic sounds just by tapping her nails on different objects.

Last but not least, 'ASMR Barber', the only Italian male artist to have significant numbers on his Youtube channel: 480,000 subscribers and 200 million views. Massimo Tantarelli, aka ASMR Barber, began his ASMR journey in 2013 by uploading videos of when he is at the barbershop and filming the typical sounds of that trade: razors, chops, shaving foam and brush strokes.

As can be seen, for both the Italian and global ASMR communities, the number of female artists significantly exceeds that of men.

In a video published in June 2014⁶⁹ by Paul Artwork, a PhD student in Psychology, titled 'Research on the Top 100 most viewed ASMRtists channels (not an ASMR video)', it is shown that of the top ten ASMR channels ranked by number of subscribers, nine belong to women, as depicted in the graph below.

⁶⁸ Mozzoni M., op.cit. p. 70

⁶⁹ Messitte N., «Is There Any Money To Be Made In ASMR - Part Two», URL: forbes.com/sites/nickmessitte/2015/03/31/is-there-any-money-to-be-made-in-asmr-part-two/?sh=51e38985336c (12.08.2022)

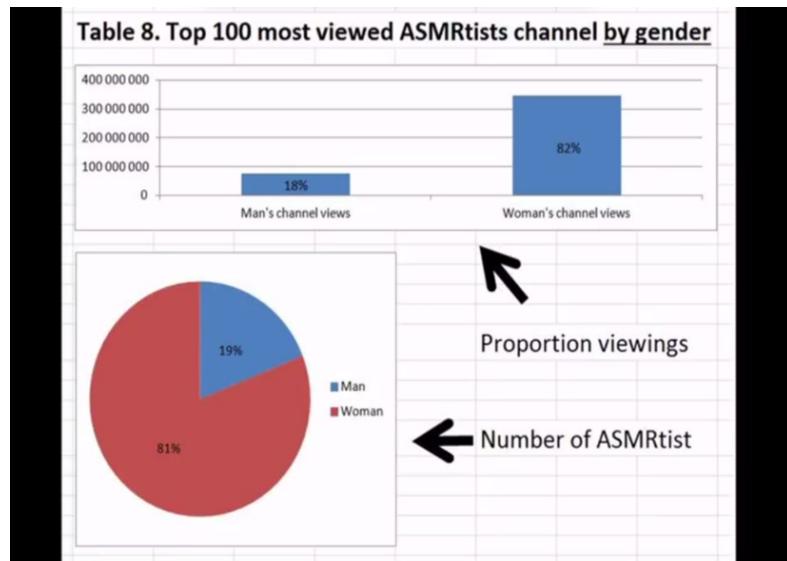


Fig. 16: Graph depicting the top 100 most viewed ASMRtists channels by gender⁷⁰

3.2 ASMR and celebrities

ASMR has also become a trending phenomenon for world-renowned stars: actresses and actors, singers, influencers, models and models listen, watch ASMR videos and, on certain occasions, try their hand at creating the same content out of curiosity or because they are driven by their agent.⁷¹

The ASMR videos produced by VIPs show a change in their personality, that is, they 'normalize' and show themselves as they are by letting go of everyday formalities.⁷² In these videos, the person who creates the triggers is no longer of paramount importance but the way in which he or she creates them and makes them special to the users who listen. This is precisely why, although ASMR VIP videos are recorded and edited by excellent staff, the views do not exceed those of ASMRtists who have been cultivating this passion and work for a long time.

Making the world of ASMR accessible to celebrities is W Magazine⁷³ (Women's Fashion & Celebrity News), a U.S. fashion magazine published by the Condé Nast Publications

⁷⁰ Si veda: imageio.forbes.com/blogs-images/nickmessitte/files/2015/03/pie-chart-viewed-by-gender.jpg?format=jpg&width=960 (12.08.2022)

⁷¹ Mozzoni M., *op.cit.*

⁷² *Ibidem*

⁷³ Wmagazine.com, URL: [wmagazine.com/video](http://Wmagazine.com/video) (12.08.2022)

group that covers style, culture, fashion, art, celebrities, and film with 469,000 annual subscribers, 80 percent of whom are female.

Numerous celebrities are invited by the magazine to give interviews or/and to try their hand at ASMR to stimulate the autonomous sensory meridian response in the fan audience, who can find all the videos in the Youtube channel, in the Celebrity ASMR category⁷⁴ which has more than 60 videos.

The first video⁷⁵ to open the category is that of Cara Delevigne published on July 28, 2016. The U.S. model and actress for the duration of 2.33 minutes talks about herself and her new acting experience as June Moon, one of the superheroes in the movie "Suicide Squad."

The video has achieved 6,654,381 views and has also received interest from users in the comments.

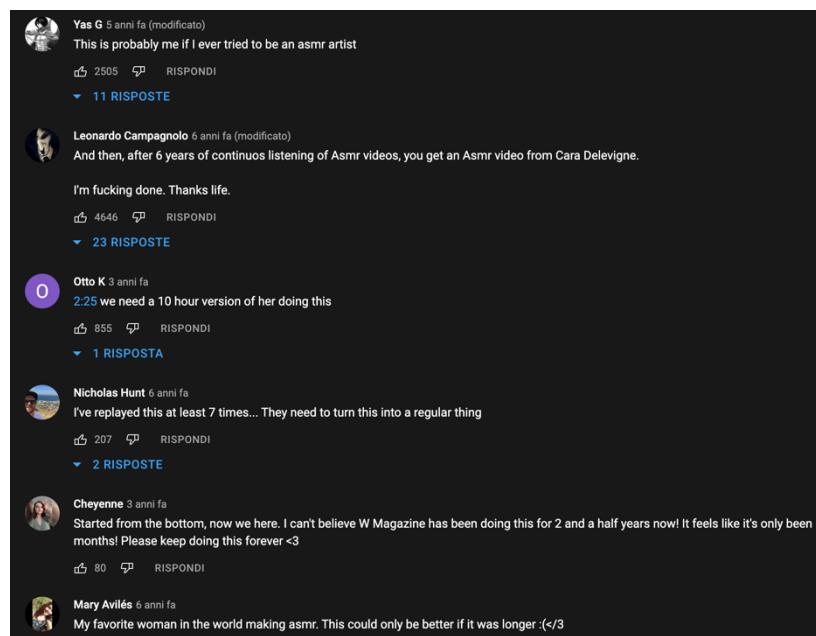


Fig. 17: Comments under the first video for W Magazine: Celebrity ASMR⁷⁶

⁷⁴ W Magazine, «Celebrity ASMR», URL: youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeV2Z0bkqSgs-Xhmf2hXv_3XoqR2SA1q, 29 settembre 2022 (12.10.2022)

⁷⁵ W Magazine, «Cara Delevigne Explores #ASMR | W Magazine», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=1hyr7ZKkQbQ&list=PLeV2Z0bkqSgs-Xhmf2hXv_3XoqR2SA1q&index=61, 28.07.2016 (12.08.2022)

⁷⁶ W Magazine, «Cara Delevigne Explores #ASMR | W Magazine», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=1hyr7ZKkQbQ&list=PLeV2Z0bkqSgs-Xhmf2hXv_3XoqR2SA1q&index=61, 28 luglio 2016 (12.08.2022)

American heiress Paris Hilton was also involved in an ASMR interview by W Magazine. She tells her story since her childhood through whispers, everyday objects, and food, and at the end of the video, she always promotes her latest perfume in ASMR style.

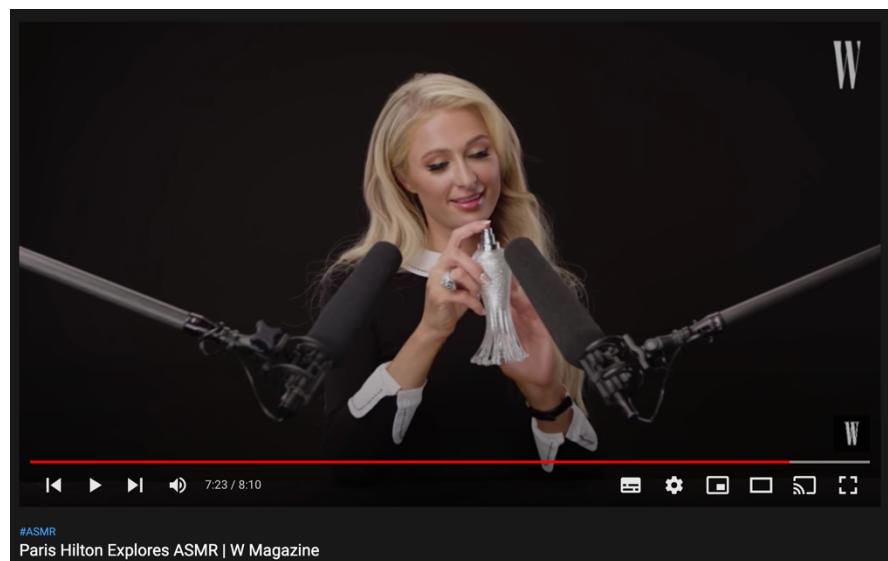


Fig. 18: Framework of Paris Hilton's ASMR video for W Magazine⁷⁷

Also, for W Magazine, actor and musician Penn Badgley lends himself to a 16-minute ASMR interview with a total of 3,431,260 views and 112,274 likes. He deals with personal topics such as the braces and ponytail he had at his audition for 'John Tucker Must Die,' the conclusion of his album in 28 days with his band and the character Dan Humphrey he played in "Gossip Girl": all while playing with water and test tubes, retro cell phones, plastic, CDs and keys. Her voice is warm and soothing, perfect for an ASMR video, as described by most user comments.

⁷⁷ W Magazine, «Paris Hilton Explores ASMR | W Magazine», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=HCuddH2qRyY&list=PLeV2Z0bkqSgs-Xhmf2hXv__3XoqR2SAIq&index=37, 10 dicembre 2018 (12.08.2022)

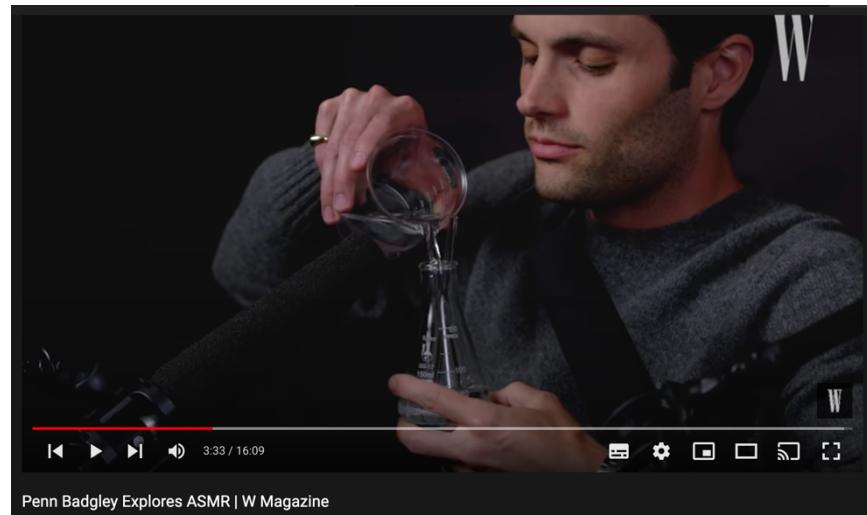


Fig. 19: Framework of Penn Badgley's ASMR video for W Magazine⁷⁸

ASMR is also featured in songs by global stars such as Madonna. The 'pop icon' who since the early 1980s has been cyclically making a comeback by riding every trend she can intercept, creates 'Medellín' in 2019. In the single, made with Colombian Maluma, there are alternating vocals and whispers associated with ASMR techniques, such as the words, "One, two, cha cha cha. Slow down papy..."⁷⁹ audible at minute 2.57.

⁷⁸ W Magazine, «Penn Badgley Explores ASMR | W Magazine», URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=O082IarO6wU&list=PLeV2Z0bkqSgs-Xhmf2hXv__3XoqR2SAlq&index=26](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O082IarO6wU&list=PLeV2Z0bkqSgs-Xhmf2hXv__3XoqR2SAlq&index=26), 12.09.2019 (12.08.2022)

⁷⁹ Mozzoni M., op.cit., p. 83

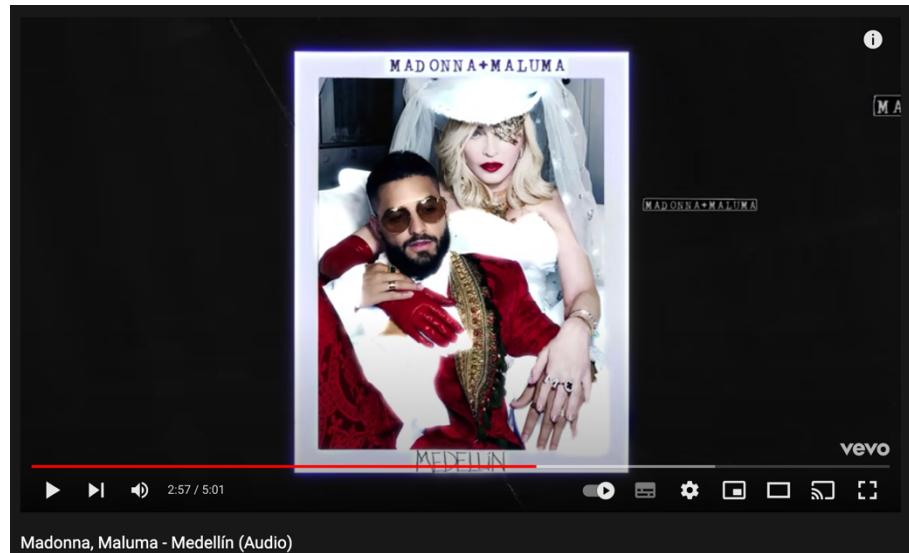


Fig. 20: Framework song 'Medellín' Madonna and Maluma⁸⁰

In addition to the American W magazine, the streaming platform Deezer with its 'Deezer ASMR Sessions'⁸¹ project also tried to engage some big-name singers to reproduce one of their best-known songs in an ASMR key.

The first folder features 'Fallin' by Alicia Keys, 'You're Beautiful' by James Blunt, 'What's New Pussycat?' by Tom Jones, 'Kings & Queens' by Ava Max, and 'Parents' by Yungblud.

The number of artists to collaborate with is increasing, so much so that Nigel Harding, Deezer's vice president Artist Marketing, expects to update the playlist at least once or twice a year.⁸²

3.3 Earnings

For many ASMR artists, creating content is a passion, a way to feel useful and break away from the daily hustle and bustle; for others, a chance to earn money.

⁸⁰ Madonna, «Madonna, Maluma - Medellín (Audio)», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=b8PtBzdiZ3g, 2019 (12.08.2022)

⁸¹ Deezer.com, URL: deezer.com/it/playlist/9221517042 (12.08.2022)

⁸² Samantha Hisong, «Perché Alicia Keys si è messa a fare musica ASMR?», URL: rollingstone.it/musica/perche-alicia-keys-si-e-messa-a-fare-musica-asmr/571391/#Part1 (13.08.2022)

On March 31, 2015, the high-finance newspaper 'Forbes' began to take an interest in the potential that the ASMR business could bring to artists who practiced it, titling the article 'Is there any money to be made in ASMR?'⁸³

Within the article, they sought to understand whether ASMR could become a source of income for artists with multiple memberships, taking as an example Nichole, otherwise known as SpringBok ASMR, who left her job as vice president of marketing for a large board game company to devote herself entirely to the world of autonomous sensory meridian response. Income occurs through sponsorships and advertisements from companies of various types, although those with the highest views are those consistent with the phenomenon related to microphones, cell phones, and technology games.⁸⁴ Earnings also occur through donations from subscribers (who have access to special content), crowdfunding, product placement, sales of media content on other platforms such as iTunes and Spotify, and engagements by advertising agencies on behalf of large brands that are increasingly investing in this new way of doing communication.⁸⁵

To start making a profit on YouTube there are minimum requirements that the platform imposes: first of all, it is necessary to have a channel already started, and only after getting the account unblocked can the youtuber, and in this case the ASMR artist, decide whether to have all his videos monetized and how to do it. He can choose when to insert advertising within his video, its duration, and whether or not it can be skipped.⁸⁶ In addition, he must stick to a video publishing schedule of between one to three per week.

