

# Linguae &

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## Soundscapes

Listening to British and American Languages and Cultures

*edited by Alessandra Calanchi*

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# Singing Corporate Social Responsibility: A Multimodal Analysis of the 2018 Budweiser Super Bowl Commercial <sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** – The 2018 Super Bowl Commercial of the Budweiser Beer is entitled “Stand by You” and revolves around the pluriannual Water Donation Program of the Anheuser-Busch brewing company. The video features images of the employees of the Budweiser Cartersville, GA brewery organizing the emergency drinking water delivery with the help of American Red Cross, its partner in such disaster-relief efforts over the past 30 years. The images are accompanied by a cover of the 1961 Ben E. King iconic song “Stand by me”. Adopting a socio-semiotic multimodal perspective, the paper aims at analyzing the meaning-making construction of the video in its YouTube contextualization. In detail, the focus of the paper is to understand how the sound and the lyrics of the cover, with their cultural, linguistic and semiotic layers of meaning, constitute the semiotic entry point in the narration and create the soundscape for the framing of Corporate Social Responsibility.

**KEYWORDS** – Multimodality; Social Media Discourse; Social Semiotics; Soundscapes; Systemic-Functional Linguistics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2018 Super Bowl Commercial of the Budweiser Beer is entitled “Stand by You”<sup>2</sup>. It revolves around the pluriannual Water Donation Program of

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<sup>1</sup> Even though the authors planned and designed the essay together, Iliaria Moschini is the author of sections 1,2,3,4.1, 5 (lines 1-38) and Johnny Wingstedt is the author of sections 4.1.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5 (lines 39-53).

<sup>2</sup> The URL of the YouTube page where the commercial was originally launched in March 2018 was [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=5&v=CxGUmtRLm5g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=CxGUmtRLm5g).

the Anheuser-Busch brewing company and its efforts to provide millions of cans of water to cities across the US that were impacted by natural disasters in 2017, such as Hurricane Harvey in Texas, Hurricane Irma in Florida, Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and the Californian Wildfires. The video features images of the employees of the Budweiser in Cartersville, GA brewery organizing the emergency drinking water delivery with the help of the American Red Cross, its partner in such disaster-relief efforts over the past 30 years. The images are accompanied by the cover of the 1961 Ben E. King song “Stand by Me” rearranged and performed by the 5-time Grammy Award nominee, Skylar Grey. The pop-soul song has become iconic in American culture and has come to express the country’s idealized image sense of communal participation. Indeed, in an interview with Billboard, Grey stated that the song “was the perfect choice for Anheuser-Busch because it brings to life how they really do stand by communities in times of need” and that its “more stripped-down and acoustic version” that should emphasize such a message (Marzovilla 2018). The song was released for digital download almost contextually (Gray 2018) and the American singer-songwriter declared that she would take part in the fundraising campaign by donating a portion of song’s proceeds to the American Red Cross. The campaign was hybrid, because it merged a classical commercial video advertisement with the digital release of the song used on social media. Indeed, the video of the full-length cover featured images of the commercial and the call to involve fans to participate in the water donation fund-raising campaign addressed the so-called millennials, an influential, hard-to-reach segment of population (Patrizi 2016; YPulse 2017).

The aim of the present paper is to examine the meaning-making construction of the campaign through the analysis of the commercial and the cover video and the perspective that has been adopted combines social semiotics and multimodal analysis. In details, the focus of the paper is to understand how the sound (van Leeuwen 1999; Wingstedt 2017, 2019) and the lyrics of the cover (Moschini 2011), with their cultural, linguistic and semiotic layers of meaning, constitute the semiotic entry point in the narration and create the soundscape for the framing of Corporate Social Responsibility across semiotic modes. As regards the structure of the essay, the paper starts from the explanation of the theoretical and methodological approach which

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The commercial can be retrieved at <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/waos/budweiser-super-bowl-2018-stand-by-you-song-by-skylar-grey> (11/11/2019).

has been used to analyze the commercial, to concentrate then on the communicative context and on the study of the text which is divided into two steps, the exploration of the overall structure and of the main remediation and recontextualization strategies and the investigation of the semiotic aural architecture of the commercial.

