

# Subliminal communication

## ■ Definition

The word *subliminal* comes from the Latin *sub limen*, literally “below the **threshold**”. **Subliminal communication** goes beyond the conscious mind and information is sent “below the threshold” of conscious **awareness**. We are **overwhelmed** by lots of information daily and our conscious mind has developed the ability to filter ‘non-important’ facts. Not noticing something doesn’t mean not being aware of it: whatever can be seen or heard but is not consciously perceived is subliminal and can have an influence over us.

## ■ A bit of history

Apparently, the Ancient Greeks were the first to try and pass messages without directly attracting attention to them: they used **slight**, almost imperceptible emphasis on certain words or expression with different meanings to communicate in a persuasive way.

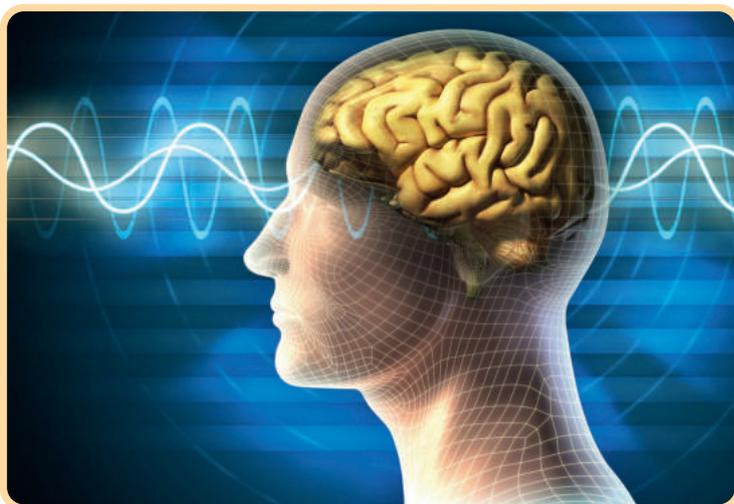
This strategy has increasingly been used ever since by great communicators and nowadays subliminal messages are sometimes used in advertising to influence people without them being consciously aware of the manipulation. Different techniques are now successfully used to affect the audience at a level below their consciousness.



## ■ Subliminal messages

Subliminal messages are perceived outside the conscious **realm** – by the unconscious or deeper mind – in two different ways:

- through **visual stimuli**: images flashed quickly enough to go ignored by the human eye, but registered by the subconscious;
- through **auditory stimuli**: audio messages **embedded** within a track, not audible by the listener but registered by the subconscious.



**awareness:** *consapevolezza*  
**cue:** *spunto*  
**deliberate:** *intenzionale*  
**embedded:** *racchiuso*  
**ordinarily:** *di solito*  
**overwhelmed:** *sopraffatto*  
**realm:** *regno*  
**slight:** *leggero*  
**threshold:** *soglia*

**1**  **Fill in the gaps with the given words. Three of them are extra.**

carry • messages • cues • external • response • below • perception • opposite • alter • above • aware • lowest • auditory • influence • people

**Have you Ever Been Manipulated by Subliminal Messages?**

Subliminal **1.** ..... are defined as signals **2.** ..... the absolute threshold level (ATL) of our consciousness which can **3.** ..... behaviours via non-conscious processes, while supraliminal messages act **4.** ..... the threshold of consciousness. It is necessary to understand that we cannot become **5.** ..... of subliminal stimuli even if we look for them. Absolute threshold is defined as the **6.** ..... level of stimulus we can detect, be it visual, **7.** ....., or sensory. Moreover, we need to accept that subliminal **8.** ..... is the result of a **deliberate** communication technique aimed at generating a **9.** ....., so that people will do things they wouldn't **ordinarily** do. Supraliminal is the **10.** ..... of subliminal. Supraliminal messages influence us by causing us to think about aspects of a message that are related. They're much easier to **11.** ..... out: they can be consciously noticed and simple **12.** ..... can be used to influence people.

Adapted from: <https://visme.co/blog/subliminal-messages/>

**2**  **PAIR WORK** Read the text. Then, look at the logos below and try to identify the subliminal messages hidden inside them.



Subliminal messages in advertising are intended to engage people subconsciously. These ads use different colours, shapes, and words that allow customers to make small but powerful associations between a brand and an intended meaning. Advertisements have a long history of being subtle and ingenious. Whether they're hiding a double-meaning in a logo or working some Photoshop magic, subliminal ads definitely meet the criteria of clever. And the more clever the ad, the better we feel about "getting" it – and the better we feel about the product. In this case, Pepsi released the image on the left and Coca-Cola responded with the image on the right. Pepsi's original ad is subliminal in that it makes the viewer think and smile: it's funny to suggest that getting a Coke when you wanted a Pepsi is scary. Coca-Cola's response is perfect: it reverses the message.

