

Graffiti as an urban territorial and identity tool for branding

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Abstract

The urban territory, supported by its elements (architectural and monumental) and the existing delimitations between neighbourhoods (physical and psychosocial), sustains the construction of identity (individual and collective) in urban society. Graffiti is one of the forms used for this, informing outsiders about the boundaries of the neighbourhood or to denounce situations that affect the neighbourhood and/or the neighbourhood. These graffiti have a great symbolic charge that is transferred to the territory itself. This transfer encourages the people of a community to identify with a territory which, by radiating its identity qualities, becomes a meeting point, a destination and an identity reference point. For this reason, brands have begun to use them, because it allows them to get closer to the people who identify with the graffiti. It is not a widely used technique, but it achieves good results at festivals. It is used by different types of advertisers, including institutional ones, mainly to make identity known, to mark brand territory, to denounce inequalities and to break down stereotypes.

Keywords

graffiti; street art; identity; marketing; territory; engagement.

1. Introduction

Given that advertising festivals reward marketing actions that use urban graffiti, it is considered necessary to investigate the appropriation of this artistic and social manifestation by advertisers for commercial purposes. In order to fulfil the main objective, aspects related to power relations, urban territory, communication and graffiti are explored.

As will be explained below, in the 1960s, the weak social groups living in the city began to paint graffiti in order to complain, protest, make visible and denounce their

problems. Given that this research is framed within the territorial sphere, it is decided to contextualise it by means of a very current urban territorial problem, i.e. gentrification. Once contextualised, its relationship with governance is analysed.

2. Gentrificación

This process revitalises an urban area by attracting higher social classes who, theoretically, with their high purchasing power, boost the development of the neighbourhood. In reality, the supposed boost is localised in the businesses frequented by these groups. In fact,

instead of spreading to the rest of the neighbourhood, it erases the traditional economy and natural spaces of the original population, in order to build 'other places' (Islas and Hernández, 2024, p.1) specific to these new classes. Over time, it tends to attract more people who expand the conquered territory and expel the native population (Bedoya et al., 2022, p.264), setting in motion new consumption practices sustained by a new materialistic culture (2024, p.2), which materially and physically transforms the landscape and lifestyle of the territory. All of this constructs new symbolic and semiotic dimensions that erase the traditional spatial meaning of the neighbourhood. The city council promotes this simulacrum of the neighbourhood's reality, because by hiding its social problems, it covers up the stigma that slows down the arrival of investment and tourists (2024, p.3).

The local corporation sustains this simulacrum in graffiti as urban art associated with innovation, promoting graffiti that it recently tried to erase as illegal. In this context, a curious situation arises. Many of these graffiti are graffiti denouncing gentrification or extolling the identity of the original population. However, both the city council and the new upper-class residents turn them into an artistic object of consumption in order to attract prestigious investments and tourists (2024, p.5). At this point, a materiality of space (refurbished buildings, luxurious shop windows, luxury cars, etc.) and an immateriality of space (ideals and symbolisms from both sides) are combined, which are in contrast, but which serve the powerful to do business with a territory that the latest arrivals appropriate through consumption. For the natives it is the (modified) stage of their real life and they appropriate it because they find meaning in it and because it generates feelings (2024, p.39).

2.1 Tourism

Gentrification is generally associated with the relocation of upper-class residences to a devalued but revaluing location. However, the urban tourism economic model makes the city more attractive and competitive. To do so, it demands territorial and landscape changes that erase

the old social representations in order to commercialise it attractively as a product (Mendieta, 2019).

Against this excessive tourism, as in the previous case, citizen resistance arises, although it is true that it manifests itself in innumerable ways, one of the main ones being the painting of graffiti in the neighbourhood on walls, façades, shutters of closed shops, etc. And, once again, the city councils and the new upper classes turn these artistic and social denunciations into artistic products that are attractive to tourists.

When graffiti is commissioned by the municipality and the upper classes to generate an artistically attractive context, artists are hired to represent the neighbourhood. MacCannell labels this as the 'represented authenticity' that fosters fictitious social relations that conceal the real everyday life of the place visited (2019, p.205). This reality falsifies the neighbourhood (Cohen, 2005, p.13) to commercialise its landscape (2019, p.213) and please the resident.