## 2. THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In this paper a socio-semiotic approach to the study of communication is adopted (Hodge and Kress 1988). The main purpose of Social Semiotics is to understand meaning making in its social dimensions in terms of the interactive conditions of any act of communication and the social relations that are involved. According to social semiotics, meanings derive from social action and signs are always socially situated and motivated by the historical, cultural and social experiences of the sign maker. The development of Social Semiotics can be traced back to Halliday's view of language, which emphasizes the connections between a verbal sign-system and the purposes for which it is actually used (Halliday [1975] 2007). According to Halliday, every linguistic act involves a choice. Therefore, language presents a system of *meaning potentials*, which are sets of options that speakers can select to make meaning in different social situations. This theory departs from the tradition of structuralist semiotics and considers language as an evolving system in context. In Halliday's view, three modes of meaning or *metafunctions* characterize the semantic system of language. Each text is the product of the three functions: the *ideational metafunction* represents the content function of language; the *interpersonal metafunction* encodes the role relationships associated with the context of situation, and the *textual metafunction* expresses the speaker's text-forming potential (Halliday [1975] 2007). All these components are reflected in the lexicogrammatical system in the forms of networks of options from which a sign maker can choose when encoding meaning. In their book *Social Semiotics* (1988), Hodge and Kress expanded Halliday's notion of language as a system of choices that are both semiotic and semantic to other sign systems, such as images. Since the publication of the seminal volume *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996), which founded the school of Multimodal Studies, research in social semiotics has started to focus on the fine-grained analysis of texts that feature different

semiotic resources in order to investigate the processes of meaning making. Kress and van Leeuwen define multimodality as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 20); in sketching an outline of a multimodal approach to social discourse, they define communication as “a process in which a semiotic product or event is both articulated or produced *and* interpreted or used” (20; emphasis in the original).

The book *Speech, Music and Sound* (van Leeuwen 1999) introduced a social semiotic perspective to the study of sound integrating linguistics, semiotics and musicology. Indeed, the volume discusses the meaning potentials and the communicative roles of the elements of sound such as melody, rhythm, timbre and aural perspective as they are used in the production and the interpretation of music, speech and other sounds. It draws concepts from musicology, pragmatics, semiotics, linguistics and phonetics. Such a perspective is crucial to our work because, methodologically, the essay focuses on the way meaning is realized in the Budweiser commercial. The semiotic entry point of our analysis is given by the song, which is used as the soundtrack and is directly referred to in the name of the video, featuring a pun of the original song title. We start from investigating the song as both a cultural and a semiotic sign, outlining its provenance – that is, where the song comes from in terms of context and communities of practice – and its *recontextualization* (Bernstein 1990) and *resemiotization* (Iedema 2001) processes. The process of recontextualization explores the changes that occur to a text when it is placed in a context different from its original one, while resemiotization deals with the semantic and semiotic changes when meanings shift from context to context and from practice to practice. In detail, our analysis highlights the sonic environment of the text and its functional role in the process of meaning making starting from the study of the system of *sound perspective* of the commercial, a concept that van Leeuwen (1999) borrows and adapts from Schafer (1977). Actually, the perspective of sounds describes the soundscape of an artefact, especially the symbolic distance and the relationships between the different sounds and the listener, thus outlining their social and communicative roles in shaping meaning. Our analysis also explores the verbalizing role of the lyrics in telling the story of the emergency drinking water delivery. Moreover, our analysis concentrates on basic structural elements of the song, such as its harmonic progression, the melody and the rhythm, and compares the original recording to Skylar Grey’s cover both as it is used in the com-

mercial and as it is realized in the version published contextually to the Super Bowl event and to which the commercial is directly related also because of the above mentioned participation of the singer in the fundraising campaign.