Three years after the Forbes article was published, the BBC published another article on the ASMR phenomenon written by Damian Fowler titled 'ASMR: the big business of making super soft sounds'⁸⁷ in which it is explained how what started out as niche content is destined

⁸³ Messitte N., «Is there any money to be made in ASMR», URL: [forbes.com/sites/nickmessitte/2015/03/31/is-there-any-money-to-be-made-in-asmr-part-two/?sh=2beb1c43336c](https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmessitte/2015/03/31/is-there-any-money-to-be-made-in-asmr-part-two/?sh=2beb1c43336c) (12.08.2022)

⁸⁴ Messitte N., «Is There Any Money To Be Made In ASMR - Part Two», URL: [forbes.com/sites/nickmessitte/2015/03/31/is-there-any-money-to-be-made-in-asmr-part-two/?sh=2beb1c43336c](https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmessitte/2015/03/31/is-there-any-money-to-be-made-in-asmr-part-two/?sh=2beb1c43336c) (12.08.2022)

⁸⁵ Mozzoni M., op.cit., p. 77

⁸⁶ Chiara ASMR, op. cit., p. 99

⁸⁷ Fowler D., «ASMR: the big business of making super soft sounds», URL: [bbc.com/worklife/article/20180605-the-weird-whispering-videos-that-brands-want-to-cash-in-on](https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20180605-the-weird-whispering-videos-that-brands-want-to-cash-in-on) (12.08.2022)

to become big business as brands in the marketing industry become interested in exploiting a cultural trend. Consider that depending on the views per video, companies can pay between \$1,000 and \$3,000 for a campaign, as long as ASMR creators have or increase a relationship of trust and transparency with their audience, getting more and more views and high influence. In fact, as Savannah Newton explains⁸⁸: "ASMR consumers feel like they can relate on a personal level with the creators of the videos, so they also trust them when promoting brands."⁸⁹

One example of an ASMR artist who has started earning a lucrative income is Sophie Michelle, a 21-year-old British woman who manages to support her university studies thanks to her ASMR videos on Youtube, earning 60,000 pounds a year, about 69,000 euros. It all started in 2017, when she realized that thanks to her videos, she could help people calm down and reduce anxiety, as she stated in the British newspaper Manchester Evening News.
90

But Sophie Michelle's channel is not the only one with such gains, in fact, the first ASMR channel in YouTube search results in terms of total views is that of 'Gentlewhispering'. The channel has been in existence for three years and has 650,000,000 total views, 2 million subscribers, and, considering YouTube's minimum earnings, could earn about \$130,000 per year on average. This is 12 percent more than an average salary of a lawyer in the United States, where, to arrive at similar earnings, he had to study for several years.⁹¹

3.4 The case Chiara ASMR

"Ciao, grazie per essere qui con me oggi."

It is with this sentence that CHIARA ASMR, one of Italy's most famous and followed ASMRtists, opens her videos on the Youtube channel, rubbing her fingers together that in

⁸⁸ Talent manager dell'agenzia Ritual Network Ltd di Doncaster nel Regno Unito certificata da YouTube per la crescita di audience e specializzata nella massimizzazione del potenziale di guadagno gli influencer.

⁸⁹ Fowler D., «ASMR: the big business of making super soft sounds», URL: bbc.com/worklife/article/20180605-the-weird-whispering-videos-that-brands-want-to-cash-in-on (12.08.2022)

⁹⁰ O'Brien D., «The student who earns £60,000 a year - by whispering on Youtube», URL: manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/student-who-earns-60000-year-15414069 (12.08.2022)

⁹¹ Silady A., «The Economics of ASMR», URL: smartasset.com/insights/the-economics-of-asmr#:~:text=ASMR%20artists%20are%20able%20to,pay%20rate%20tends%20to%20be (12.08.2022)

contact with the microphone resemble the beating of a butterfly's wings and subsequently inserting the video cover that has characterized her for years.



Fig. 21: Framework video cover Chiara ASMR⁹²

She is known to the web only as Chiara ASMR, a 28-year-old girl from Emilia, Italy, who has a degree in Chemistry and Pharmaceutical Technology from the University. Since she began to make herself known, she has always wanted to remain anonymous, preserving her last name, her identity and, up to 5000 channel subscribers, even her face.

As she tells in her book⁹³, her story began in 2014 in a library during university exams. In that silent place she felt for the first time the sensations that ASMR triggers release. Intrigued, she decided to find out more about this phenomenon that would later, after a few months, become her greatest passion.

After the first videos created out of interest and with the use of a cell phone, it was in 2017 that Chiara saw a chance to earn money and realized that ASMR could become a job, thanks to the views, the subscribers (currently 1.08 million⁹⁴) but especially thanks to the sponsorships and advertisements of companies on her videos.

⁹² Chiara ASMR, «MI PREPARO E TI FACCIO DORMIRE | ASMR», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=6pRnZ6qYEQ4, 5 Maggio 2022 (16.08.2022)

⁹³Chiara ASMR, op.cit. pp. 14-30

⁹⁴Fonre: youtube.com/c/ChiaraASMR (12.08.2022)

Chiara ASMR is famous for the variety of videos on her Youtube channel: she experiments with new techniques and triggers and uses precise tags to get noticed by most users.

Necessary for content to be immersive in the sensory experience and without the presence of disturbing external noise are microphones. Microphones fall into two categories: dynamic and condenser microphones. The former are less sensitive, while the latter are suitable for high frequencies and more delicate, which implies obtaining more natural sounds but with the risk of picking up background noise and spoiling the ASMR experience. Usually ASMRtists have several microphones, each with different special characteristics.

A well-known microphone in the ASMR world is the 'Yeti' model from Blue Microphones. This has four different recording modes, captures all sounds and is suitable for different triggers, especially those created on the microphone: brushing with transparent food film or shaving foam is the most popular.

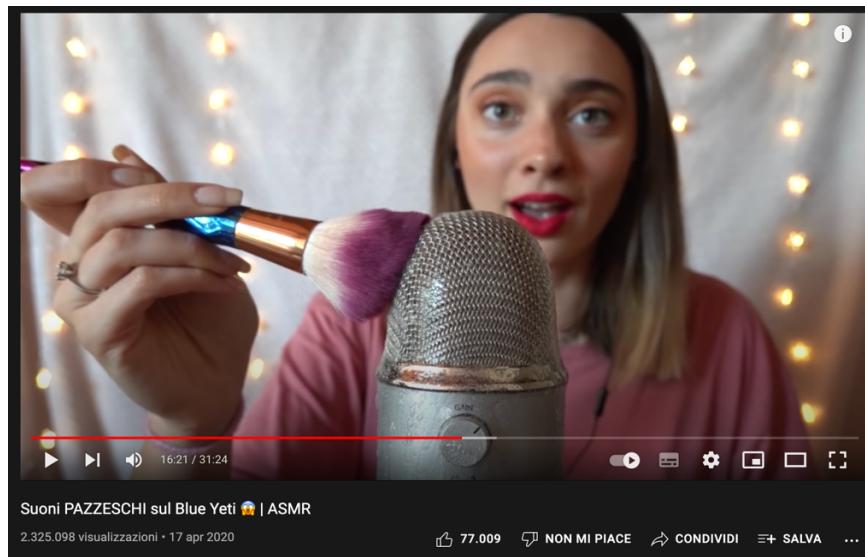


Fig. 22: Framework of the Chiara ASMR video⁹⁵

For binaural video making, on the other hand, there are dedicated microphones to bring out the sounds in their entirety: the 'Rode NT5' and the 'SR3D'.

⁹⁵ Chiara ASMR, «Suoni PAZZESCHI sul Blue Yeti | ASMR», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=tE1sO6S9Sfo, 17 Aprile 2020 (16.08.2022)

The former are microphones used in pairs for a complete, contemporary three-dimensional experience, although it all depends on where you place them, while the SR3D is a microphone that was created specifically for binaural recording⁹⁶. Its special shape, consisting of a metal box with two silicone ears on either side, allows the user to have a fully immersive experience, because the sensations felt when listening to the ASMRtist touching the silicone ends would be the same if experienced live in person.

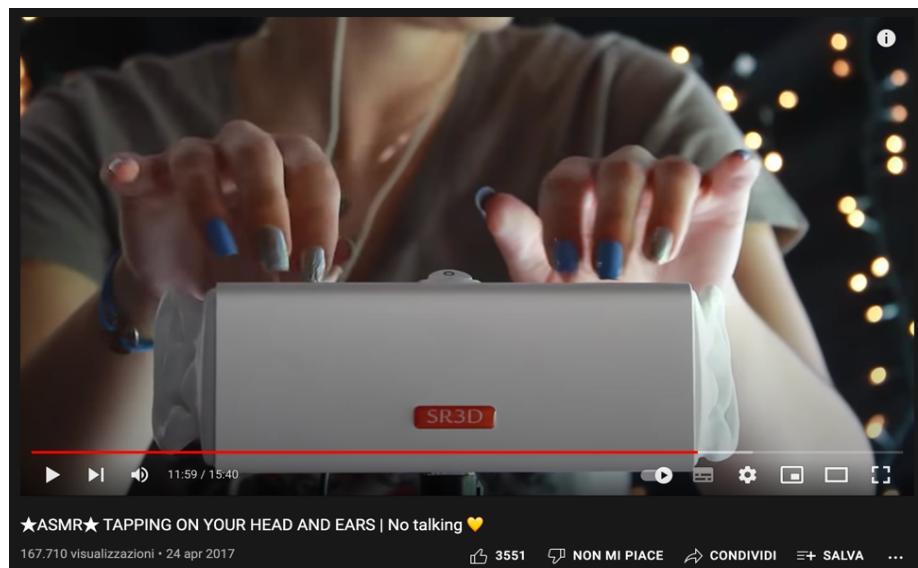


Fig. 23: Chiara ASMR video framework⁹⁷

Creating ASMR content is creative work, taking your attention and not giving it back to you until you have thought and produced everything in your head.⁹⁸

This is precisely why you need to train your mind to have new ideas to create and experiment with triggers or new ways that can engage users and make everyday situations and sounds a pleasant discovery for your own ears and well-being.

"I often let my thoughts and feelings run wild and see where they take me, or I let myself be guided by the fads of the moment. [...] Not everything can be pure imagination of the artist, an important part is study and research."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Chiara ASMR, op.cit. p. 84

⁹⁷ Chiara ASMR, «ASMR TAPPING ON YOUR HEAD AND EARS | No talking», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=PFueJe6GGX8, 24 Aprile 2017 (16.08.2022)

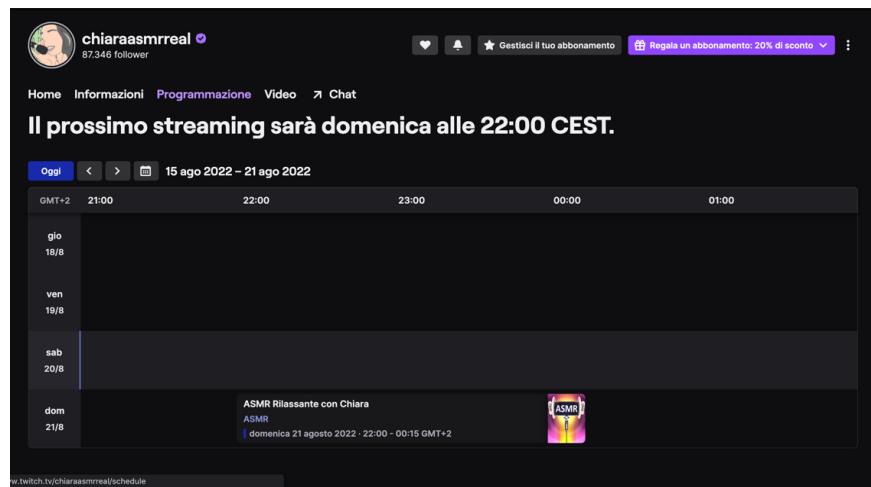
⁹⁸Chiara ASMR, op.cit. p. 31

⁹⁹ Chiara ASMR, op.cit. pp. 102-103

Creating ASMR videos and growing one's channel by fueling views can be called a real job consisting of a dose of creativity and a dose of research and study. One thinks of role-play videos in which one plays the role of a specialist doctor: although they are not too specific and with the sole purpose of relaxing, the risk of creating false information is to be considered, and in order not to come across as superficial and ill-prepared, it is important to take time to study and understand the basics of the discipline one wants to address in the video.

A key role that has contributed to the success of Chiara ASMR has been played by public relations through the attention of various news outlets including, in 2019, the 'Corriere della Sera.' The latter reads, "In an era in which, in order to get noticed on the Internet, many raise their tones to the point of insult, a 25-year-old woman from Emilia has managed to collect almost one hundred million views on Youtube with the art of lowering tones. [...] People listen to them to relax if they are tense, or to fall asleep, students follow them to shake off pre-exam tension, and more adults keep them in the background while they work"¹⁰⁰.

And they do this not only on the YouTube platform. In fact, Chiara ASMR is also present on other social channels such as Twitch, where she meets her channel subscribers two days a week, on Wednesdays and Sundays, with two-hour ASMR live sessions, from 10 p.m. onwards.



¹⁰⁰ Morillo C., «Chiara ASMR, la studentessa che sussurra a Youtube vista 100 milioni di volte », Il Corriere della Sera, febbraio 2019, URL: corriere.it/tecnologia/19_febbraio_10/chiara-asmr-studentessa-che-sussurra-youtube-vista-100-milioni-volte-e3f40a50-2d78-11e9-9137-8c3ab066961d.shtml?intcmp=googleamp (12.08.2022)

Fig. 24: Scheduling of Chiara ASMR on Twitch's streaming platform¹⁰¹

The live streaming reaches an average of 13 thousand viewers. In fact, the peculiarity of this social channel is that mainly live videos are broadcast, in which only users who pay a monthly subscription can chat with the artist and co-create with him/her at that instant, not afterwards as it happens on YouTube. This feature allows Chiara ASMR and other artists to create ASMR content during the live broadcast and likewise have an exchange of topics with their subscribers, strengthening the already existing trust relationship.

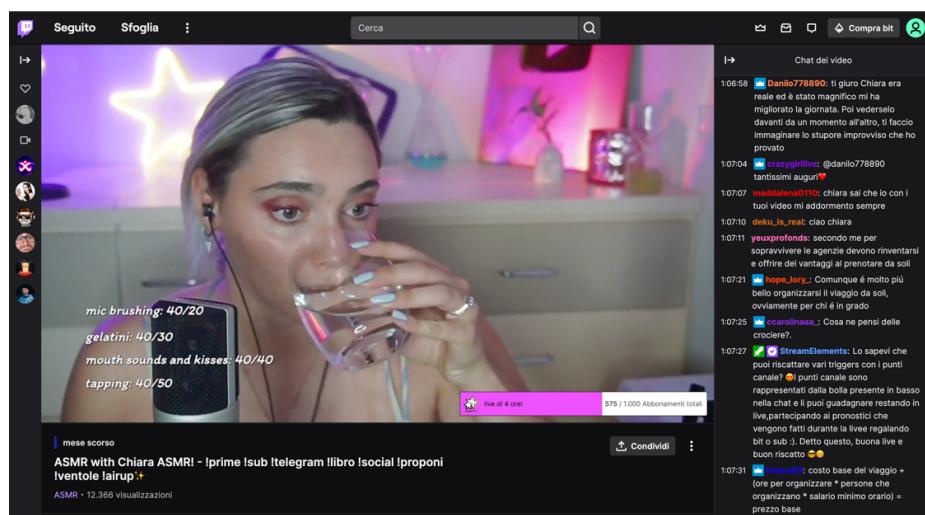


Fig. 25: CHIARA ASMR video framework on the Twitch platform¹⁰²

The Instagram channel, on the other hand, shows up with 377 posts and 126 thousand followers. Chiara maintains her personal profile without revealing information about her identity. It shows travels, adventures and everyday situations, as well as sponsorships and various participations in events.