Such remodelling transforms the natural representation, symbolism and use that construct the original narrative. Without them, the territory becomes a 'non-place' for the neighbour, even if the tourist feels it as his or her own (2019, p.215). Therefore, the city today, instead of being the citizen's city, is the tourist's city (2019, p.221).

3. Governance

It involves managing the problems that affect the city in a shared manner between public bodies, the private sector and civil society (Zurbriggen, 2011).

From this management, effective public policies are created because they are born from the consensus of all parties (Ziccardi, 1999).

However, the previous section shows that this formula is not always applied, in favour of the economic interests of the upper echelons. It is then that the affected population reveals itself and expresses its opposition, for example through graffiti.

It can therefore be said that the best antidote to graffiti is to apply governance.

4. Territory

Following in the wake of governance, Mares (2021, p.111) advocates dialogue to build an urban territory that shares native and new inhabitants' symbols. In this way, there would be a joint social representation based on respect.

However, the cases studied show that this respect does not take place. Thus, urban graffiti symbolise territorial power disputes, including messages that restrict access to the place. They all produce space, spatial practices and favour its physical and symbolic understanding (Lefebvre, 1978). Ultimately, graffiti (of counter-power) make visible conflicts, powers and urban resistances that demand a solution (Gargantini and Peresini, 2017, p.3; Castells, 2012).

But it is not only the graffiti that makes the neighbourhood's identity visible. The housing built in a neighbourhood promoted by a public social housing policy symbolises the inequality suffered by its residents in comparison with the rest of the city. This socio-territorial segregation constructs subjectivities that stigmatise certain territories (Sabatini, 2003; Davis, 2006; Borja, 2007). This is what Segura (2012) calls the symbolic burden of place.

For Bourdieu (1999), spatial structures physically objectify social oppositions (centre/periphery). These structures imply a meaning that acts subjectively as a principle of perception and division. He adds that the territory forms the habitus and vice versa, based on the social uses inherited to it. The habitus influences how one perceives and acts in relation to the possible and the impossible, the us and the others, or in the material and symbolic exclusion sustained by urban images (Sabatini and Cáceres, 2004).

Graffiti fight against these urban images, reflect the relationship with space, endow it with meaning and assign it a use. And they provide the option of getting to know the reality of the territorially stigmatised (Wacquant, 2007).

Finally, organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) generates a different conception of territory (Noguera, 2004) in each group that politicises local space and socially reinforces (Velasco, 2016) the groups, so that they continue to exist (León, 2016; Caride, 2006).

5. Citizen's space

Del Pino Martínez (2017) first studies whether urban physical components have the same meaning for each user, as well as whether it varies for the same person at different times of the day. Then, he investigates whether the way of using spaces with collective significance changes.

The conclusion is that all of the situations he discusses do vary, given that people are reflexive and therefore do not always act in the same way.

6. Urban Identity

Urban identity encompasses the customs, dreams, feelings, uses, perceptions and traces of those who inhabit the urban territory. It is everything that moves and generates links of urban identity and belonging (Timmling, 2001, p.81), provided that the spaces are experienced and felt as 'singularities', that is to say, as significant places.

This identity is projected onto the public spaces that are used, which act as permanent references, generating an image that orients daily life.

A given use generates the image of an emotionally singular place associated with a sense of belonging (2001, p.82) and social and cultural identifications. Thus, the 'sense of place' (urban space-identity-architect) emerges (2001, p.82). In addition, it configures main and secondary routes that establish a coherent network of axes.

Singular experiences, in public urban spaces, acquire meaning if they trigger feelings and emotions, which provide understandable and memorable contextual relationships. These relationships drive the social and cultural validation that assigns meanings and enables

(possibly shared) spatial appropriation. All these motivate feelings of 'shelter', 'safety', 'orientation' and 'communication' that generate emotions of 'symbolic appropriation', 'social belonging' and 'protected familiarity', which help to identify with the city.

