

Analysis of the Presence of social appeals in the Effectiveness Awards and Reflections from the Sector

Análisis de la presencia de apelaciones sociales en los Premios
Eficacia y reflexiones desde el sector

Noemí Martín García

University of Valladolid. Spain.

noemicarmen.martin@uva.es



María Cruz Alvarado López

University of Valladolid. Spain.

mariacruz.alvarado@uva.es



Alberto Martín García

University of Valladolid. Spain.

alberto.martin.garcia@uva.es



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In recent decades companies have begun to be aware of the importance of acquiring a social dimension and projecting it to their target audience, turning it into content within their commercial communications. **Methodology:** This work arises with the aim of knowing the social appeals used in the most successful campaigns by the Spanish advertising industry awarded in recent years in the Awards for Effectiveness in Commercial Communication —Efi Awards— and, in addition, it collects on an exploratory basis the opinion that professionals in the sector have on this trend. To this end, a study is developed in two parts: a first quantitative applied on the advertisements awarded in the last twelve years in the awards; and a second qualitative one. By conducting interviews with creative agencies, media agencies, and advertisers. **Results:** The results highlight the exceptional nature of "the social" within the awards and its scarce presence. Only 21.5% of the winning campaigns introduce some social content, with appeals coming from social reality being the most used. In addition, a positive assessment of the use of social appeals in advertising by professionals is detected, as long as it starts from a coherence between the reality of the brand and the social actions it transmits. **Discussion:** It is

noted that, although social issues are a recurring issue in the business world, advertising continues to prioritize its commercial function without assuming itself as a social institution.

Keywords: Communication; Advertising; Advertising effectiveness; Marketing; Social change.

RESUMEN

Introducción: In recent decades companies have begun to be aware of the importance of acquiring a social dimension and projecting it to their target audience, turning it into content within their commercial communications. **Metodología:** Este trabajo surge con el objetivo de conocer las apelaciones sociales utilizadas en las campañas más laureadas por la industria publicitaria española galardonadas en los últimos años en los Premios a la Eficacia en la Comunicación Comercial — Premios Efi—. Además, recoge con carácter exploratorio la opinión que los profesionales del sector tienen sobre esta tendencia. Para ello, se desarrolla un estudio en dos partes: una primera de tipo cuantitativo aplicada sobre los anuncios galardonados en los últimos doce años en los citados premios y una segunda de carácter cualitativo mediante la realización de entrevistas a profesionales de las agencias creativas, de medios y de los anunciantes. **Resultados:** Los resultados ponen de manifiesto el carácter excepcional de “lo social” dentro de los premios y su escasa presencia. Únicamente el 21.5% de las campañas premiadas introduce algún contenido social, siendo las apelaciones procedentes de la realidad social las más utilizadas. Además, se detecta una valoración positiva del uso de apelaciones sociales en la publicidad por parte de los profesionales, siempre y cuando parta de una coherencia entre la realidad de la marca y las acciones sociales que transmite. **Discusión:** Se constata que, aunque los temas sociales son un asunto recurrente en el mundo empresarial, la publicidad sigue priorizando su función comercial sin asumirse como institución social.

Palabras clave: Comunicación; Publicidad; Eficacia publicitaria; Marketing; Cambio social.

1. Introduction

When we talk about "social advertising appeals", we refer to the messages derived from social issues in the context (inequalities, sustainability, injustices, solidarity, citizenship, etc., related to different themes) that are introduced in advertising messages (Alvarado-López, 2009).

The use of this type of appeal already existed in advertising during the 20th century, especially as the core in the specific field of social advertising (or advertising for social causes/ends), a modality that was consolidated after being tested in war contexts and proving useful for raising awareness and alleviating the social consequences of both world wars (Alvarado-López, 2010). However, especially in the second half of the last century and particularly in its last two decades, the use of appeals to social issues in commercial and/or corporate advertising began to be progressively systematized, either by integrating them into marketing strategies ("cause-related marketing") (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988), as a creative style and trend - Benetton and its sequels - (Toscani, 1996); or as a consequence of communication derived from corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Bartlett and Devin, 2011).