Chiara ASMR is a true personal brand: she has her own identity that is recognized and appreciated by many and which she curates through communication that varies according to the social channels she uses. She is Chiara ASMR, an expert in the ASMR world who through her triggers manages to make people relax and for this reason she is one of the greatest creators of ASMR videos known and followed in Italy, but she is also and only

¹⁰¹ Si veda: twitch.tv/chiaraasmrreal/schedule (19.08.2022)

¹⁰² Si veda: twitch.tv/videos/1521585168 (19.08.2022)

Chiara, a simple 28-year-old girl who wants to share her life and her work with those who follow and appreciate her.

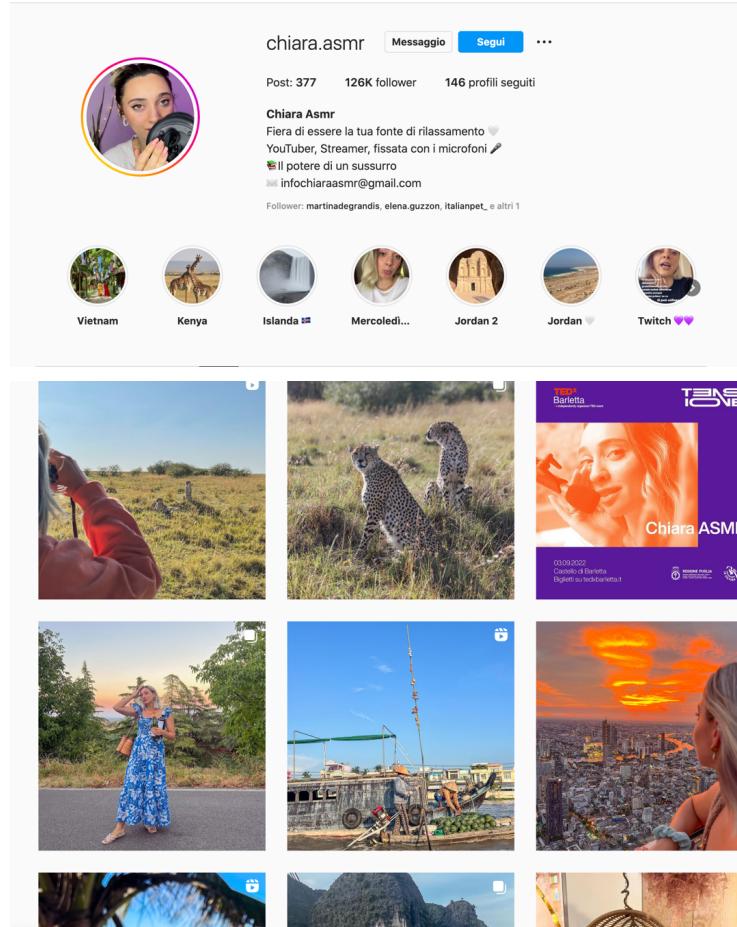


Fig. 26: Instagram profile of Chiara ASMR¹⁰³

3.5 The case ASMR Zeitgeist

Another prominent ASMR artist in the scene is 'ASMR Zeitgeist,' more specifically Michael Richter, a 34-year-old living in Munich who chose his stage name in 'Spirit of Time.'

His YouTube channel has 2.45 million subscribers, over 514,817,457 video views and 215 uploads, ranging in length from one hour to four, including a commercial for the launch of Renault Zoe.¹⁰⁴ Its estimated annual earnings are between 173,000 - € 1.04 million.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Chiara.asmr, URL: instagram.com/chiara.asmr/?hl=it (12.08.2022)

¹⁰⁴ Renault Italia, «ASMR auto elettrica | Renault ZOE presentata da ASMR Zeitgeist», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=wRvZ5sQ4Al4, 18.09.2018 (13.08.2022)

¹⁰⁵ YouTubers.me, URL: youtubers.me/asmr-zeitgeist/youtube-quanto-guadagna (13.08.2022)

"Hello sweet insomniacs and tingle lovers. Zeitgeist"¹⁰⁶ is the introduction of his videos, although not always present as in Chiara ASMR, created with a soft and deep voice.

What is recurring in each video, however, is the initial cover with the hourglass logo inside a circle (as can be seen from the image below) and the inscription advising to wear headphones for a better hearing experience, all accompanied by a deep sound that already makes the user perceive that this is an ASMR video.

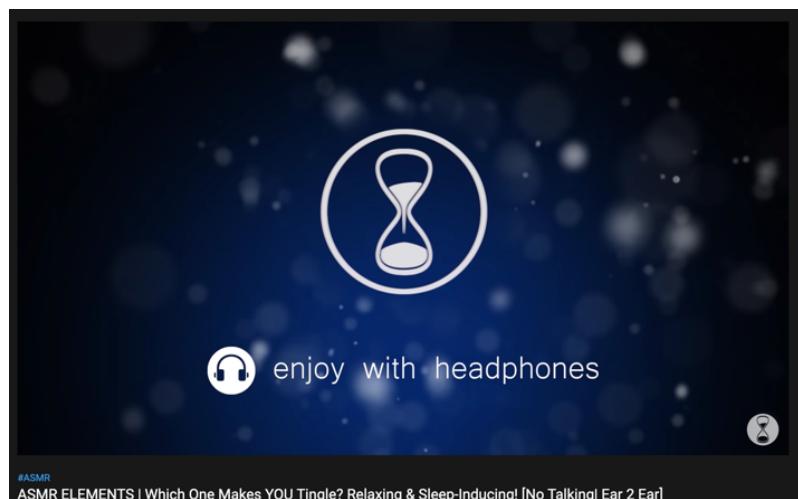


Fig. 27: ASMR Zeitgeist Video Cover¹⁰⁷

Its videos also used to be introduced by a preview: this is to include in the first few minutes of the video a 'taste' of what can be found inside, to help users understand precisely what triggers will be used, even if these are already made explicit with tags in the title.

¹⁰⁶ Trad. «Ciao dolci insonni e amanti del formicolio. Zeitgeist»

¹⁰⁷ ASMR Zeitgeist, «ASMR 3D Face Treatment at the Sleep Spa - Skin Care Triggers & Soothing Sounds from Ear to Ear», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=42ZRfVbJ9Xw&list=RDCMUCzGEGjOCbgv9z9SF71QyI7g&index=6, 4 giugno 2022 (13.08.2022)

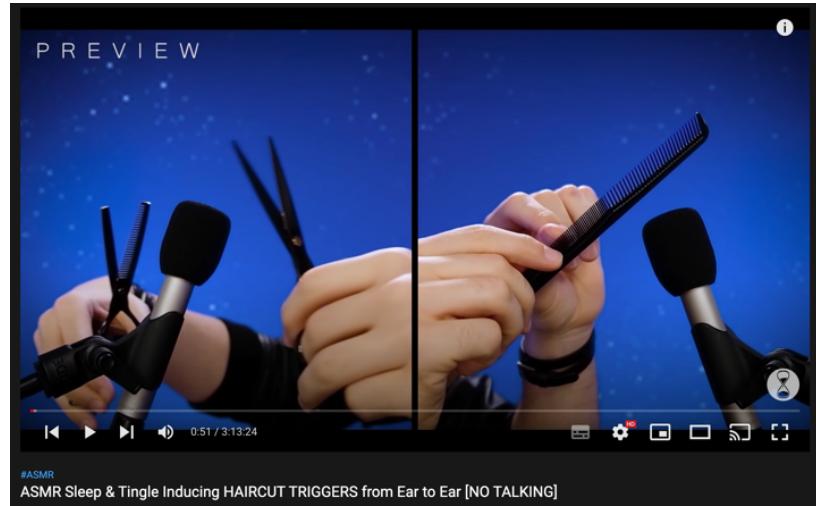


Fig. 28: Preview of the ASMR Zeitgeist video¹⁰⁸

ASMR Zeitgeist created his channel in July 2015, although his debut was on November 1, 2016 when he posted 'TINGLE - The ASMR Pokémon - Drawing Tutorial, Male Whispering, Scratching' from which he got 362,787 views and 11,313 likes. In this video he introduces his 'friend' Tingle and draws him on a sheet of paper explaining exactly the process to make him.

After experimenting with talking and role play videos, ASMR Zeitgeist today mainly focuses on sensory and visual triggers such as: brushing, tapping, scratching, crinkle sounds, ear cleaning and the binaural sounds. In some videos it places all the triggers most desired and liked by its audience within a single video, as can be seen in the image below.

¹⁰⁸ ASMR Zeitgeist, «ASMR Sleep & Tingle Inducing HAIRCUT TRIGGERS from Ear to Ear [NO TALKING]», URL : youtube.com/watch?v=_BmZhffIGZY&list=RDCMUCzGEGjOCbgv9z9SF71QyI7g&index=5, 2 dicembre 2021 (13.08.2022)



Fig. 29: ASMR Zeitgeist video framework 'ASMR 99 TRIGGERS in 99 Minutes for a 99.99% Sleep & Tingle Guarantee [NO TALKING | Ear 2 Ear]'¹⁰⁹

What sets ASMR Zeitgeist apart is its prowess in the experimental research of the sounds with which it enriches its videos and the excellent technical quality of the instrumentation that leads to accurate and complete audios in terms of sound frequencies.

Adding to the immersion in the video experience are the graphics he places on the microphones, which differ not only in use but especially in shape.

He uses the 'Blue Yeti', the 'Tascam" and the 'SR3D' microphone and customizes them all not only with faces or cute eyes that hint at grimaces when there are certain triggers, but by calling them by actual names, as if they were alive. In addition, ASMR Zeitgeist uses on a daily basis a particular binaural microphone in the shape of a face to which it inserts a smile according to the trigger it is doing (as can be seen in image #28).

Here, instead, is an example of 'Frank'.

¹⁰⁹ ASMR Zeitgeist, «ASMR 99 TRIGGERS in 99 Minutes for a 99.99% Sleep & Tingle Guarantee [NO TALKING | Ear 2 Ear]», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=-mPQw1aRpC0, 8 agosto 2022 (13.08.2022)

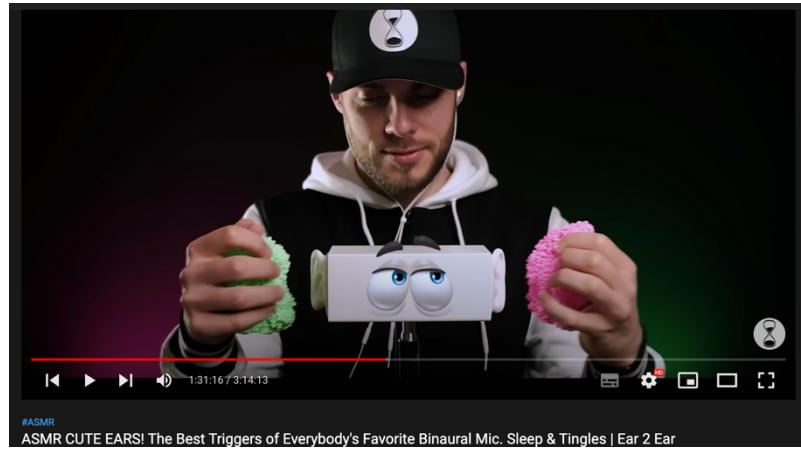


Fig. 30: ASMR Zeitgeist video framework¹¹⁰

In order to make the usability of its videos faster and easier ASMR Zeitgeist categorizes all its videos within folders, so the user, once he enters the channel, just needs to click on 'Playlist' to see all the uploaded videos collected and be able to decide right away which ones to watch, without having to scroll through them all.

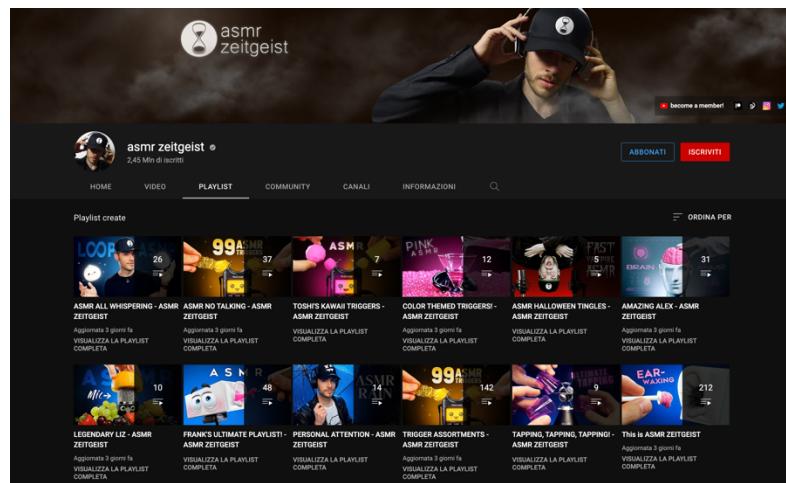


Fig. 31: ASMR Zeitgeist Youtube channel¹¹¹

ASMR Zeitgeist is not only a YouTube channel, Michael Richter, in order to maintain his personal brand and to be recognized by those who search for him, has chosen to keep the

¹¹⁰ ASMR Zeitgeist, «ASMR CUTE EARS! The Best Triggers of Everybody's Favorite Binaural Mic. Sleep & Tingles | Ear 2 Ear», URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=Dcj-9A-LDSY&list=PLr65dJbDudvKpMmbsW_T5mWWow6cfje&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dcj-9A-LDSY&list=PLr65dJbDudvKpMmbsW_T5mWWow6cfje&index=1), giugno 2022 (13.08.2022)

¹¹¹ ASMR Zeitgeist, URL: [youtube.com/c/asmrzeitgeist/playlists](https://www.youtube.com/c/asmrzeitgeist/playlists) (13.08.2022)

same name for the other social networks where he is present, such as Instagram and Twitter, while for the Facebook social, whose last publication was on April 12, 2020, he carries his real name.

The two social networks Instagram and Twitter are channels mainly created to support the YouTube channel. In fact, they mainly convey updates or appointments regarding the release of new videos and content, although sometimes personal images are featured.

CHAPTER 4: NEUROSCIENCE AS THE BASIS OF ASMR

4.1 ASMR and Science

Every phenomenon born online has its own life: it is born, grows, grows old, and dies. The press starts to take an interest in these phenomena when they are still small and then gets rid of them and moves on to other more important news.

But this is not the case with ASMR, which has attracted the attention of journalists and university researchers dedicated to finding an answer to this object of study through sophisticated methods.

However, attention to the phenomenon was delayed, as only a few people were externalizing the benefits they felt and, completely inexperienced, began naming it with more disparate definitions, such as 'brain orgasm or brain orgasm.' This way of naming the subject undermined the initial interest of the scientific community, which then lagged behind the spread of the phenomenon as it was wrongly pigeonholed into an erotic category for quite some time.¹¹²

The term 'cerebral orgasm' implies a sexual response, but the ASMR experience itself is evocative of positive feelings (for some calm, for others euphoria) but not comparable to arousal or other perceptions of a sexual nature.¹¹³

Having overcome the first hurdle, highlighting the importance of studies of the ASMR phenomenon was Steven Novella, director of General Neurology at Yale University School of Medicine, who began to investigate triggers and the fact that these seem to involve for each person the same brain networks: the sensory cerebral cortex and the autonomic nervous system.

The involvement of these brain networks results in the decrease of rational brain activity in some areas and the detour of major functions in the occipital, frontal and temporal areas causing a sleep-like sensation.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Irene Sanità Gigante, «ASMR: un piacere esclusivo o per tutti?», URL: sinapsyche.it/asmr/ (09.09.22)

¹¹³ My Personal Trainer, «ASMR: Cos'è e Come Funziona l'Orgasmo Cerebrale?», URL: my-personaltrainer.it/salute/asmr-orgasmo-cerebrale.html (09.09.22)

¹¹⁴ Kuntz M., «ASMR: IL NUOVO FENOMENO A METÀ TRA MEDICINA E MITO», URL: kompeterejournal.it/asmr-il-nuovo-fenomeno-a-meta-tra-medicina-e-mito/ (7.09.22)

What Novella is certain of is that the ASMR phenomenon still has no definite answers to researchers' questions and that to be clearer, MRI or transcranial magnetic stimulation technologies are needed to study what people experience while watching ASMR videos.¹¹⁵

After Novella, to take interest in the phenomenon came several researchers and scientists who define ASMR as: "an experience rooted in human physiology that can have therapeutic effects on physical and mental health"¹¹⁶, which is why several experiments have begun that have seen thousands of subjects being subjected to ASMR videos to find useful answers. Among them is a study by Giulia Poerio, a professor at the University of Essex, in which 1,000 people were summoned to observe ASMR videos, resulting in 800 sensitive subjects exhibiting greater shivering than those subjects who were less sensitive. At the higher sample also showed higher levels of arousal and calmness in the body and reduced stress, anxiety and sadness due to a decrease in heart rate.¹¹⁷

A follow-up study conducted by Dartmouth College researchers in 2018¹¹⁸ measured with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) blood flow activity in the brain as participants experienced tingling while watching ASMR movies. All 10 participating subjects experienced increased auditory and visual regions and increased function in the occipital, frontal and temporal lobes.