Metropolitan life offers infinite contacts that promote an indifference to others, which leads to individuality (Paiva, 2021). Only in one's own urban territory does such indifference disappear because it offers a context composed of one's own symbols and symbolic interactions. The two internal aspects that Simmel (2005) studies in order to get to know a society and its individuals. He states that society is not an external entity, it is a creation based on individual interactions conditioned by feelings, interests, impulses and personal goals. He therefore asserts that the individual uses the city to fight continuously against any imposed external reality. Durkheim (1893) qualifies that what is one's own is only found in one's own neighbourhood or territory, because of its resemblance to the people who provide emotional relations. Outside, ephemeral cultural experiences are imposed and profitably commodified (Baudrillard, 2009) by the market society.

7 Urban Landscape

This research considers it necessary to study the urban landscape of each territory, given the need to know if it has an impact territorially and on citizens (Torres, 2017). The cultural sphere and Laurie (1976) present it as the environment in which social and human activity takes place. Gómez Orea et al. (2012) relates it to the manifestation of the territorial system, while Bertrand (2002) establishes its emergence when there are looks towards the territory.

As an element of urban planning, in addition to linking territorial and urban planning and the visual image of the landscape, it should be considered that the structure of the city has a physical or built part; a social and political part (social groups); and an economic part (production and consumption) (Torres, 2017).

It is composed of form, line, colour, texture, dimension, scale, space and spatial configuration. All of these are

basic visual elements that help the observer to generate a particular image of the landscape. Torres (2017) identifies different components, but this work highlights the scenic background, for working with that which allows the scene surrounding the observed object to be organised and constructed. All of this harmonises the whole and facilitates the understanding of what is observed.

De la Torres (2017) highlights the instrumental, emotive, cognitive, affective functions; the built and environmental surroundings; as well as the established orders or ideologies that make up the sense of place and, simultaneously, criticise the traditional cultural discourse.

8 Graffiti

Before going deeper into graffiti, it is necessary to contextualise it. This art or technique is part of the discipline known as Street Art, which encompasses the different techniques or arts used in urban spaces to create artistic works.

Urban art operates in a city that has become a non-place, that is to say, a place of transit where the spaces provided by that place are not inhabited. It is like a conveyor belt transporting people on their way to fulfil a mandate. It is in this situation when it is considered necessary to reappropriate lost spaces (Aladro-Vico et al., 2018).

There is research that frames graffiti as activism. This term reflects the union between art and activism, starting in the 21st century. They state that it descends from Street Art, Situationism and graffiti art from the 20th century (Ardenne, 2008). At this historical moment, genres, modes of expression and communication tools are undergoing a 'massive transcoding' (Manovich, 2005) that merges them into a new common space that transforms communication.

Graffiti mark territory as a collective action (for one side to turn around an unjust situation) or as an instrument that constructs a self-concept (when sides show or defend their identity) (Tolosana, 1983, p.149). In such

situations, group meanings and feelings of self are negotiated and do not want to be taken away by the opposing side (Gamson, 1992). One of these meanings is conveyed by clothing (Minetti, 2009). Taking all of this into account, collective action acts as a territorial basis that re-signifies and cohesively links urban spaces, in order to generate trust and common aspirations that promote a just life. When graffiti from different sides cohabit in the same place, a participatory process takes place that exchanges the needs, interests and leaderships of opposing actors. It is true that normally, rather than pursuing dialogue, they seek to put pressure on the other, using the rights of their own side as a shield. In short, it helps in the process of urban appropriation and identification, promotes social insertion to improve the quality of life and helps to memorise a theme in order to endure over time. By marking territory, they create routes made up of different territories that help to build territorial identity. Graffiti differs from muralism because while the former is imposed, that is, it is carried out without permission, the latter is agreed upon by the person who does it and the owner of the wall. They even negotiate the subject matter and content between both parties (Martínez, 2019).

9 Analysing the adaptation of artivism to marketing

In recent decades, traditional advertising has lost credibility and effectiveness. In order to recover the former, the advertiser seeks face-to-face communication strategies that make it possible to present the organisational values and, in addition, to listen to the receiver so that he/she feels that he/she is taken into account.