### 3. THE COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXT

The “Stand by You” video by the Anheuser-Busch America brewing company was presented on February 4, 2018 during the Super Bowl, which is the annual championship game of the National Football League (NFL) and also one of the most-watched American television broadcasts. Indeed, the Super Bowl Halftime is a show and is a special ‘prime time’ for advertisers in the US since 1967 not only because of its large diverse audience, but also because it is one of the ‘bonding’ moments in US national community (Moses 2014). Since the 1980s, the Anheuser-Busch company has been presenting commercials during the Super Bowl Halftime and many of them have become iconic, like the famous Budweiser Clydesdales ads. In 2017, Anheuser-Busch departed from its tradition of the Clydesdales’ ads and presented a commercial entitled “Born the Hard Way”, a short film about the brewing company’s immigrant roots. The ad caused a debate as it was released a week after President Trump signed a controversial executive order that imposed a restriction on immigration. The “Stand by You” ad also detaches from the Clydesdales’ tradition to present the program of Corporate Social Responsibility that Anheuser-Busch dedicated to the natural disasters which occurred across the US in 2017. It is the pluriannual Water Donation Program that sees the brewing company delivering clean and safe drinking water to cities affected by natural disasters thanks to the same production and logistical capabilities used to can and deliver beer across the country. The video features images of the General Manager of the Budweiser Brewery in Cartersville, GA and other employees organizing the emergency drinking water delivery with the help of the American Red Cross, its partner in such disaster-relief efforts over the past 30 years.

The “Stand by You” ad was first released online on January 26, 2018 on the YouTube Budweiser channel at an address which has been now dismissed (see footnote 2). The verbal message that accompanied the video (*Fig. 1*) provides the context for the ad and a *transversal link* (Lemke 2002) in the company’s website (<http://www.budweiser.com/en/stand-by-you.html>)

provides more information about the water donation program. Indeed, the text is informative, and the register of the message is neutral; it also features elements of colloquial language where the company announces that “there is more to do”. A response to this call to action comes in the same message with the announcement that, by the end of 2018, another brewery would join Anheuser-Busch in delivering clean water to communities in need. Such an ethically oriented practice serves to shape the image of Anheuser-Busch America brewing company as a caring and committed organization, because it shows the company’s sense of responsibility towards the community and the environment (both ecological and social) in which it operates. This image is reinforced by the video which features an articulated semiotic architecture, especially for the aural resources as the next section illustrates.

The image shows a screenshot of a YouTube video player. At the top, the video title is "Budweiser 2018 Super Bowl Commercial | 'Stand By You'" with 20,019,011 views. Below the title are icons for likes (28K), dislikes (6K), share, and a menu. The Budweiser logo is on the left, and a red "SUBSCRIBE 169K" button is on the right. The video description reads: "Since 1988, our employees have helped provide more than 79 million cans of water to cities across the U.S. that were impacted by natural disasters. But there's more to do. By the end of 2018, our brewery in Fort Collins, CO will be joining our brewery in Cartersville, GA to deliver even more clean drinking water to communities in need." Below the description is a link to learn more: <http://www.budweiser.com/en/stand-by-...>. The music is identified as "Stand by Me" performed by Skylar Grey. The category is "Entertainment" and the license is "Standard YouTube License". A "SHOW LESS" link is at the bottom.

Figure 1. The Contextualizing message of the commercial on YouTube

#### 4. THE ANALYSIS

The analysis starts from discussing the textual structure of the video, the complex semiotic interplay of the visuals and sound making up the Super Bowl Budweiser commercial (seen as a multimodal/audiovisual ensemble) and the symbolic role of the song “Stand by Me” in American society. Then follows the investigation of the salient resources of the music soundtrack through the



examination of aspects such as musical structure, performance, voice quality, production features, and structural characteristics of the lyrics.

#### *4.1. The Super Bowl Budweiser Commercial*

The Budweiser commercial is 60 seconds long and features a *problem-solution textual pattern* (Hoey 2001), in which Anheuser-Busch plays the role of the committed participant who answers the call of those in need, as the title of the ad shows. The title “Stand by You” verbally expresses a moral commitment to the semantic value expanded by the intertextual reference to the famous song “Stand by Me” (1961), which we discuss later in the section. The original song, originally performed by the soul singer Ben E. King, was actually modelled on spirituals and inspired by Psalm 46: 2-3 which, in King James Version, recites:

<sup>2</sup> Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

<sup>3</sup> Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

Therefore, the call acquires a religious connotation as if it were a sort of prayer the brewing company is willing and committed to answer as the last screenshots of the video show by offering a solution, if it only partial, to the problem of water shortage (see *Fig. 2*). In such shots we can see how Anheuser-Busch crafts its image through the juxtaposition of almost identical images that feature a hyper-real image of two different versions of the company’s beverage can, the first one with the beer and the second one with the water, in a process almost of ‘transubstantiation’. Moreover, it is worth noting that the change that occurs in the title of the commercial – which, as above said, plays upon its lyrical source – actually remodels the nature of the speech act: a request is turned into a promise and a reassessed commitment quoted again in the last shots of the video. This circular structure links the title of the commercial to its last seconds and seems to resolve the problem-solution pattern mentioned above. It also conveys the message that the call/prayer has been answered and it will always be whenever America is in need.