Having defined the basics showing the areas of the brain involved, what makes science still uncertain about this phenomenon is the fact that there are people who are sensitive and others who are totally insensitive to ASMR, and one wonders if there is therefore a neurobiological difference between individuals.

The 'Embodied Emotions' lab at the University of Winnipeg in 2016 set out to answer this question by focusing on the 'Default Mode Network' (DMN), which is a network of interconnected neurons that is activated when we are in a waking state and shift our focus of attention from outside to inside.¹¹⁹ More simply, this is the opposite state to vigilance,

¹¹⁵ Novella S., «ASMR», URL: theness.com/neurologicablog/index.php/asmr/ (7.09.22)

¹¹⁶ Poerio G. L., et al., *More than a feeling: Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) is characterized by reliable changes in affect and physiology*, Plos One, 13(6), 20 giugno 2018

¹¹⁷ Mozzoni M., op.cit. p. 8

¹¹⁸ Bryson C. Lochte, Guillory S. A., Richard C. A. H., Kelley W. M., *An fMRI investigation of the neural correlates underlying the autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR)*, BioImpacts, 8(4), 23 settembre 2018, p. 295-304

¹¹⁹ Mozzoni M., op.cit. p. 11

the so-called 'Task Positive Network,' the neural network or circuit that enables us to perform a task with attention.¹²⁰

It has been found that people who are sensitive, as opposed to those who are insensitive to ASMR, have greater connectivity between sensory areas of the brain, as well as more developed ones. Researchers at James Cook University also added that sensitive people are more empathetic, predisposed to new experiences and have a high ability to immerse themselves within stories.

4.2 The benefits of ASMR

Although science is still searching for definite answers, one thing is certain: those who are sensitive to the phenomenon claim to have psychological and physical benefits.

The biggest obstacle in studying the phenomenon is the subjectivity of the sensation (difficult to measure). Since 2015, however, neuroscientific, physiological and psychological research has been continuously gathering new information on the characteristics and effects that accompany the sensation.¹²¹

To investigate the actual benefits that those experiencing ASMR feel from watching videos, an experiment was done in which participants were asked to watch two different videos¹²²: one ASMR and one non-ASMR in a laboratory setting. Half of the people who took part in the study were recruited because they identified themselves as people who experience ASMR, while the other half as non-ASMR-sensitive, both age- and gender-matched.

The study found that those who experience ASMR show a significantly greater reduction in heart rate (an average decrease of 3.14 beats per minute) than those who do not, and a significant increase in positive emotions, including relaxation and feelings of social connectedness.

¹²⁰ Corriere della Sera, «Sussurri da guardare: che cosa sono gli Asmr che stregano Youtube», URL: corriere.it/liberitutti/18_novembre_02/sussurri-asmr-effetto-rilassante-a292d29c-dcee-11e8-989f-9f5167836d06.shtml (09.09.22)

¹²¹ Irene Sanità Gigante, «ASMR: un piacere esclusivo o per tutti?», URL: sinapsyche.it/asmr/

¹²² Poerio G. L., et al., *More than a feeling: Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) is characterized by reliable changes in affect and physiology*, Plos One, 13(6), 20 giugno 2018

Dr. Poerio said, "Our studies show that ASMR videos do indeed have the relaxing effect anecdotally reported by those who have tried them, but only in people who experience this feeling."¹²³

Considering that many people, through ASMR, achieve a state of relaxation and tranquility, it is hypothesized that this phenomenon may have therapeutic benefits for those suffering from sleep disorders, stress, anxiety and depression.¹²⁴

The association between the ASMR effect and the feeling of pleasure could be related to the involvement of hormones that kick in during the experience of the phenomenon. From a neuro-chemical point of view¹²⁵, in fact, the reported tingles and mild euphoria are related to the release of endorphins. These substances, in fact, are released when people experience stimuli that are reassuring or relaxing to them, such as whispers or the touch of a brush in the hair. Endorphins also stimulate the production of dopamine and oxytocin. The former is a substance related to desire and reward (it could thus be responsible for potential ASMR addiction), while the latter is the molecule responsible for emotional and interpersonal connection in relationships of all kinds¹²⁶, a relationship that begins as early as childhood experiences.¹²⁷

4.3.1 ASMR and Mindfulness

ASMR shares some phenomenological characteristics with mindfulness. Mindfulness is a two-component process in which a person is found to intentionally self-regulate his or her attention and have full awareness of the present moment¹²⁸, as well as to open his or

¹²³ Department of Psychology, «Brain tingles: First study of its kind reveals physiological benefits of ASMR», URL: sheffield.ac.uk/psychology/news/brain-tingles-first-study-its-kind-reveals-physiological-benefits-asmr#:~:text=In%20the%20first%20study%20of,who%20do%20not%20experience%20ASMR (9.09.2022)

¹²⁴ Irene Sanità Gigante, «ASMR: un piacere esclusivo o per tutti?», URL: sinapsyche.it/asmr/#bibliografia (09.09.22)

¹²⁵ Bryson C. Lochte, Guillory S. A., Richard C. A. H., Kelley W. M., *An fMRI investigation of the neural correlates underlying the autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR)*, *BiolImpacts*, 8(4), 23 settembre 2018, p. 295-304

¹²⁶ Irene Sanità Gigante, «ASMR: un piacere esclusivo o per tutti?», URL: sinapsyche.it/asmr/#bibliografia (09.09.22)

¹²⁷ Chiara ASMR, op. cit., p. 50

¹²⁸ Paul Verhaeghen, *Presence. How mindfulness and meditation shape your brain, mind and life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017

her feelings and emotions to all experiences without belittling them even if they are negative.

It derives from Buddhist-style meditation and applies this type of meditation to everyday environments and life.

It was founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn, along with his other colleagues, a Zen biologist and writer from the United States starting in the 1970s.

To test whether ASMR and Mindfulness had affinities, Canadian researchers used scales such as 'The Toronto Mindfulness Scale' (TMS)¹²⁹ and 'ASMR Checklist'¹³⁰ on 500 participants which showed that not only is there affinity between these two domains, but that people most sensitive to ASMR triggers are the same to experience higher levels of mindfulness, and that individuals with the highest curiosity score on the TMS scale toward repetitive stimuli have greater perception and feeling of ASMR 'thrills.

Toronto Mindfulness Scale

Note: In contrast to the FFMS, the TMS scale is intended to measure "state-like" experiences during meditation, rather than "trait-like" cognitive dispositions that might reflect the cognitive consequences of meditative practice.

We are interested in what you just experienced. Below is a list of things that people sometimes experience. Please read each statement. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. In other words, how well does the statement describe what you just experienced, just now?

0	1	2	3	4
Not at All	A Little	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Very much

Rate 0-4	Item #	Item
1	1	I experienced myself as separate from my changing thoughts and feelings.
2	2	I was more concerned with being open to my experiences than controlling or changing them.
3	3	I was curious about what I might learn about myself by taking notice of how I react to certain thoughts, feelings, or sensations.
4	4	I experienced my thoughts more as events in my mind than as a necessarily accurate reflection of the way things 'really' are.
5	5	I was curious to see what my mind was up to from moment to moment.
6	6	I was curious about each of the thoughts and feelings that I was having.
7	7	I was receptive to observing unpleasant thoughts and feelings without interfering with them.
8	8	I was more invested in just watching my experiences as they arose, than in figuring out what they could mean.
9	9	I approached each experience by trying to accept it, no matter whether it was pleasant or unpleasant.
10	10	I remained curious about the nature of each experience as it arose.
11	11	I was aware of my thoughts and feelings without overidentifying with them.
12	12	I was curious about my reactions to things.
13	13	I was curious about what I might learn about myself by just taking notice of what my attention gets drawn to.

Fig. 32: Toronto Mindfulness Scale¹³¹

It has also been shown that both mindfulness and ASMR can lead to a feeling of relaxation that improves people's subjective well-being.¹³²

¹²⁹ Consiste in domande riguardanti l'esperienza mindfulness dei partecipanti.

¹³⁰ Consiste in domande riguardanti le esperienze ASMR dei partecipanti.

¹³¹ Si veda: ocf.berkeley.edu/~jkfahlstrom/ConsciousnessWeb/Meditation/TMS.htm (12.09.22)

¹³² Barratt E., Davis N. J., *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR): a flow-like mental state*, Swansea University PeerJ, March 26, 2015

Although these results are already important for research, they are only the first answers to the various questions that researchers are asking.

It should also be noted that there are fundamental differences between the two phenomena just presented. If one looks carefully, mindfulness focuses on the emotional and psychological aspect of the person, while ASMR occurs after a bodily reaction and relaxation both physically and mentally.¹³³ In addition, ASMR is based on the relationship between the triggers and the viewer, while mindfulness is personal, focusing on total self-care.

4.3.2 ASMR and Frisson

With respect to mindfulness, frisson, a French term that translates to thrill and jolt, is defined as 'brief moment of emotional arousal' or 'epidermal orgasm'.¹³⁴ Later, after some studies, it learned another meaning: 'psychophysiological response to pleasurable sound or visual stimuli, capable of inducing affective states of positive valence and sometimes visible tingling and shivering through erection of skin hairs and pupillary dilation'.¹³⁵

The frisson is closely related to the musical component, although it can also be induced by other stimuli, and the tingling and shivering sensations make it even more closely related to the experience of the autonomic sensory meridian response.

Indeed, supporting this link are the several similarities between ASMR and frisson.

The first concerns a study conducted with diffusion tensor MRI¹³⁶ in which it was found that having goosebumps while listening to music would be induced by increased connectivity between sensory areas of the brain, just as with ASMR.¹³⁷

In addition, frisson is also a completely subjective phenomenon like ASMR, in fact, if one reflects, music may give one person goosebumps and another not, although it is

¹³³ Chiara ASMR, op.cit., pp. 64-65

¹³⁴ Mozzoni M., op.cit., p. 19

¹³⁵ Harrison, L., Loui, P., *Thrills, chills, frissons, and skin orgasms: Toward an integrative model of transcendent psychophysiological experiences in music*, Frontiers in Psychology, Article 790, 2014

¹³⁶ Tecnica di risonanza magnetica che prevede l'uso del tensore di diffusione per ottenere immagini anche tridimensionali basandosi sull'analisi del movimento delle molecole d'acqua presenti nei tessuti del cervello.

¹³⁷ Sachs M., E., Ellis R., J., Schlaug G., Loui P., *Brain connectivity reflects human aesthetic responses to music*, Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, Volume 11, Issue 6, giugno 2016, Pages 884-891

enough to have one's attention totally focused on the moment one is listening to become, almost equally, sensitive to the experience.¹³⁸

As described by Marisa Del Campo and her colleagues at the University of Connecticut, both frisson and ASMR are linked to mindfulness and the state of flow, that moment when a person is totally involved and absorbed in the ongoing experience that causes them to lose all sense of space and time.¹³⁹

4.3.3 ASMR and Flow

Flow is that state in which a person is so immersed in the activity he or she is doing that he or she feels a growing sense of energizing focus, full involvement and fulfillment in what he or she is doing.¹⁴⁰

It is a common experience for those in sports, the arts, literature and music, although one does not have to be a champion to experience this state.

One who is in the flow feels that he is fully engaged, focused, concentrated; he knows that the activity is feasible and that the skills he possesses are adequate for the purpose, and for that they will be used to the fullest. He is absolutely focused on the present and feels a sense of serenity. He also has a sense of moving in harmony with the activity undertaken, as if within a current, a flow.¹⁴¹

The state of flow is not only visible mentally, but also on a physical level. One study showed how classical music pianists entered flow by presenting a slowing heart rate and deeper breathing, a symptom of life satisfaction and well-being.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Mozzoni M., op.cit., p. 21

¹³⁹ Del Campo M. A., *Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) and frisson: Mindfully induced sensory phenomena that promote happiness*, International Journal of School & Educational Psychology, Aprile 2016, pp. 99-105

¹⁴⁰ Del Campo M. A., *Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) and frisson: Mindfully induced sensory phenomena that promote happiness*, International Journal of School & Educational Psychology, Aprile 2016, pp. 99-105

¹⁴¹ Simone M., «Flow o dello sport come stato di grazia», URL: brainfactor.it/flow-o-dello-sport-come-stato-di-grazia/, 2014 (13.09.22)

¹⁴² Robb A., «The ‘flow state’: Where creative work thrives», URL: bbc.com/worklife/article/20190204-how-to-find-your-flow-state-to-be-peak-creative (13.09.22)

While those who experience this state during their working life are associated with a person who has higher productivity, motivation and loyalty to the company.¹⁴³

It has also been noted that those who experience ASMR share some characteristics of flow states because it allows easy mirroring between those who watch the videos and those who create them (who are in a flow state), thanks to mirror neurons that cause them to experience that feeling.¹⁴⁴

This mirroring occurs thanks to mirror neurons, which allow us to understand both mentally and physically the actions that one of our fellow human beings is performing at a given moment, since, at that exact moment when we observe the other, the same neurons are activated in our brain that come into play when we are the one performing that same action.

4.3.4 ASMR and Hypnosis

When thinking about the practice of hypnosis, most people think it is related to magic or a maneuver implemented by mysterious artifice to manipulate the will of others. In reality, it is a normal experience that we are confronted with every day when we are focused, absorbed, enraptured, entranced by something that catalyzes our attention to such a degree that we ignore everything going on around us.

When hypnosis occurs, through electroencephalography we detect not only the shift that occurs from a profound prevalence of beta waves, typical of the waking state, to alpha and theta waves-the former typical of relaxation, the latter of R.E.M. sleep and dream activity-but also a significant reduction in heart rate.

An additional factor linking hypnosis to ASMR is called 'dissociation' and relates to the ability to temporarily detach from one reality and enter completely into another type of experience. If you think about it, in some ASMR triggers such as role play, the person is intent on viewing a film in which someone is 'taking care of the other' in a confined space and for a set time.

¹⁴³ Robb A., «The 'flow state': Where creative work thrives», URL: bbc.com/worklife/article/20190204-how-to-find-your-flow-state-to-be-peak-creative (13.09.22)

¹⁴⁴ Barrat E., Davis N. J., *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR): a flow-like mental state*, PeerJ, Swansea University, March 26, 2015

Craig Richard, in his book 'Brain Tingles'¹⁴⁵ and during his speech at TEDx in Charlottesville, explains how he and other researchers at Dartmouth College have seen that the brain regions that are activated while people are watching ASMR videos are the same ones that are activated when people receive positive personal attention from a kind and caring person in the real world. One feels deeply relaxed.¹⁴⁶

The only difference in this sees a one-to-two relationship in the clinical setting for hypnosis, and a one-to-many relationship in the case of the enjoyment of an ASMR film available to anyone, although the ASMRtist addresses people by calling them by words such as, "just you, only you"¹⁴⁷.

The voice and the use of the body are also elements of great connection with the subject of hypnosis, as these are two practices that require the activity of nonverbal communication to be precise: the gaze, tone, rhythm of the voice, gestures and breathing must follow precise rules, just as a good ASMRtist follows them.

Instead, the differences that exist concern the professionalism and contact of the two phenomena.

More specifically, the activity of hypnosis should be carried out only by a licensed health professional, within his or her clinic and to whom direct feedback can be sent as soon as the session is over; in contrast, the activity of ASMR can be carried out by anyone person, who can create an effect transmitted to multiple people who will only be able to reveal their feelings later and through a platform.