The way to stage this change is to choose to carry out actions in the urban space, maintaining direct contact with the target of each campaign. And, among the many options available, graffiti is being studied. Its advertising application maintains its essence and is carried out to connect with groups that are difficult to connect with through traditional media. When an urban tribe sees a company's graffiti in its territory that sends a message, it understands that the company has the same values and that they share the same territory. This generates an emotional bond between the two parties that

memorises the message and its sender better and for a longer period of time. This means that when the consumer chooses between several options during their final purchase decision, the feelings generated by the graffiti will come to the surface and the balance will be tipped towards the brand that has taken the risk in favour of this technique.

In the following, different cases of award-winning actions in relevant festivals are studied to discover if marketing values graffiti well and to study when, by whom and with what objectives it is used.

Table 1. Graffiti And Award-Winning Actions in the Period Under Study.

Name	Advertiser	Description	Award	Function
Make the politicians work	URA.RU	In the hole - a road gap paint a graffiti of the cartoon of the councilor who should propose the work.	Gold	Report the laziness of the council. It is achieved.
Los grafitis de la naturaleza	Manzanas Val Venosta	This brand of apples celebrate the day of fruit farmers and fruit trees by painting natural landscapes on the blinds of neighborhood fruit shops. Joining several blinds you see the whole landscape.	Bronze	The owners of the fruit shops mark their territory (the shutter of their business) so that no one will attack them. In addition, as between graffiti artists are respected, the work will be respected.
La obra más cara	Renfe	In ARCO, graffiti is shown on a door of a wagon. Its price, 15 million euros, is what the state spends cleaning the wagons.	Bronze	To denounce an illegal act that affects the entire population.
Festival de Cine de San Sebastián	TCM	Graffiti is painted on cars, shop blinds and facades denouncing that people do not watch key films.	Bronze	He denounces the low appreciation people have for the seventh art. And proposes the channel TCM as a solution, because it reissues.
El arte de esperar	Reclame aquí	A telephone customer, tired of not being answered, paints a graffiti in front of the company complaining.	Bronze	Report abuse of power by the company.
El Colectivo Yamaha Fino se llena de arte callejero	Yamaha Motos	Paint drawings throughout the city that evoke the Yamaha philosophy.	Silver	Communicate the identity of Yamaha riders to the world and their urban route-territory.
Snow Graffiti	Turismo de México	In spring in Chicago it snows but not in Mexico. That's why a snow anuncio is done in Chicago announcing that in Mexico there is no snow. The building's facade and snow are used.	Bronze	Promote the identity and attributes of Mexico, so that tourists can go.
Valla graffiti	Smart	Instead of using paper on a fence, the car is shown by making graffiti.	Gold	Communicate the identity, values and differentiation of the car: environmentally friendly.
Pick your own -> 50m	Yoggi	A new stand is placed, imitating a provisional one, and on it a written sign drawn by hand with graffiti indicating the direction and distance to the shop where Yoggi is sold.	Gold	It draws a graffiti that shows the distance and fruit and vegetables. It is a natural drawing, without mountings. As its products.

Sin rampa, la acera es un muro	Movimento Superação de Globo Comunicação E Participações	Graffiti the side of the curbs and photograph them to look like walls. Thus it is visible that a simple curb is a wall for people with reduced mobility.	Gold	Report unequal municipal treatment towards people with reduced mobility. They want to move freely like the rest, but they have to remove obstacles.
Hummer Mountain Dew	Mountain Dew	Breaking the boundaries by letting them paint graffiti on a Hummer to express what they feel about the taste of Mountain Dew	Silver	Show product identity. Make known the power of your flavor.
The Anti Cancer Paste Up	A C Camargo Cancer Center	On the graffiti showing naked women, they draw the scar of an amputation of a breast. They also put up a #LigadoRosa hastag and the headline "Any woman can fall victim to breast cancer".	Bronze	They encourage women to report their condition for treatment by a doctor. They also eliminate the bad image of women who lack a breast.
The Power of Cute	The Royal Borough of Greenwich	Memorials are placed outside the music pubs indicating their closure by the government's law against musical nightlife.	Bronze	Pub owners denounce government action and announce their discontent. They seek social support.
#CoverTheProgress	Turismo de Puerto Rico	During Hurricane Maria, Puerto Ricans wrote the message "SOS We Need Water/Food" to be seen from the planes. Now that they are recovered, in the same square they write the message "Bienvenidos cover the progress"	Silver	<p>The first graffiti draws the world's attention to communicate its problems and ask for help.</p> <p>The second graffiti calls for tourists to come to their city, to repay the help given by society at large.</p> <p>Thus show that their culture is grateful to those who help.</p>
Hot Spot	Budweiser Europa	Football, music and street art to rejuvenate the brand image in Europe.	Silver	Graffiti expresses the identity of Budweiser so that young people can see it is part of their territory. Graffiti delimits the territory and shows the youthful identity of the brand.
Boards of Change	Chicago City Council	Voting boxes are built with the panels on which black people express their feelings through graffiti. This is done so that they do not lose their right to vote, as the parties and media ignore them.	Grand Prix	Graffiti makes the demands and needs of marginalized people known. They also serve to let the rest of us know that we know our right to vote, that is, we do not let them be deceived.