The detailed analysis of the text of the video and of the interplay among the different semiotic resources is given in the next section. We can nonetheless say that at *ideational* level the video can be divided into 5 functional units:

1"-13"/14" – 42"/43" – 50"/51" – 54"/55" – 59". In the first unit, the video features the General Manager of the Budweiser Cartersville, GA brewery who answers an emergency call in the middle of the night. In the second unit a new participant enters the narration: it is Budweiser, both as a brand and as the collective unit of its workers, who are working to help solving the natural disaster emergency. Then, the narration goes back to the first protagonist who organized the work of his companions. The last two units are dedicated to the list of the natural disasters and to the brand. At *interpersonal* level, the relationship between the sender and the receivers is primarily realized (apart from the first functional unit) via the lyrics and the music of the song. At *textual* level, as far as sound perspective is concerned, the first two units feature an architecture where ambient sound progressively shifts to the field position and to ground position (van Leeuwen 1999) and then gets intertwined with a melody conveying anticipation and, finally, with dialogue. Then, ambient sound becomes diegetic (the news on the radio) while the video assumes a first-person perspective (POV shot). When the Budweiser Logo appears for the first time (salience is here given by the color contrast), the lyrics start telling the story.



Figure 2. "Stand by You" Budweiser commercial – a snapshot

#### 4.1.1. Detailed Structure and Sequences

The Budweiser commercial begins with a 13-seconds intro-sequence, starting with a cell phone ringing in the middle of the night at the bedside of a sleeping couple. A man, the protagonist of the story, wakes up and answers the phone; we hear him say "I'll be right there". He quickly gets ready, kisses his sleeping wife, and then drives his car through the night across a bridge. Inside

the car we hear a radio news broadcast reporting: "... and the storm is affecting thousands of families, people still in desperate need of aid". At the end of the broadcast message we see the car arriving at a large industry building. The top floor is dominated by a neon sign showing the company logotype, "Budweiser", in large bright red letters contrasting the dark sky. Throughout this entire intro, a single continuous long note is played, in medium-high register. The unwavering sound establishes a foreboding quality of uneasiness and unresolved tension to the situation, contributing a sense of anticipation. At the same time, the sustained note contributes structural continuity to the rapid and effective visual editing of the sequence.

The next sequence starts with a visual cut to the Budweiser brewery interior, showing workers and a moving assembly line with boxes of beer cans. The cut is synchronized with the start of the first verse of the song, replacing and resolving the sustained note, providing immediate release from the previous tension. The sounds of guitar and voice add a sense of relaxed and steady forward motion to the visuals. In a brief shot of the proponent, now apparently giving instructions to his co-workers inside the brewery, written captions introduce him as "Kevin Fahrenkrog, General Manager, Cartersville Brewery". Activities of the brewery personnel are recurrently visually represented, thereby associating human agency and engagement with the corporate brand. The opening lyrics ("When the night has come, and the land is dark, and the moon is the only light we'll see...") echo the visual setting of the previous intro-sequence, and also allude to the events reported by the radio broadcast. Furthermore, it adds a suggestive narrative subtext to the relatively plain visuals of the brewery interior.

About half-way into the video, the assembly line is stopped: we are shown that it no longer produces beer, but cans of fresh water. As the lyrics approach the end of the verse, "... no I won't be afraid, just as long as you stand...", we see how large delivery trucks with the company logo leave the industrial plant. At "...stand by me", the visuals take us back to the home of the proponent, who is now at the breakfast table with his wife. They are watching the morning news on television, showing how cans of water are off-loaded from a truck. Text graphics of the news broadcast states, in bold letters: "Disaster relief efforts in action". Both representations of news broadcasts (also the previously mentioned radio broadcast) and the proponent's name and position give a cogent sense of authenticity.