Some ASMRtists, such as Fairy ASMR, have tried to bring live ASMR experiences to life for a few users, with the intention of creating the same kind of sensations live as well and to make this experience more and more livable and strong that could become a moment similar to clinical hypnosis in the future.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Craig R., *Brain Tingles: The Secret to Triggering Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response for Improved Sleep, Stress Relief, and Head-to-Toe Euphoria*, Adams Media, Minnesota, 4 settembre 2018

¹⁴⁶ TED, «The brain science (and benefits) of ASMR Craig Richard | TED», TEDx Charlottesville, 8 luglio 2022 URL: youtube.com/watch?v=Yukt7O1wDXc (17.09.22)

¹⁴⁷ Mozzoni M., op.cit.

¹⁴⁸ Fairy ASMR, «IL PRIMO ASMR DAL VIVO IN ITALIA: Tingly Vlog * Fairy Asmr ft. Hermetic Kitten ASMR», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=op2AgDI7_yA, 24 maggio 2019 (19.09.22)

4.4 Neuromarketing

Realizing the potential that this phenomenon can have in many people, several companies have chosen to try their hand at building advertisements, campaigns, and marketing strategies having ASMR as their main element.

To create these types of campaigns, they have used techniques that were born in 2003, techniques that help companies understand how consumers think and decide and what are the deep motivations that foster their behaviors. These are the techniques that draw on the sphere of neuroscience and are applied to marketing to make it easier and more effective to engage both attentively and emotionally with customers, from design to product communication and sales, by testing the effects on the consumer's cognitive sphere during their customer journey.

Neuromarketing, as it is called, is the perfect alternative to traditional market research because it allows for real-time analysis of consumer behavior through the responses emitted by the body, such as breathing rate, heartbeat and sweating, and the deeper responses of the brain when one is in the midst of a purchase decision in front of a shelf or while watching an advertisement.

Even while watching ASMR movies. In fact, the same technologies used for neuromarketing (functional magnetic resonance imaging, electroencephalography, and eyetracking), now also ethically accepted because they are considered noninvasive, were used, as described in previous chapters (see Ch. 4.1), to understand the benefits that users felt and perceived while viewing ASMR movies.

The responses that are received are completely involuntary and passive, consequently, thanks to these measurements, scientific and objective data can be obtained, because without the presence of any rational element of the individual.

What is going to be studied precisely is the most complex structure of the entire human body: the brain.

The brain is divided into right hemisphere and left hemisphere, which in turn are divided into two lobes: parietal associated with movement and recognition of shapes and structures, occipital associated with visual processing activity, temporal which is suitable for perception and recognition of auditory stimuli of memory and speech, and finally

frontal, which is concerned with reasoning, movement, articulation of speech and emotions.

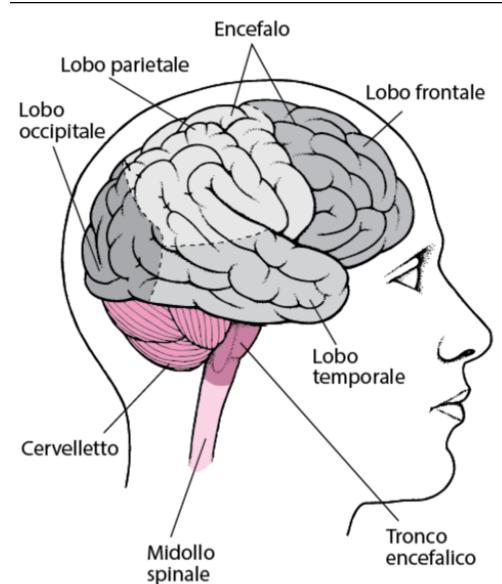


Fig. 33: Brain structure¹⁴⁹

And it is the latter that play a key role in choosing a product.

"Where the hand goes to the eyes if they have already gone, where the eyes have gone, there the mind has already flown, where the mind gone, there are already emotions, where there is emotion there is also life."¹⁵⁰

Emotions are divided into primary or secondary. The former are seven and also belong to other species of animals: anger, sadness, fear, joy, surprise, disgust and acceptance. The latter, are a combination of the former and are the result of interaction between individuals: joy, anxiety, envy, jealousy, shame and disappointment.

The senses also play a key role in choosing a product.

"Nothing is in the intellect, which has not first been in the senses." Aristotle already in his time, 384 BC - 322 BC, understood the value and importance of the senses.

¹⁴⁹ Si veda: msdmanuals.com/-/media/manual/home/images/n/e/u/neu_viewing_the_brain_a_it.gif?thn=0&sc_lang=it (19.09.22)

¹⁵⁰ Nātyaśāstra, Trattato indiano sulle arti e sullo spettacolo, 200 a.c.

'Senses' means the systems that are sensitive to certain stimuli from the external environment and in which specialized receptors translate them into nerve impulses. Accordingly, it means the ability of a receptor to respond selectively and differentially to sensory stimulation.¹⁵¹

Ale Smidts, director of the Erasmus Center for Neuroeconomics at the Rotterdam School of Management recounts neuromarketing as: "a set of techniques for identifying brain mechanisms geared toward greater compression of consumer behavior for the development of more effective marketing strategies."¹⁵²

4.5 Neuroselling

Marketing strategies that use neuroscientific techniques as a foundation are more likely to succeed. This is because neuromarketing techniques provide insight into key aspects of making a product more appealing and more compatible with customer needs.

There are three acts studied: concentration, i.e., the subject's attention in performing an action or during a stimulus, recollection, and emotional involvement during and at the end of immersion in the experience.¹⁵³

For it is the latter that is the key element. When choosing one product over another, consumers generally do not have the time to buy rationally, but rely on a purchase without any intentionality. The choice is made on the basis of the consumer's liking of the sound, smell, taste, and feel of the product.

When the user is observing an advertisement, neuromarketing tools measure its attention flow and moods, highlighting when and where attention is focused and when interest wanes.

With regard to product placement, for example in ASMR videos, thanks to neuromarketing it is possible to understand how product placement is perceived within a video or film, distinguishing those that are consistent from those that are invasive.

¹⁵¹ Giulia Cesarini Argiroffo, «Il Neuromarketing dei sensi», URL: neuroscienze.net/il-neuromarketing-dei-sensi/ (19.09.22)

¹⁵² Gallucci F., *Neuromarketing*, EGEA S.p.A., Milano, giugno 2019, p. 15

¹⁵³ Giulia Cesarini Argiroffo, «Il Neuromarketing dei sensi», URL: neuroscienze.net/il-neuromarketing-dei-sensi/ (19.09.22)

What I will present in the next chapter will show the presence of ASMR within campaigns of a large number of brands, which have decided to exploit the benefits of the phenomenon to their advantage in order to immerse the viewer in a state of complete engagement, to the point of prompting them to purchase their offered product.

CHAPTER 5: ASMR AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

5.1 ASMR nelle produzioni cinematografiche

ASMR is not new, it has always existed, only before 2010 it was not given a name, meaning and value.

ASMR accompanies us during certain moments of our everyday life: even when we are immersed in reading a book we can perceive the phenomenon.

This is the case with one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, Virginia Wolf, who in her book 'Mrs. Dalloway' tells her readers about the ASMR experience, as early as 1925, the year the book was published through these words: "'K...R...' said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard the gurgling of the kappa and the erre, close to his ear, melodious, deep as an organ chord, but with guttural accent as of a cicada, delightfully tickling his spine, sending up up to his brain sound waves that bumping into each other shattered."¹⁵⁴

Reading these words immerses one in ASMR tingles and enables one to understand the sensations felt by those who are sensitive to it and at what everyday moments the phenomenon can occur.

But ASMR also allows individuals to taste flavors and smell smells present within a film, and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's 'The Fabulous World of Amélie' in 2001 is an example. The viewer, for example, gets in touch with the protagonist's pleasures during the opening monologue: "She [Amélie] cultivates a particular taste for small pleasures: diving her hand into a sack of legumes; breaking the crust of crème brûlée with the tip of her teaspoon; and bouncing stones on the Canal Saint-Martin."¹⁵⁵

Such clear and precise gestures echo in the mind of the viewer who becomes mesmerized and immersed in the scene, being imprisoned by it as if he himself were performing those actions.

Several films dating back to the late 1990s also contain unintentional ASMR scenes within them.

¹⁵⁴ Woolf V., *The Mrs. Dalloway Reader*, Harcourt, University of Michigan, 1925

¹⁵⁵ Jean-Pierre Jeunet, *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*, Francia, Canal+, France 3 Cinema, UGC Distribution, 2002 (Italia)

The first involves the film 'Edward Scissorhands,' released in Italy on April 24, 1991 and directed by director Tim Burton.

Edward, a boy who possessed scissors for hands and who everyone thought to be aggressive, although he actually turns out to be shy and harmless, befriends a family and moves into their home. After getting cuts on his face, the mother of the family decides to 'cure' him with her products. In this scene, the woman's voice is warm and soothing, the words are repeated several times, the beauty blender, i.e., makeup sponge touches Edward's face repetitively and lightly, and we, the viewers, are immersed in a moment of caring, typical of the ASMR role-play trigger.

Questi gesti così chiari e precisi riecheggiano nella mente di chi guarda che rimane ipnotizzato e si immerge nella scena, rimanendone imprigionato come se fosse egli stesso a compiere quelle azioni.



Fig. 34: *Edward Scissorhands* makeup scene¹⁵⁶

The second film work is directed by Quentin Tarantino and has been made visible in Italy since January 17, 2013. It is 'Django Unchained,' Quentin Tarantino's homage film to Sergio Corbucci, director of 1966's 'Django,' a milestone of the Italian-style western that stars

¹⁵⁶ Andrew Jacoby, «Edward Scissorhands Makeup Scene», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=X3tDMnQPfgg, 1 luglio 2014 (30.09.22)

Django, an African-American slave who together with bounty hunter King Schultz goes in search of two men and his wife during the American Civil War.

One scene shows the two protagonists inside a bar. Former dentist King Schultz converses with Django while tapping two beers. The man's words alternate with the movement and sound of the alcoholic beverage as it is poured into the glass, reminiscent of a typical ASMR sound, especially in videos representing eating triggers.

As the beer flows into the glass, it is as if the viewer can sense its foam and somehow taste it. The combination of sight and hearing in this case also intercepts the sense of taste, making the viewer not only perceive the taste but activating the desire to taste the fresh drink.

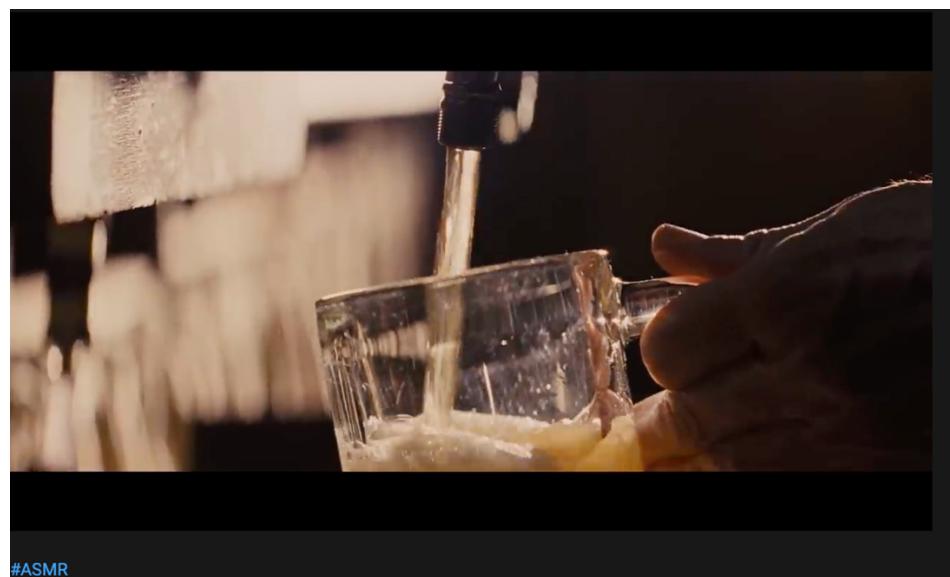


Fig. 35: film 'Django Unchained'. ASMR scene¹⁵⁷

Even in a horror movie there is room for ASMR. This is the case with 'Hannibal,' precisely the TV series released in 2013 for three seasons and starring actor Mads Mikkelsen. The TV series is an original U.S. production and is based on the novels by Thomas Harris.

The TV series centers on two main figures: a brilliant FBI profiler, Will Graham, who has a great gift for insinuating himself into the minds of serial killers but who needs psychiatry sessions for a particular serial killer case, and Hannibal Lecter, a psychiatrist who

¹⁵⁷ ASMR Central, «ASMR Central-Django Unchained Beer ASMR scene HD», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=OhXI8RKMmCU, 11 novembre 2016 (30.09.22)

conceals a killer side of him devoted to cannibalism. The latter is filmed in several scenes cooking human flesh to serve to guests. The scenes in which he prepares the different dishes is carried out making a reference to the phenomenon of ASMR. All the sounds of a preparation can be heard: the knife cutting meat on top of a cutting board, the oil simmering inside a pot, the egg being beaten to make an omelet and the sizzling that occurs as soon as it is poured onto the pan, the vacuum-packed bags being touched and placed in almost manic order inside the refrigerator, and the tea being poured onto cups.

Every sound used is meant to convey relaxation and calm to the viewer, trying to create a pleasant atmosphere that, in reality, is totally opposed to the scene of profound cruelty that, in reality, is taking place.



[ASMR] hannibal lecter cooking

Fig. 36: TV series 'Hannibal. Collections of scenes in which he cooks in ASMR fashion'¹⁵⁸

Now think of yourself as being in a small tailor's store: the dress is ready and all that remains is to put it on to observe the alterations to be made. The fitting of the dress is within a silent environment, in which the only sounds that can be heard are the steps of the tailor walking from the pin box to the dress, his hands caressing the fabric to modify it into its best shape, and his soft, quiet voice whispering a few instructions about the position the body must take to make the dress fit perfectly.

¹⁵⁸ Trxshedit, «[ASMR] hannibal lecter cooking», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=lOIZmoOhJik, 2 dicembre 2017 (30.09.22)

These actions bring with them a total abandonment of thoughts and rigidity, and this can be seen within a scene in the 2017 film 'The Hidden Thread' or originally 'Phantom Thread' written, directed and co-produced by Paul Thomas Anderson, which garnered 6 nominations at the 2018 Academy Awards, winning the one for Best Costume Design.

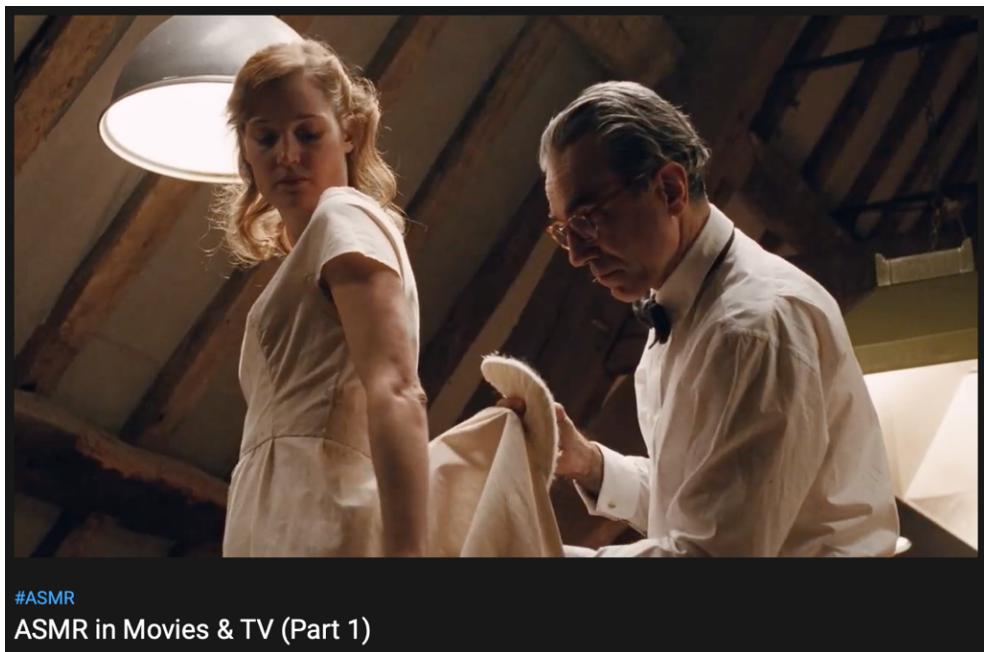


Fig 38: 'Phantom Thread'. ASMR scene¹⁵⁹

Lovers of the Harry Potter Saga have also come across some ASMR scenes. Among several, there is a really intense one within the eighth film entitled 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.' In the scene¹⁶⁰, the viewer is immersed inside a battle, in which the protagonist, aided by his companions, tries to defeat enemies led by Voldemort, the evil wizard of the saga.