10 Results and Discussion

10.1 Results

From 840 actions awarded in urban space, between 1999 and 2024, only sixteen convey the commercial, corporate, institutional or third sector message through graffiti. One of them is awarded the grand prize, four gold, four silver and seven bronze. All of them represent 1.90% of the winners in that period. The data is not negative, simply, it must be taken into account that the rate of advertisements executed with this technique is small, compared to the other techniques and means employed. Similarly, consumers and brands associated with the graffiti world represent a small part of the total. In addition, it should be remembered that Covid 19 prevents the celebration of some festivals for one or two years.

The types of advertiser include institutions, general brands, trade associations, groups defending a cause and general brands (motorcycles, apples, alcohol and cars). It is true that social groups abound and that brands use it to approach these consumers, since they choose the outdoor environment or other urban techniques for their campaigns aimed at the general public.

All the actions are carried out in public urban space, except for Renfe's which takes place at the ARCO fair. Graffiti is mainly placed on walls, but also on shop blinds or on the asphalt itself. It is regularly conducted on vehicles parked on the street. As for the spaces in which they develop, it must be said that they are territories specific to the graffiti culture and, at the same time, close or manageable for the brand. With this effort, the brand enters as a member of the territory, to show all other brands what their urban space (or consumer space) is, to show their identity and their affinity with each one of them. In 13 actions it is used alone without combining it with any other technique, a fact that reveals its power-effectiveness both to attract attention and to communicate the message.

Finally, their function fits in with those identified by analysing the sources studied. The most common are to delimit the territory of the brand; make known its

identity to integrate among the target; and denounce a reality that affects the collective that promotes graffiti. It has been used to break down preconceived ideas.

10.2 Discussion

In view of the great results obtained at festivals, it seems logical to ask local authorities to allow advertisements and awareness messages (through graffiti) as they can help them to revive the city by the hand of citizens. Invite more companies to communicate using this technique.

10.3 Conclusions

- 1 Using graffiti in marketing, it removes its bandalistic stigma, demonstrating its usefulness for social minorities or groups that live injustice to raise their voice.
- 2 Graffiti marks territory. Urban territory is key for the population and that should be understood by advertisers.
- 3 Using a specific urban territory to place the graffiti addresses the message to the target in the city.
- 4 By studying the original functions of graffiti, brands can learn about the objectives they are pursuing and use them in their campaigns.
- 5 The brand making a graffiti becomes another graffiti artist and another member of the community, so its messages and proposals are not perceived as imposed, rather as a plan of an integral.
- 6 The graffiti placed by the advertiser in a territory with which the target has engagement, increase the relevance of the territory, message and brand.
- 7 If you allow yourself to participate in the creation of graffiti, your link with the brand is strengthened.
- 8 The message succeeds when the person takes a graffiti photo, personalizes the photo and shares it.
- 9 The awards reflect that the sector values graffiti highly.

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Conflict of Interests and ethics

"The author(s) declare no conflict of interests. The author(s) also declare full adherence to all journal research ethics policies, namely involving the participation of human subjects anonymity and/ or consent to publish."

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