At the musical pick-up leading into the refrain, "oh darlin', darlin'...", the proponent and his wife exchange glances of rapport and affection. Then,

on “... stand by me” the musical expression intensifies, as the visuals cut to a birds-eye view of more delivery trucks leaving the brewery – now at morning daylight. The filmed visuals are layered with text graphics, in quick succession (and in time with the music) displaying the names of recent sites of natural disasters: Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, California. After that, still in time with the music, the video concludes with a short sequence of stills and text graphics, designed in five visual steps: (1) Cut to image of Budweiser beer can; (2) Text “Whenever you need us” (first part of campaign slogan) is added below the beer can; (3) The can turns around, transforming into a can of fresh water (see Fig. 2); (4) The text graphics is replaced with the second part of the slogan: “We’ll stand by you”; (5) Video ends with the Budweiser logotype.

The multimodal design of the final sequence is precisely structured. As each of the described visual steps are performed in time with the music at a steady pace of two beats per step, a sense of audiovisual unity is established. The semiotic modes of image, writing, lyrics, musical sound and vocal character converge, based on a joint sense of time – contributing forward motion and drawing attention to the interplay of the elements of the multimodal ensemble. The final guitar chord of the song is synchronized with the concluding visual part of the slogan “We’ll stand by you” forming a shared audiovisual event. This message is immediately echoed by the final vocal reiteration of the lyrics “... Stand by me”, with the visuals changing into the Budweiser logo, which concludes the video, while the final guitar chord still rings out. The careful weaving together of the visuals and the soundtrack brings salience to the central message – and the structured conclusion sets up for a lasting impression of the video.

#### 4.2. *The Song*

As mentioned, the song “Stand by Me” was released in 1961 by singer-songwriter Ben E. King, who co-wrote it with Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. The song has over the years been recorded in hundreds of versions imprinting it firmly into American society. The title “Stand by Me” is also used for a successful movie, directed by Rob Reiner (1986), featuring the original recording as part of the soundtrack. King’s recording was 2015 included in the *United States National Recording Registry* as having “made history as one of the most broadcast songs of the twentieth century” (Library of Congress 2015).

In social semiotic terms the song can today, in the US setting, be understood as a culturally highly recognizable *complex sign* in itself. As a sign, it can be described as a *multimodal ensemble* (Kress 2012), which includes musical sound and lyrics as salient semiotic modes. The title and the lyrics of the song, including its spiritual roots mentioned earlier, and by association also the melody, are likely to contribute immediate connotations to qualities such as loyalty, solidarity and compassion. Furthermore, it is set up to bestow a sense of ‘Americana’, aptly aligning with and contributing to the Super Bowl event as a bonding moment of the US national community. These are significant aspects of the *provenance* that the song brings to the Budweiser commercial. Provenance, ‘where signs come from’, is described by Kress and van Leeuwen as referring to the idea that “signs may be ‘imported’ from one context (another era, social group, culture) into another, in order to signify the ideas and values associated with that other context by those who do the importing” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 23). In importing the song into the Budweiser video, the company acquires not only a mood-setting soundtrack, but, more importantly, it connects the beer brand with ideas and values that are associated with the song.

#### *4.3. The Skylar Grey Version*

The musical structure of “Stand by Me” is based on a conventional alternating form of verse and refrain. The harmonic progression is a common, and repeating, pattern that is identical for both verse and refrain. The Skylar Grey cover version stays close to the original musical structure (‘what’ is played) where the basic structural elements of melody and chord progression are kept close to the King version. These similar elements make the song immediately recognizable, which is very useful in advertising. However, when it comes to the performance aspects (‘how’ it is played) of Skylar Grey’s cover, there are some notable differences between the two versions. In the Skylar Grey version, the tempo is slightly slower and the rhythmic feel is more laidback and gentler compared to the original, which is distinctly rhythmic and accented. The Grey instrumentation starts from a sparse setting of voice and acoustic guitar, gradually and discretely expanded by strings, and later choir in the refrain. King’s version, though also sparsely arranged, builds from the bass playing a pronounced rhythmical riff, setting up for a rhythm and blues groove featuring percussion (including guiro, playing strong regular accents

on the second beat of each bar), and strings playing rhythmic figures. There are also distinct differences in vocal timbre and expression. While King's voice is loud, rough and somewhat tense, Skylar Grey projects a relaxed, soft, intimate and slightly breathy vocal performance.