In the last part of the battle, after several casualties, Voldemort gives an important communication to everyone present. But not in a classical way; rather, he insinuates himself into the minds of everyone present by whispering words in a warm, soft, soothing tone.

¹⁵⁹ Cinetica Movies, «BEST ASMR in Movies - Unintentional Part 2», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=VijteQ8GUwA&t=268s, 9 ottobre 2020 (30.09.22)

¹⁶⁰ FunwithGuru, «ASMR in Movies & TV (Part 1)», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=hO_1bXs3miA, 6 maggio 2018, (8.10.22)

Exactly this fragment identifies a trigger often used by ASMRtists during their videos that is meant to calm and soothe.

Finally, 'Battle of sexes,' a biographical film released in various Italian theaters in 2017, which received positive reviews from critics with nominations for best actress in a musical or comedy film and best actor in a musical or comedy film at the 75th Golden Globes, respectively. The film play is about a true story that happened in 1973 between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, two American tennis players who challenged the injustices of the tennis tournaments of the time, in which female players, considered inferior, despite filling the stadiums as much as the men, were awarded only one-eighth of the prize money meant for men. Because of this, the two sportswomen, created the WTA Tour, the Women's Tennis Association, which would take on increasing importance in the tennis world and become a symbol of the fight for equality between men and women in sports.

The ASMR scene is related to a relaxing moment inside a hair salon where the professional, before washing and cutting, gently massages her hair.

The protagonist enters an even more immersive and totally relaxing atmosphere that becomes even more accentuated by the whispering of a few words by the professional, who finally, cuts her hair.

The sound of the scissors is gentle and reminiscent of an ASMR trigger used during role plays: for some, this scene activates mirror neurons that allow the viewer himself to experience the feeling that the protagonist is experiencing, totally empathizing.

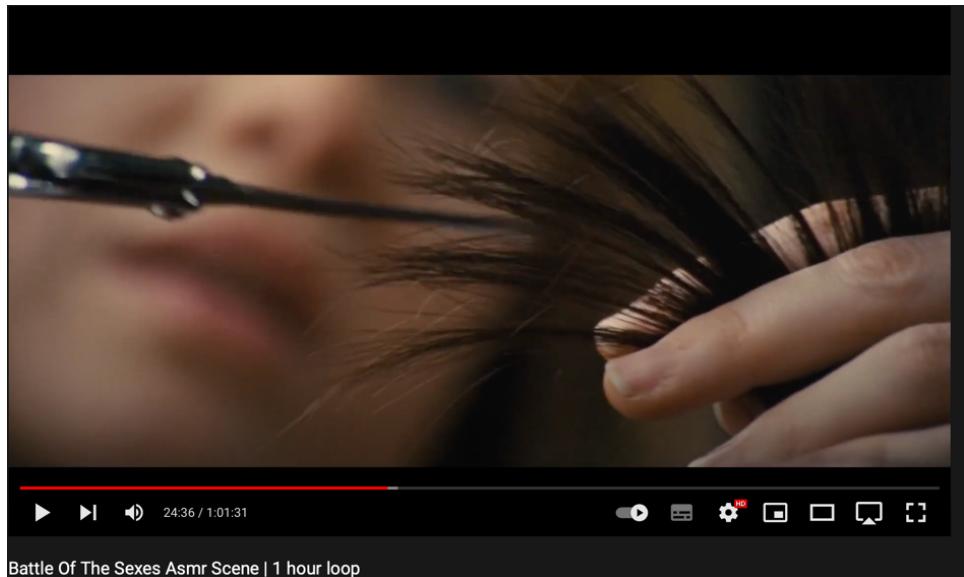


Fig. 39: *Battle of Sexes. ASMR scene*¹⁶¹

5.2 The best ASMR marketing strategies

While YouTube searches for ASMR are growing at a rapid pace, interest in the phenomenon has doubled from June 2016 to June 2018, as highlighted by Google data.¹⁶²

The interest in ASMR starts from spectator users, but it is steadily starting to attract the eyes of many curious people, among them brands that see ASMR as a phenomenon to be known and used to attract new customers in an unusual but effective way.

The first ASMR commercial by a brand was made in 2015 by 'Dove Chocolate China', which in those years changed the format of the iconic candy bar and to communicate it to its audience turned to the advertising agency BBDO Beijing. The latter decided to create a commercial in which the technical and informative aspects of the product were not told explicitly but brought to life through sounds. BBDO Beijing creates two ASMR commercials, with two different protagonists, in which there are different triggers inside to stimulate the feeling of pleasure to the greatest number of users. In the first video, Chinese actor and singer Li Yi Feng, describes in a low voice the process of 'Dove' chocolate, in

¹⁶¹ J.G., «Battle Of The Sexes Asmr Scene | 1 hour loop», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=1zGRNh9zf8&t=131s, 8 novembre 2021 (30.09.22)

¹⁶² Damian Fowler, «ASMR: The big business of making super soft sounds», URL: bbc.com/worklife/article/20180605-the-weird-whispering-videos-that-brands-want-to-cash-in-on (30.09.22)

which it eventually achieves a smooth and silky texture through a slow and repetitive grinding of cocoa beans, which during melting attract hypnotically. In the second, however, Chinese actress and model Angelababy was called in, showing how good the 'Dove' chocolate bar is through the opening of the wrapper, and the popping of the bar in contact with her teeth. These sensory elements, together with her ethereal, whispering voice, draw the viewer into her intimate chocolate taste experience.

From this point on, many companies have mobilized in the creation of ASMR content, having fun experimenting with different channels and particular situations.

Among the most memorable of all is the commercial for 'Michelob Ultra Pure Gold' by the U.S. company active in the production of alcoholic and soft drinks, Anheuser-Busch.

Si pensi di essere in uno, se non forse all'unico e inimitabile incontro di Football americano, il Super Bowl, dove a riecheggiare nelle tre ore e mezzo di gioco sono le voci, i fischi, i canti e le grida dei 100 milioni di spettatori tifosi. Il tempo di gioco viene diviso da due intermezzi da 15 minuti in cui nei tabelloni si mostrano pubblicità di sponsor e non, che con la loro voce e suoni cercano di superare quella degli spettatori.

Think of yourself at one, if not perhaps at the one and only inimitable American Football game, the Super Bowl, where echoing through the three and a half hours of the game are the voices, whistles, chants, and shouts of the 100 million spectator fans. Game time is divided by two 15-minute interludes in which the scoreboards show advertisements from sponsors and non-sponsors, whose voices and sounds try to outdo that of the spectators.

Now imagine being in these 15-minute interludes and feeling an unusual silence only to find that on the screens is Zoë Kravitz, with a backdrop of beautiful green Hawaii mountains behind her, lifting a bottle of Michelob Ultra-Pure Gold and whispering, "Let's all experience something together". He then opens the bottle of organic beer and pours it over a glass, totally emphasizing the fizz thanks to the two microphones on either side.

Liz Taylor, creative director of FCB Chicago, the marketing agency that designed the Michelob Ultra-Pure Gold commercial explains, "You always want to be disruptive. The Super Bowl is notoriously one of the loudest events-there are explosions, people screaming, puppies, monkeys, and children. We wanted to be disruptive, and we thought, can we turn

our ads into experiences? Wouldn't it be great if we could give 110 million people chills at the same time?"¹⁶³

To create a 100 percent memorable and immersive experience, the ad agency sought help from ASMR expert Craig Richard, who also wrote a book on ASMR and founded ASMR University. This explains the care and precision of the final result.



Fig. 40: the Pure Experience: ASMR television commercial¹⁶⁴

The choice to whisper, to have this so to speak unconventional approach compared to other commercials and campaigns we have always been accustomed to, makes the commercials unique, and they choose this new way of communicating to give more prominence to their products.

Among them, McDonald's Canada in 2021 creates the Grand Big Mac promo 'The Sound of Something New'¹⁶⁵ in which it wants to draw the audience's attention with just the sound of its ingredients, especially the sound of the burger in contact with the hot plate and oil.

The whispered voice of the commercial's narrator tells for four minutes about the ingredients inside, explaining what's new in the new bun and making viewers listen to their sounds. But that's not all: he tries to make the viewer relive the same atmosphere he would

¹⁶³ Zach Schonfeld, «Inside the Rise of the ASMR Commercial», URL: vulture.com/2019/03/inside-the-rise-of-the-asmr-commercial.html (30.09.22)

¹⁶⁴ Mariano Glas, «ULTRA Pure Gold Super Bowl Commercial with Zoe Kravitz ASMR», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=zqU8ar4gSyI, 28 gennaio 2019 (30.09.22)

¹⁶⁵ McDonald's Canada, «The Sound of Something New (ASMR) | McDonald's Canada», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=oOFGQVjuGf0, 18 giugno 2021 (30.09.22)

be in if he were tasting the sandwich for the first time and sitting inside one of the chain's stores. One hears the sounds of the napkins, the packaging of the sandwich, the soda with ice cubes inside colliding with each other, and the fizz of the soda, which activates the sense of taste.

The viewer watching the commercial does not see images and cannot understand what the real format of the new sandwich is. All this is the will of the brand, which, in this way, creates a call to action. In fact, the user, in order to find out the format and what is new in the new Grand Big Mac, must compulsorily go inside a store of the chain.

Lindt Canada in 2020, created a commercial to advertise the new dark chocolate bar of the Excellence¹⁶⁶ line through an ASMR spot in which between opening the wrapper and tapping on it, the voice of the testimonial is interspersed, telling how the wrapper seems to be that of a gift card, of the delicacy of the bar enhancing its scents and its taste after tasting a small piece.

One wants to enhance the ingredients and their scents that transpire from the chocolate bar while trying to immerse the viewer in the scene, relaxing them.

There is also room in the ASMR world for sympathetic and humorous advertisements. This is the example of LYNX, a British perfume, deodorant and shower gel company that through a series of commercials wanted to promote its foam trying, in a funny way, to also inform and give advice on the subject of hair removal.¹⁶⁷

The product is the 'Lynx 2 in 1 Shower & Shave Foam,' the instant shower and shave foam for men that can be used to wash and shave at the same time.

Inside the site are the different commercials showing the different male body parts where the product can be used, explaining the best techniques for shaving and getting smooth, soft skin. The videos show Matthew, the testimonial of the campaign who, naked, whispers and simulates the actions to be performed to achieve the desired result using the product before and after showering. His warm voice, the sound of the foam in his hands and on his body,

¹⁶⁶ Lindt Chocolate Canada, «Lindt Excellence ASMR», URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=1grFIM55qO0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1grFIM55qO0), 23 gennaio 2020 (30.09.22)

¹⁶⁷ Lynx, «LYNX presents Shower & Shave ASMR Tutorials | THE CHEST», URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=u75uo3dfvgw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u75uo3dfvgw), 19 febbraio 2019 (1.10.22)

and the relaxing shower are conveyed through binaural and condenser microphones (see Ch. 3.4), which immerse the viewer within the scene, as if they themselves were the protagonists.

Within the site¹⁶⁸ under the different videos are CTAs, in which the user is asked to use the hashtag #LynxASMR on their social networks and share thoughts and stories about their own shower shave.

There are also marketing campaigns not only to advertise products or services, but also to publicize the beauty of certain areas, as the Philippine Department of Tourism has done to increase tourism to its places through the 'ASMR Experience the Philippines' project.

They use ASMR to enable people who listen to fully immerse themselves in the location depicted in the video and explore it from the natural sounds, achieving a connection with nature that only those who live can understand and experience.

The videos, which are available on the official YouTube page of the Philippine Department of Tourism¹⁶⁹, were recorded using binaural audio so as to allow for an all-encompassing immersion within the video. Users can relax and immerse themselves in 21 locations in the Philippines.

But, in this case, a note needs to be made. ASMR is a phenomenon that causes physical sensations such as light and pleasant tingling sensations that start in the head and sprinkle throughout the body, and psychological sensations such as relaxation, calmness, tranquility and even drowsiness.

These sensations are alive because there are people who create repetitive, melodic sounds through triggers that are able to relax and create benefits to more people who listen to them. ASMR occurs during moments of positive personal attention from outsiders to whom we place our trust and who communicate security to us.¹⁷⁰ These use their own voice and hands to create gentle movements and sounds.

¹⁶⁸ Lynxformen.com, URL: lynxformen.com/uk/inspiration/grooming/asmr-shaving-tutorials-and-manscaping-tips.html (1.10.22)

¹⁶⁹ Tourism Philippines, «ASMR Series | The Philippines Experience», URL: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjJeD2qsshyH_uDuKLjassvLUulHCwKmS](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjJeD2qsshyH_uDuKLjassvLUulHCwKmS), 28 luglio 2022 (ultimo aggiornamento), (1.10.22)

¹⁷⁰ ASMR University, «What is ASMR?», URL: asmruniversity.com/about-asmr/what-is-asmr/ (1.10.22)

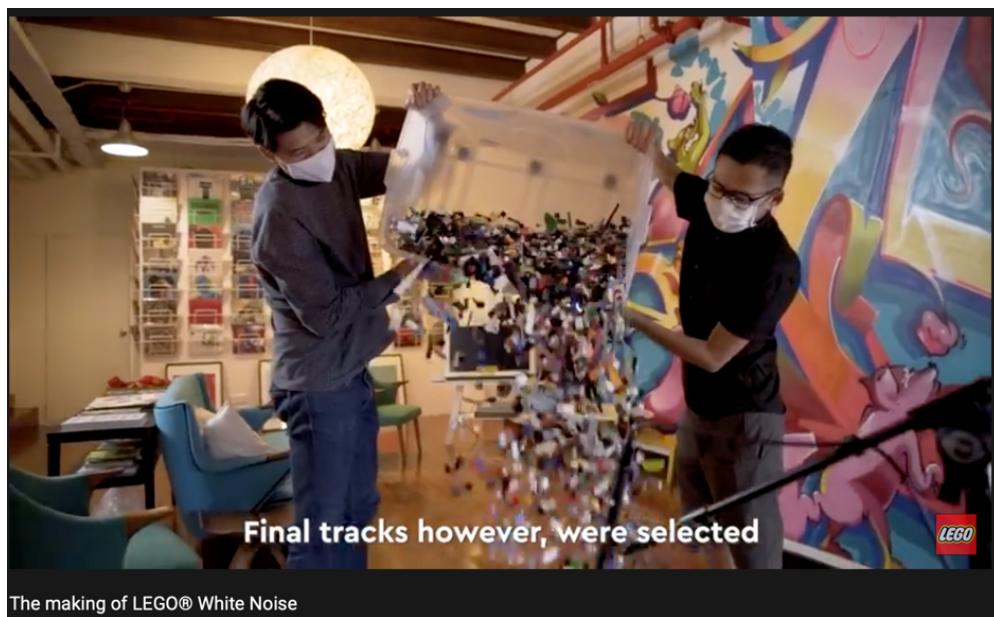
What should not be confused, then, is that ASMR is not the set of sounds of nature, but of sounds that are the result of people's gestures that are sometimes mixed with objects. The sounds of nature, although they have benefits for some people, cannot be called ASMR.

And that is the mistake the Philippine Department of Tourism has made in its campaign.

In fact, only natural sounds wrongly associated with the term ASMR are heard in some of the videos in the playlist. Instead, a video about a canoe ride on Lake Sebu is present for a duration of 50 minutes. The atmosphere is quiet and the ASMR sounds heard refer to the oars of the canoe lightly stroking the surface of the water¹⁷¹.

Continuing on, there are not only advertising campaigns, also ASMR podcasts. Such is the case with the 'Lego White Noise' playlist created within the Spotify platform by LEGO.

The playlist, with a total duration of 210 minutes, consists of seven tracks and 10 thousand bricks, which aim to make its listeners disconnect from the daily hustle and bustle to relax and discover the perfect soundtrack to listen to while creating their Lego collection. Bricks were used in different combinations to create the playlist: from shaking multiple pieces together, to dropping the bricks on a flat surface, forming the song 'The Waterfall'.¹⁷²



¹⁷¹ Tourism Philippines, «ASMR | BINAURAL CANOE RIDE ON LAKE SEBU, GLIDING THROUGH A TRANQUIL LAKE IN THE MORNING LIGHT», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=vTvRykbp3tY&list=PLjJeD2qsshyH_uDuKLjassvLUulHCwKmS&index=7, 18 maggio 2022 (1.10.22)

¹⁷² SirLukelayle, «Lego White Noise», URL: open.spotify.com/playlist/2YwRHce3JMKowDwQZlqGn0 (1.10.22)

Fig. 41: Lego White Noise: the construction of the playlist¹⁷³

The initiative comes at the height of the pandemic period and is aimed not only at children, but primarily at adults, as stated in the Lego press release, who relive memories of when they were children in this playlist: "The 'LEGO White Noise' playlist was launched to be paired with the immersive LEGO Botanical Collection building experience, following a survey [by LEGO] that revealed that about three-quarters of adults (73 percent to be precise) are looking for new ways to relieve stress."¹⁷⁴

5.3 The results of ASMR marketing campaigns

In addition to the campaigns just seen, there are some that have achieved great results, both domestically and internationally.

The first to be successful is the commercial of the Swedish multinational IKEA that created, for the U.S. audience in 2017, 'Ikea Oddly' in which a series of items contained in a student dorm room in America were presented within the video.

In the film, which lasts a total of 25 minutes, all the items students might need inside their university rooms are shown on the screen while a narrator describes and gently touches them by showing their functionality, material, and price. The narrative is whispered, with a soft melodic voice that makes the viewer who watches relax and absorb.

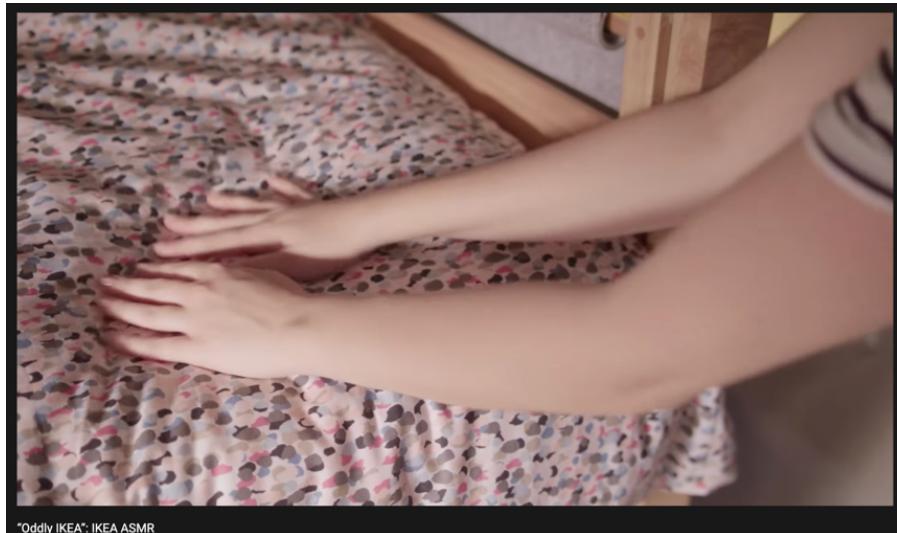
Kerri Homsher, media specialist at IKEA USA explained that at the time of the advertisement, ASMR was an untapped market for other brands and that she did not know what to expect. But the strategy paid off: the video went viral and to date has garnered 3.3 million views.

IKEA also claims to have seen a 4.5 percent increase in sales in stores and 5.1 percent online during the advertising campaign.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Lego, «The making of LEGO® White Noise», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=SU6a7FdSrH4, 21 febbraio 2021 (1.10.22)

¹⁷⁴ Lego.com, «A New Mindful Mix: the LEGO Group releases a soothing soundscape created with thousands of LEGO® bricks», URL: lego.com/it-it/aboutus/news/2021/february/white-noise, 1 febbraio 2021 (1.10.22)

¹⁷⁵ Wave Tribe, «FENOMENO ASMR: CHE COS’È E PERCHÉ È DA TENERE D’OCCHIO», URL: waveltribe.it/it/blog-marketing-web/92-social-media/106-fenomeno-asmr-che-cos-e-e-perche-e-da-tenere-d-occhio.html (1.10.22)



"Oddly IKEA": IKEA ASMR

Fig.41: IKEA Oddly¹⁷⁶

A number of Italian brands have also embarked on creating ASMR campaigns. Among these are.

Coccodì, which relied on the advertising agency Connexia for its commercial.

We're in the world of food, in 2019, and Coccodì, Italy's leading retailer of free-range eggs, is using an ASMR approach with its 'Sound Eggsperience' spot for its 'È fresco e si sente' advertising campaign. The company's desire is to show its audience one of the key values that has been inherent in Coccodì products for more than 50 years: the freshness of the eggs, from their production in only organic and free-range farms to final consumption. The purpose of the commercial is to create a sensory experience that can show product freshness in the eyes of the audience through ASMR triggers. The viewer then becomes an integral part of the experience and is able to 'taste' the product from the screen, strengthening the relationship with the brand.

Massimiliano Trisolino, managing partner strategy & creativity at Connexia explains that: "We chose to create for Coccodì the first Adv campaign based on ASMR to be able to tell in an original way on social channels the quality and freshness characteristics of the product and contribute, at the same time, to the positioning of

¹⁷⁶ IKEA USA, «“Oddly IKEA”: IKEA ASMR», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=uLFaj3Z_tWw, 8 agosto 2017 (1.10.22)

the manufacturing company as a market leader for its quality standards and organic orientation."¹⁷⁷

The campaign, promoted on social channels Facebook, Youtube and Instagram from April 15 to June 30, tells about the preparation of various recipes obtained by having egg as the only ingredient. Through the various ASMR triggers, one is immersed within an atmosphere in which the egg and its various nuances reign. For 72 seconds, one hears the sound of the packaging, the omelet being created on contact with hot oil, the meltiness of the soft-boiled egg, and the frothiness of the whipped egg white.



Fig. 42: Coccodi ASMR spot¹⁷⁸

These are all everyday sounds that often cannot be perceived due to various factors, but when immersed in a quiet atmosphere they relax and evoke vivid and pleasant sensory effects for the listener.

The result of this campaign was surprising. Consider that on Facebook the company page has 42,944 followers with a maximum of 270 likes per post. On the other hand, the engagement that the commercial has had counts 1,051,172 views, 3780 likes, as

¹⁷⁷ Connexia, «Connexia presenta “È fresco e si sente”. Per la prima volta nel nuovo spot digital di Coccodi l’ASMR amplifica «i suoni» di qualità e freschezza», URL: connexia.com/it/connexia-presenta-e-fresco-e-si-sente-per-la-prima-volta-nel-nuovo-spot-digital-di-coccodi-lasmr-amplifica-i-suoni-di-qualita-e-freschezza (1.10.22)

¹⁷⁸ Coccodi, «Coccodi ASMR Sound EGGsperience | È fresco e si sente», URL: youtube.com/watch?v=YwQfE5fV724, 18 aprile 2019 (1.10.22)

opposed to 22 negative reactions, and a total of 1347 comments, most of which are positive, as can be seen from the image below.



Fig. 43: Coccodi Facebook page comments. 'È fresco e si sente' campaign spot¹⁷⁹

5.4 Brand-artist collaborations

Typing the word 'ASMR' into the YouTube search engine returns more than 12.7 million results, including videos with more than 20 million views.¹⁸⁰ With these numbers, artist ASMR is expanding its community, attracting more and more brands that are beginning to see the phenomenon as a chance to stand out and get noticed by the public.

These are proposing thousands of dollars' worth of collaborations and sponsorships: consider that depending on the views per video and the level of influence of the ASMR artist,

¹⁷⁹ Coccodi, «Coccodi è fresco e si sente: indossa le cuffie e gustati l'esperienza ASMR», URL: facebook.com/UovaCoccodi/videos/474467319968185, 7.05.2019 (1.10.22)

¹⁸⁰ Wave Tribe, «FENOMENO ASMR: CHE COS'È E PERCHÉ È DA TENERE D'OCCHIO», URL: wavetribe.it/it/blog-marketing-web/92-social-media/106-fenomeno-asmr-che-cos-e-e-perche-e-da-tenere-d-occhio.html (2.10.22)

companies would be willing to pay between \$1,000 and \$3,000 for a campaign, as defined by Savannah Newton, senior talent manager at Ritual Network, a digital talent agency.¹⁸¹

And the collaborations are, more often than not, a success, as the ASMR community feels totally engaged and connected to their artist of choice and, the latter, they trust almost blindly. And this is true even for smaller channels, because it too has a strong and loyal community that can support and appreciate it.

An example of brand-artist collaboration can be seen in an Italian brand, with the '#STRACCHINOASMR' advertising campaign. This is the launch of the new 'Stracchino Cremoso' by the Vallelata brand, which has chosen the phenomenon of ASMR to narrate and enhance the creaminess and freshness of the product by leveraging the sensations that an ASMR content provokes in those who are sensitive to listening.

"We decided to experiment this new communicative approach with Vallelata, our most sensory brand and linked to the world of pleasure, taking the opportunity of the launch of the brand new stracchino, a product characterized by a full and enveloping texture that is particularly satisfying: the result is the involvement of consumers in a "sound" taste experience that conveys all the goodness and creaminess of the new addition to the Vallelata family," explains Mauro Frantellizzi, Marketing Director Galbani Formaggi.¹⁸²

To evoke the total involvement of consumers, H48, the advertising agency that created the campaign, presented the new product with three of the most followed ASMRtists in the Italian community: Sara ASMR, Fairy ASMR and Sasha ASMR, who, through the triggers of eating, tapping and whispering, tell the public about the tastes, aromas and delicacy of the new stracchino.

The campaign achieved high visibility, precisely 10 million views and 11 million reaches, also thanks to the partnership with 'Cookist', which supported the amplification of the content.

¹⁸¹ Damian Fowler, «ASMR: The big business of making super soft sounds», URL: bbc.com/worklife/article/20180605-the-weird-whispering-videos-that-brands-want-to-cash-in-on (3.10.22)

¹⁸² Teresa Nappi, «H48 FIRMA UN INNOVATIVO PROGETTO DIGITALE PER IL LANCIO DEL NUOVO STRACCHINO CREMOSO DI VALLELATA», URL: <https://www.engage.it/agenzie/h48-firma-un-innovativo-progetto-digitale-per-il-lancio-del-nuovo-stracchino-cremoso-di-vallelata.aspx> (1.10.22)



Fig.44: #STRACCHINOASMR¹⁸³

5.4 Opinions expressed by users online

When joining the ASMR community, whether the channel is small or popular, whether the videos are of higher quality or not, the important thing is to create content that is valuable and useful to those who watch it and choose it from the rest of the list. It is important that they are helpful for those who have insomnia or anxiety problems, or, simply, for those who feel like watching engaging content that can give them immersive physical and mental experiences.

Only in this way can one say they benefit from their presence within the ASMR community, which makes itself available for encouraging advice and constructive criticism without the need to harm or offend anyone.

Those who follow ASMR channels do so because they see in them a chance to benefit their physical and mental well-being and are constantly seeking new content.

Often those who do not benefit from the phenomenon avoid commenting below the videos, although as interest from brands increases, more and more users are commenting negatively.

It should be pointed out that these are in the minority compared to positive comments, although very often there are comments with nasty or polemical tones, as can be seen from the image below, created by people outside the ASMR world or who do not benefit from it.

¹⁸³ Si veda: video.cookist.it/video/an/X5Ldx-SwzjVfk_Zg (1.10.22)



Fig. 45: Comments under an ASMR video in the Facebook channel¹⁸⁴

Added to this category of users are those who try to create ASMR videos without knowing it thoroughly and expecting to get immediate results that will bring them definite economic benefit.

The proliferation of videos far removed in purpose and content with ASMR, and which have this acronym in the title only to capture likes and possible sponsorship from brands, has led many people within the community to open discussions about it, to somehow protect all that has been created over the years without it being destroyed.

"The ASMR format is not a way to get views easily, but behind it has a world of passion and research, positive results and content curation, which cannot be ignored or disregarded. Therefore, the only stake in joining this community is to respect it, and to commit to bringing something positive into it. Those who create mediocre content, or content that has nothing to do with ASMR and pass it off as ASMR are hurting the whole community, because they

¹⁸⁴ Chiara ASMR Pagina, Facebook, 17 agosto 2018 (5.10.22)

discredit it and give it the wrong image both to those who do not know it and within the community itself."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Chiara ASMR, op.cit. p. 122

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

6.1 The methodological approach

This chapter is going to answer several questions, including the research question, related to the phenomenon of ASMR and how it presences in the lives of respondents.

In the end, answers will be obtained to know the guidelines that a brand must follow in order to create winning ASMR marketing strategies that can create unique and memorable experiences for the following audience.

Therefore, to achieve the objectives of the research, it was decided to create a totally anonymous observational questionnaire that would go into people's perceptions of ASMR and advertisements, leading them to answer subjective questions and spending time watching and listening to some videos.

The choice of an eminently qualitative observational instrument is justified by the fact that the studied phenomenon is not yet widely known and studied, and the purpose of the research is to analyze some aspects of it in order to understand the opinions and feelings of those who enjoy its contents.

6.2 Research question

The first step was to define the research question, i.e., 'Can individuals who are considered 'non-sensitive' to ASMR become so or have a positive perception of it through viewing ASMR advertisements?'

After that, another consequential question was developed: 'How much do ASMR advertisements impact and stimulate individuals defined as 'sensitive'?'

These two questions aim to investigate whether the ASMR phenomenon can be a valuable tool to reach prospect audiences, both sensitive and non-sensitive to the phenomenon, and bring them closer to the product.

The study under consideration aims to broaden the knowledge of the ASMR phenomenon to more users, seeking at a later stage to combine it with the sphere of marketing and advertising, in order to understand whether the relationship between the two worlds works

and whether there is a real possibility of creating winning marketing strategies by taking advantage of a new method of study.

6.3 Sample

After specifying the research question, the target audience was defined.

Its composition was not difficult: the research question is open and suitable for anyone with no age limit, as it assumes that everyone has a TV, computer, and smartphone to watch videos and advertisements.

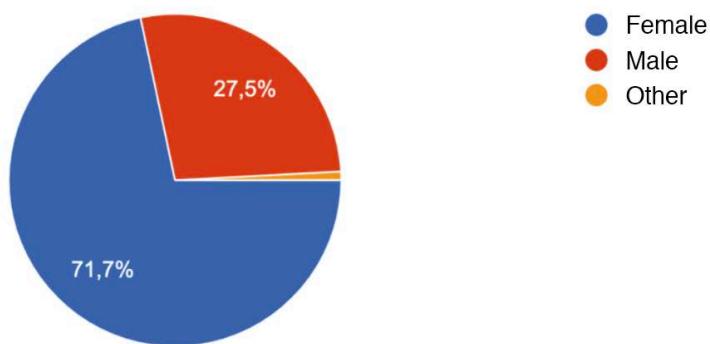
The questionnaire, however, could not be structured equally for everyone. For this very reason, at the beginning, an attempt was made to divide the target audience into two different groups: the experts and connoisseurs of ASMR from those who did not know enough about ASMR or did not know it existed.

The questionnaire, which was available for the duration of six days, at any time of the day, required users to fill out only one condition: to be in a quiet place, out of noisy contexts, so as to concentrate and grasp the true essence of the different ASMR videos and advertisements.

This, in order to obtain answers that are as authentic and truthful as possible, unaffected by the external environment and daily frenzies.

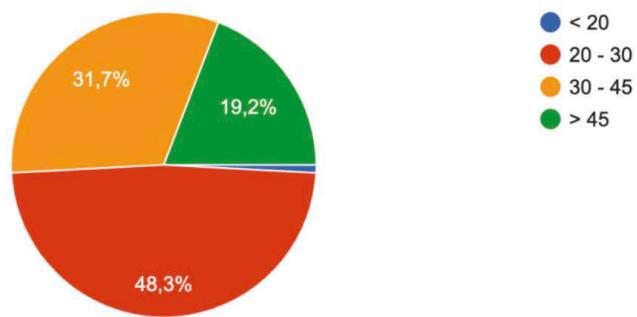
At the end of the questionnaire period, 120 responses were collected, of which 71.7 percent were from women and 27.5 percent were from men.