The differences in vocal address of the two singers, can be described in terms similar to how Kress and van Leeuwen ascribe communicative functions of different *image acts* to certain images. The notion of image acts is derived from the linguistic concept of *speech act* and is a tool for describing the sometime imaginary interpersonal relation between a picture and its viewer. Kress and van Leeuwen identify two possible image acts: *demand* and *offer*. In a portrait, a demand can be executed through the gaze of a depicted face, if it is looking directly at the viewers and maybe also gesturing (e.g. pointing) as if wanting something from them. In other pictures the viewer may instead be addressed indirectly: "here the viewer is not object, but subject of the look, and the represented participant is the object of the viewer's dispassionate scrutiny" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 121). This kind of image 'offers' itself to the viewer, detached, available for inspection or inquiry. In analogy with the concept of image act, we suggest *audio act* for describing certain aspects of imaginary relations between a sound and its listener. The Ben E. King version of "Stand by Me" can be described as more of a demand, with its rhythmic groove and King's loud and tense voice calling for attention. The relaxed, gentle and laid-back version by Skylar Grey leans more towards an offer, leaving the listener to freely contemplate and reflect on what is heard. Alternatively, using terminology borrowed from advertising, King's version could also be described as more of *hard sell* (direct, forceful, persistent sales technique), while Grey's version would be an example of a *soft sell* approach (indirect, subtle, emotionally focused) (Okazaki *et al.* 2010). Taking a soft sell approach underlines the emotional appeal of the message and also invites reflection on the serious subject matter of the Budweiser campaign.

As mentioned earlier, the Skylar Grey recording is available in two versions: the full-length cover (2 min. 24 sec.), and the Budweiser commercial soundtrack version, edited to fit the 60 seconds format used for advertising. The edited version has room for only one verse and a shortened variant of the refrain (five bars instead of the original eight bars). Besides being edited to fit the time constraints, the Budweiser soundtrack version is also sonically remixed in ways that affect the listening experience. The expressional consequences resulting from the remix become especially evident when comparing the Budweiser soundtrack with Grey's full-length version. A close listening

reveals how a shift in representation of the singing voice is achieved, potentially affecting the understanding of the Budweiser video. The singing voice is of special interest, in its capacity of simultaneously executing multiple modes of meaning making: through lyrics, melody and voice character (Wingstedt 2017).

In the Budweiser remixed commercial version, the vocal track of Skylar Grey is recorded using markedly less reverberation compared with the full-length cover version. Less reverb emphasizes the ‘direct sound’ rather than the ‘room sound’, which augments a sense of vocal presence. In this, details and nuances of voice quality and expression are more clearly perceived. The acoustic presence of the vocals, combined with the soft and relaxed performance of Skylar Grey contribute to the perceived *proximity* between singer and listener being experienced as closer, more personal and intimate. Vocal proximity suggests a heightened sense of physical and narrative closeness, on an interpersonal level and invites the listener to an increased sense of involvement, immersion and identification with the acoustically represented situation (van Leeuwen 1999; Wingstedt 2019). This effect can also be understood in terms of *modality*, a concept that Kress and van Leeuwen propose as useful in describing and designing aspects of truth or “models of reality” (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 154). The heightened emotive expression and the ‘more than real’ presence of the vocal track going beyond the point of naturalism, can be described as an example of *sensory modality*, “used in contexts in which the pleasure principle is allowed to be dominant” (165). The pronounced sensory quality of the musical performance, contrasting/complementing the naturalistic and authentic claim initially suggested by the visuals (and the supporting sound design), allows for a complex and persuasive audiovisual narrative.

Also, in the Budweiser commercial version, the voice is maintained ‘solo with accompaniment’ throughout the song, while in the full-length version the melody vocal track is in the refrain expanded with backing vocals that doubles the melody. In comparison, the continued solo voice of the Budweiser soundtrack stands out as a carrier of a more personal message. The emphasis on interpersonal communication is evident, but also on the content (ideational) and compositional (textual) levels the verbal message is brought more to the foreground. The high definition and presentation of the vocals makes the voice the most salient element of the soundtrack of the Budweiser commercial, which also to some degree compensates for lack of visual representation of the singer.