Gender
120 answers



Of these, the most commonly found age group is 20-30 years old with 48.3 percent, followed by 30-40 years old with 31.7 percent, and 45 years and older with 19.2 percent, as can be seen from the image below.

Age
120 answers



6.4 The survey

To answer the research question, it was decided to divide the respondents into two sections, thus developing different and specific parts of the questionnaire according to the answer of the next question.

Are you familiar with the phenomenon of Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response more commonly called ASMR?
120 answers



The survey therefore was customized, for some sections, based on the respondents' level of knowledge of ASMR.

In general, however, the focus areas of the form were divided as follows:

1. Biographical data.

The first section of the questionnaire specifically collects two biographical data: age and gender.

The collection of these two data is useful in understanding whether the age of the participants and their gender affect the answers that are given in the subsequent sections, and thus the difference in perception there is of the phenomenon between younger and older people.

This first stage also involves dividing the target audience into those who have knowledge of the phenomenon and those who have never experienced it, as described in the previous section.

2. Those who know about ASMR

Among the responses of these, it was found that more are those who have known about ASMR by watching videos in the Youtube platform and on social channels such as Instagram and TikTok.

15.4 percent of the respondents came into contact with the phenomenon through word of mouth.

Of the 52 respondents in the section, the most interesting data is observed in the next questions where only 34.6% say they still watch ASMR videos to relax and sleep faster, while the remaining 46.2%, almost unanimously, explain that although they know ASMR they do not listen to it due to non-interest or because they turn out to be 'annoying and disturbing sounds.'

Those who listen to and use ASMR to gain benefits say that the reasons they choose this type of video are basically two:

- he is able to relax during times of increased stress
- he is able to sleep more peacefully and faster

And this is why ASMR videos, although most users prefer them at different times of the day, are predominantly watched during the evening and night hours, either with headphones, achieving greater immersion, or with the audio of the devices with which they are watched.

In addition, 42.3 percent of respondents say they get physical and mental benefits from watching ASMR videos, including: relaxation, chills, tingles, pleasantness, tension release and calmness.

3. Those who have never experienced the phenomenon or do not know it in detail

For those who are not familiar with the phenomenon in detail or have never experienced it, the dedicated section involved watching three ASMR videos of three different ASMRtists from each other, which could show in a completely simple way what the phenomenon was all about.

The three videos had different triggers as their focus: the first one the 'no talking' in which sounds were filmed with binaural microphones, the second one the 'Role play' and the third one the 'Cook-bang' and 'Mukbang'.

It was chosen to include these three different videos to allow the user to experience the most popular triggers, not only to perceive what they were watching but to allow them to understand if and which sounds could be akin to their physical and mental well-being.

The 68 respondents were then asked to describe their feelings, and most of them stated that at least one of the three videos caused them to feel good, relaxed, serene, and shiver in their bodies.

Only 21 respondents expressed a totally negative perception by expressing that they were annoyed, indifferent and bored.

4. 4 The ASMR commercials

The order of the items was designed with a specific purpose: to make sure that all respondents were equal on their knowledge of the phenomenon. This way everyone would know how to answer the last questions in the fourth section about ASMR commercials, the focus of the questionnaire.

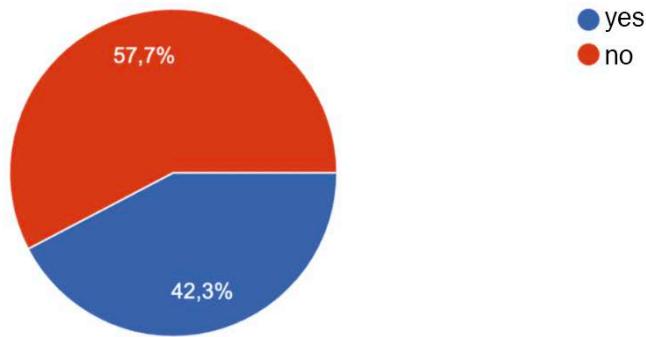
The last section showed two different advertisements: the first of 'Michelob Ultra Pure Gold,' an American beer (see ch. 5.2), the second of 'Coccodì,' an Italian brand of free-range eggs (see ch. 5.3).

From this last question went on to determine the answer to the research question.

Considering those who know about the phenomenon, 30 out of 52 respondents in the first section said they were 'not sensitive to ASMR videos,' 21 out of 68 those in the second section.

Have you ever experienced special feelings listening to or watching ASMR videos?

52 answers



After viewing the two advertisements, 68 out of 120 respondents say they were not enticed to buy the products, in contrast to the 50 (43.3%) who were intrigued by them.

The positive responses in fact bring out people's interest in the novel approaches and techniques that form these advertisements. For some, they increase perception and desire, they highlight the quality of the product, they innovate advertising communication that

instead of 'shouting' immerses the viewer in a more relaxing and tranquil situation, they involve and empathize on a sensory level so much so that to some they stimulated appetite and thirst, and they express the essence of the product by enhancing its quality without being invasive.

Negative responses, on the contrary, can be grouped into three main points:

- The disturbance toward the sounds, which are too accentuated;
- The absence, in the commercials, of a direct product-brand association. The sounds within refer to the general product category and not to the product-specific sounds of a brand;
- The stubbornness of the commercials to emphasize the sounds when in fact they should dwell on the product and its benefits.

Among these responses, also, about 11 people stressed that they were not enticed to buy the product because it was not of their interest. It is therefore assumed that they did not object to the phenomenon itself but to a certain type of product described using the ASMR technique, and that if the product had been different and of their desire, the feedback would have been different.

The findings at the end of the questionnaire show that considering the individual responses of the 120 respondents 51 are 'not sensitive' to ASMR, in relation to 69 'sensitive'.

The solution to the research question finds that of 51 users, only 14 of them would purchase the product observed while viewing the two advertisements, as opposed to the other 37. The questionnaire therefore shows that 72.5 percent of the 'non-sensitive' are not intending, after viewing the suggested ASMR advertisements, to purchase the products within them, and only 27.5 would do so.

It is therefore inferred that the 'non-sensitive' to ASMR videos are equally 'non-sensitive' to ASMR advertisements.

However, the situation is opposite for the 'sensitive' individuals, as 54% of them would have a propensity to purchase the product after viewing the ASMR advertisement.

6.5 Limitation of the research

One of the main limitations of the present research is the limited experience of using the questionnaire.

In order to make the questionnaire less tedious but more quickly usable by users, it was decided to include only two ASMR video commercials in the fourth section as examples, taking into account that those participating in the third section had already had the opportunity to view three different videos.

These two commercials may have influenced the responses, since, as previously described, many users stated that they were not interested in the products viewed and consequently not even by the ASMR advertisements.

To obtain more certain data and observe perceptions and feelings in more detail, users should be exposed to several ASMR advertisements playing different products within a common place and then quantitatively define a response.

The second limitation of the research is based on the fact that ASMR as an advertising realization technique is still a virgin field and not fully explored by brands, except in some cases.

Viewing users from the beginning are accustomed to observing commercials that through their voice 'shout' to attract attention.

ASMR seeks the same purpose with totally opposite techniques, and it is not easy for everyone to understand this paradigm shift right from the start, especially if one has always been accustomed to advertising that is more visual than auditory and faster in image fruition.

Like anything, before an element is accepted and understood by the public, it needs its time.

Because of this, users' responses can be influenced and may change over time.

The third limitation goes back to the last question of the questionnaire: 'Did the commercials you saw entice you to learn about the product and buy it?'

To this question 43% answered 'Yes.' These may have been influenced by the previously watched videos and the fact that a response to a questionnaire does not involve actual acquisition of the product in question.

CHAPTER 7: A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL ASMR MARKETING

7.1 The new trend: Relaxation

In 2015, Microsoft, the American multinational IT company, carried out a study investigating the attention span of mankind. The research shows that humans have an attention span of 8 seconds, shorter than that of a goldfish. The mechanisms of attention have changed dramatically in recent years as we are receivers of a large amount of stimuli, which are becoming more and more invasive.

The ones who have become part of the chorus in an impactful way are brands, who through advertisements want to enter the mind of the consumer and attract attention in order to sell their products and services.

But is this really the right way?

Advertisements have their own language and objective, to attract and intrigue the viewer in order to bring him closer to the brand, but advertising alone cannot do this, especially if it is structured similarly to the others.

Before creating advertising, one has to be in the mind of one's consumer, and therefore have a brand positioning that is distinctive and distinct from others. Only in this way can brands afford the full 8-second attention span of the viewer.

Having said that, only after having defined the brand positioning can one think about innovating, creating something that very few have experimented with and only very few have excelled at. It is a question of creating a new form of advertising, based on the deepest sensations, which would attract a more attentive and sensitive audience. It would change the basic element, the noise, the loud sounds, in favour of more intimate, deep and delicate sounds that speak directly to each person's perceptions and emotions.

This would lead to a different kind of attention that would focus and relax the viewing public and stir them to a higher concept: savouring all things calmly, understanding their form and spirit, going into the detail of each element without being superficial, awakening the innermost senses.

Today's generation feels aware of what is happening and feels drawn to know more about the issues, to understand them in depth in order to make them their own so that they can then act.

This change of vision, less superficial but more aware and present, should also be taken into consideration by brands, not only in the presentation of themselves and their values, but also in the advertisements they create, where the purpose would remain the same but the means by which they get there would become deeper and more meaningful.

And it is in this way that, in an everyday life where anxiety and speed are accepted, a new form of advertising would be created, based on relaxation and deeper sensations and emotions, to give space to the sounds and movements of small everyday moments, which sometimes we do not even notice, but which are part of our lives.

"ASMR is growing rapidly in popularity, and not as a quick fad or a temporary trend. People are not only curious about it, but are adopting it as a basic relaxation technique, like yoga, meditation, concentrated breathing and mindfulness."

Therefore, adopting this technique and becoming a forerunner of a new advertising mindset that is based on people's physical and mental well-being could increase one's competitive advantage.

7.2 The protagonists of the story

While traditional advertisements follow the trend and recreate fast visual forms to attract and glue the user to the TV or mobile phone screen, brands using ASMR marketing in their advertising strategies give space to more sensorial, engaging and intimate elements.

The effect obtained from commercials of this type is, for those who are sensitive and attracted to them, a feeling of extreme relaxation that manages to lower the protective shield we use with all other advertising and make us more sensitive and 'vulnerable'.

This should not be interpreted negatively as a persuasive incitement to buy one's own products, but a careful and positive way of advertising, which would achieve a win-win result.

Those who would obtain a fundamental role in the realisation of this type of advertising would be the sounds that, together with images and storytelling, would involve all five senses, creating an exciting and engaging story.

The images therefore, although of paramount importance to immerse the viewer, would be played more slowly, to capture their very essence and give them the greatest emphasis.

And they would reflect the philosophy of life¹⁸⁶ in which the new generations believe.

After experiencing difficult years due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, people's rhythms and habits have changed in favour of a 'slower' lifestyle¹⁸⁷: by slowing down at the right times, everything is done better.

'Slow food', 'slow fashion', 'slow thinking', are just a few terms to indicate this tendency of individuals to change their mindset for the sake of their own well-being. It is about building a more meaningful and conscious lifestyle for oneself, one's surroundings and others.¹⁸⁸

The sounds would be those typical of ASMR, produced by objects or ASMRtists who use their voices and skills to create an immersive, quality experience.

The latter becomes fully appreciated when the advertising and the sounds belonging to it fit completely and perfectly with the concept and the product itself that is being shown to the public.

7.3 The construction of the experience: from choosing the theme to maintaining the memory

How to design an ASMR advertisement?

For all brands that decide to try or focus on this phenomenon by associating it with the world of marketing, it is important to be aware of what actions to keep in mind before and during the creation of an ASMR advertisement.

The construction of effective storytelling is the basis of any concept and this needs to be aligned with the objectives and strategy addressed previously.

¹⁸⁶ Zeitoune R., Szmidt N., «Slow living: la nuova tendenza in crescita tra i consumatori», URL: thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/it-it/tendenze-e-insight/tendenze-di-consumo/slow-living-tendenza/ (11.11.22)

¹⁸⁷ Carl Honoré, «In praise of slowness», URL: ted.com/talks/carl_honore_in_praise_of_slowness/, Febbraio 2007, (11.11.22)

¹⁸⁸ Slow Living ldn, «What is Slow Living?», URL: slowlivingldn.com/what-is-slow-living/ (11.11.22)

Brands must design and develop the perfect context so that their experiential offering can be experienced by the customer in a fully immersive manner, and that it is consistent in all its aspects.

The experience cannot be designed for everyone, and this is where market analysis becomes indispensable in order to understand the target audience to which the ad can be shown, in accordance with the objectives and strategy.

From the results obtained in the questionnaire presented in chapter six, we obtain comforting data regarding people who are sensitive to ASMR, in line with the phenomenon, more attentive to sensations and pleasantly attracted to advertisements in this style.

This is why it is recommended that brands, who want to adopt ASMR in their advertising campaigns, start the journey by communicating with their sensitive audience, and then, with a view to increasing the community, involve others as well. To do this, it is necessary to conduct market analyses to understand which audiences are ready and receptive to this new form of advertising.

What must never be forgotten is that ASMR advertising, like traditional advertising, must not be forced; the sounds of the product or service to be conveyed must fit perfectly, without distortion or exaggeration, into the context in which they are placed.

How to maintain the memory?

ASMR advertising is like a white dot in the midst of black dots: its particularity and diversity makes it memorable and unique.

However, this is not enough, it is necessary for brands to use ASMR on multiple occasions and not just use it to follow trends.

The ASMR community is increasing its participants, it feels more alert and alive, ready to support those who have the will to create something positive and useful through this phenomenon.

«This experience has an impact on the way we live and interact in a significant way, so it has great potential to teach us openness, empathy and happiness». ¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Dr. Richard, «Interview with Jennifer Allen, the woman who coined the term, ‘Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response’ (ASMR)», URL: asmruniversity.com/2016/05/17/jennifer-allen-interview-coined-asmr/ (9.11.22)

Conclusions

Today, the diffusion of greater attention towards the quality of one's life, both personal and collective, is shared by almost all young people.

This conception has changed the vision of some brands that have tried to conceive a new form of advertising that would meet the needs of the new generation.

Through this paper, I have presented the phenomenon of ASMR, describing its most important characteristics and curiosities, and associating it with the world of marketing in order to observe it and get to know it from a different point of view.

Although studies on the phenomenon related to the world of science and neuroscience are readily available, some studies related to ASMR and marketing are not visible.

My intention was to bring to life a different kind of research in the field of marketing, a sphere that some brands have already experimented with, but which no one has ever examined in depth and publicly.

Marketing evolves along with society and this moment could be the beginning of a crisis in traditional advertising, which is having to change certain characteristics in order to innovate and communicate effectively to the public.

The term crisis, etymologically, derives from the Latin 'krísis' and translates into choice, decision, in this case to uproot a mentality and a way of conceiving and operating that could slowly become lapsed and obsolete for the audience to which it refers.

The results of the research I conducted were based on wanting to obtain answers regarding all individuals 'not sensitive to ASMR', especially if they could become so through ASMR advertisements. The data obtained do not show any comforting results except for all 'sensitive' individuals who are familiar with the phenomenon.

This is why ASMR needs to show itself and make itself known to people, it needs in-depth studies and scientific research that can testify to real results in various fields: from the psychological, scientific to the commercial and marketing.

It is necessary to understand the possibilities that this phenomenon can give to the individual both on a physical and psychological level, and at the same time to the brand that designs advertising campaigns in relation to its strategies.

Creating sensorial, emotional and experiential advertisements works because they allow the user to feel more connected to the brand and product, but how can this be created if the advertisements all have the same characteristics?

Surely being the voice out of the chorus might hinder at first, but innovating and starting to create, for the future, a better service and benefit for the viewer and listener, would not only benefit forward-thinking brands who would see their competitive advantage increase, but would lead to a welfare for all.

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