#### 4.4. *The Lyrics*

Before summing up this examination of the multimodal interplay of the representational modes making up the Budweiser video, something more needs to be said about the lyrics. As mentioned, the commercial has room only for the first verse and a shortened version of the refrain:

Verse:

When the night has come  
And the land is dark  
And the moon is the only light we'll see  
No, I won't be afraid, no I won't be afraid  
Just as long as you stand, stand by me

Refrain:

So darlin', darlin', stand by me  
Oh, stand by me  
Stand by me  
(King *et al.* 1961)

Looking at the structure of the lyrics, the 'hook' of the text is easily identified as the phrase "stand by me". Besides restating the song title, it is emphasized by being repeated as much as four times in a row starting from the end of the verse – and continued as almost the only (repeated) utterance of the refrain. In spoken language this kind of repetition would seem odd in most situations and would stick out as an example of *overlexicalization*, a term for 'over-use' of a word or phrase in a text (Machin and Mayr 2012, 222). However, when coupled with the repeating metric and melodic structure of music, verbal repetition comes across as a convention which is in many cases almost an expected feature (Wingstedt 2017, 140). The textual prominence of the hook is further highlighted by an increase of intensity created by the string arrangement of the refrain. The salience of the hook-phrase makes for a strong connection with the slogan of the campaign: "We'll stand by you".

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The Super Bowl is a special prime time for advertisers as it is a bonding moment in the US community when a large and diverse audience meet and convene albeit remotely, nowadays also on many different platforms. The Anheuser-



Busch America brewing company has been presenting commercials in the Super Bowl Halftime since the 1980s, many of which have become iconic, like the traditional series of the Clydesdales ads. The commercial which has been the object of our analysis departs from the tradition mentioned above to present, with the help of the employees, the company's program of Corporate Social Responsibility dedicated to natural disasters. Indeed, the ad shows the General Manager of one of the breweries who organizes, together with his staff, the emergency drinking water deliveries.

The ad was first presented on the Budweiser YouTube channel with an accompanying informative message that framed the video in the context of the water donation program, and which announced the increasing of the resources dedicated by the company to the program. The main communicative aim of the message and, overall, of the commercial is to craft the image of the Anheuser-Busch America brewing company as a committed organization that cares about the community it operates in and does its best to support it. Such an image has been carefully realized in the video primarily through the use of the aural resources and music, in particular, can be considered the leading semiotic mode in the process of meaning making as the title of the video suggests. As a matter of fact, the commercial is entitled "Stand by You" and is a direct reference to the song which has been used as the soundtrack of the video, that is the famous song "Stand by Me" (1961). This song is a very complex sign in US culture and is associated with positive communal values, such as compassion and solidarity. It also presents a sort of religious connotation as it was modelled on spirituals and inspired by a very famous Psalm (46: 2-3). The wordplay on the song title that the company adopts as the title of the commercial is functional to change the role of the encoder, which is turned into a committed doer willing to answer the call of those in need – a call which is expressed primarily by the lyrics of the song. Indeed, the lyrics feature a prominent function as they verbalize the request for help (Moschini 2011) that comes from the communities in need and that, given the religious connotation mentioned above, could be perceived as a sort of prayer. It is a prayer that Budweiser wants to answer, as stated not only in the title of the video but also in its last frames, where the company – through a verbal selection that expresses the highest degree of modality and truth – commits itself to offer its solution to the problem of the natural disasters affecting the country.

The Budweiser commercial achieves meaning through juxtaposition of semiotic modes and signs on several levels. On a macro level, we find juxtaposition of two well-known symbols in contemporary American society: the

Budweiser brand and the song “Stand by Me”. This allows the beer brand to gain association to values communicated through the provenance of the song, thus broadening and augmenting the status of the brand. On a micro level, meaning is achieved through the complex multimodal interaction of the semiotic modes involved. In this, meaning is articulated in various ways on different metafunctional levels. This paper has attempted to examine how music and lyrics, in the Budweiser 2018 Super Bowl commercial, contributes layers of meaning in interaction with moving image, writing, speech and sound design. During the work with discussing this in writing, it has become overly apparent to us that the use of music in the Budweiser commercial amply illustrates the observation by musicologist Nicholas Cook, that “advertisers use music to communicate meanings that would take too long to put into words” (Cook 1998, 3).

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