Advertising is a major social institution (Caro-Almeda, 2010) under the universal domination of brands turned into social entities (Klein, 2002). The need to drive change toward greater global justice has gradually become more visible, institutionalized, and extended, from the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) to the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in 2015 in Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2019). Companies and marketing could not remain on the sidelines of this process, hence new labels have been coined to refer to the strategies from which to redraw a symbolic universe where social concern or commitment is present for brands. Thus, purpose-driven marketing or marketing with purpose, whose most direct consequence is purpose brands, which

the Ad Council has defined as "...a strategy used by an organization to center its external communications efforts around a social cause that aligns with its core values... to develop a deeper rapport with their consumer base by creating authentic connections based on shared values" (Khalem, 2021). Or Goodvertising (Kolster, 2012), which would explicitly recognize that there is "good" advertising or that "does good" by adding to its communication objectives a positive impact on society, always based on market segmentation in which an increasing number of consumers demand sustainability from companies (KANTAR, 2022). In advertising, the social seems to go beyond appeals today, redefining itself in 'purposes' that may or may not be explicitly linked to the SDGs and leading to the core and firm commitments by companies to improve society.

To show how this phenomenon is affecting the effectiveness of advertising, a thematic content analysis is carried out to analyze the presence and/or absence of social appeals in the campaigns awarded in the Efficacy Advertising Awards between 2011 and 2022, trying to identify and establish trends and patterns in this use: which advertisers, sectors, and social themes have been used, what their purpose is, and their distribution in the various award categories. In addition, with an exploratory nature, the opinion and justification of professionals in the sector about the current use of these social appeals and themes and their benefits and consequences are investigated. The conclusions of this study allow for showing indications of the extent to which the advertising industry and all its actors are or are not involved in social problems and whether, in some way, a real change is taking place in advertising towards more altruistic and less instrumental communication.

2. Theoretical framework and state of the art

2.1. The relationship between advertising and society: dependency, impact, and transformation

The relationship between advertising and society (Pardun, 2013) is an essential constant on which the very origin of the advertising system and industry is based, which is usually dated to the second half of the 19th century (Eguizábal, 1998): Industrial revolutions, the birth of mass society, and the progressive appearance of a bourgeoisie with consumption capacity and aspirational concerns, which went from buying to going shopping, thus attributing a leisurely and symbolic character to consumption (Hobsbawm, 1976; Veblen, 1971; Bourdieu, 1998). It is the great social and cultural transformations that give impetus to the birth of an industry that is systematized and rationalized to meet the needs of capitalist production, for which differentiating marked products from their equals is a process that requires attributing referential or symbolic qualities permanently through advertising (Peninou, 1976; González-Martín, 1982).

From there, a mass consumer society emerges in which Hommo Consumens (Fromm, 1965) has been an essential protagonist, and which has been growing, moving from consumption to consumerism and from there to hyperconsumption and its extensions (Baudrillard, 1974; Ritzer, 2000; Lipovetsky, 2007; Bauman, 2007), in a process in which both marketing and advertising have been inductors and in which, for decades and with exceptions, the ethical dimension has been left aside. And, as it is considered responsible for the planetary crisis of which we are aware in the second decade of the 21st century, this process is being increasingly questioned from multiple perspectives: ecofeminism (Puleo, 2011 and 2015), "good living" (Medina, 2006; Estermann, 2012), sociology (Lemkow, 2002; García, 2004), philosophy (Cortina, 2002; Feltz, 2020), economics (Webster, 2015) or communication (Chaparro-Escudero, 2015 and de Andrés del Campo and Chaparro-Escudero, 2022).

One of the facets of the relationship between advertising and society appears here, the most obvious one within the advertising industry and also the most opaque for society. We refer to the constant research carried out on the consumer, on which the appeals that will be part of the messages depend, based on

the results obtained - attitudes, values, needs, aspirations, and desires. Advertising has needed to know people and social groups (Lee et al., 2018), nourishing itself through an entire market research industry specially designed for this purpose with the help of psychology and sociology; in the current digital scenario, it has reached its highest exponent with big data. Thus, social issues identified by research as consumer concerns, such as gender diversity or sustainability in the current context, become effective social appeals in advertising messages.

To this instrumental dimension of the advertising-society relationship, focused on achieving maximum communicational efficiency that justifies the advertiser's investment, we must add the perspective that prioritizes the influence -effects- on society of advertising impacts at all levels (León, 1996; Hayko, 2010; Pardun, 2013). This is an issue that has not been exempt from controversies (Schudson, 1984) and on which doubt often arises as to whether advertising is a mirror of society or a driver of change (Pollay, 1986, Quesenberry, 2020). From economic, sociological, and cultural perspectives, the effects have been highlighted relative to their ability to inform about new products and services, extend the consumption of certain goods, stimulate competition, sustain the media system, and disseminate trends and fashions, thereby exerting a modernizing impulse, having a valuable cultural and aesthetic dimension, or making social issues visible and mobilizing people's attitudes and behaviors towards them. Here would be the appeals that appear in the so-called social advertising, whose messages would be an example of substantive use of certain social issues on which one wants to have an impact - poverty, equality, inclusion, sustainability, etc. -; and others of an educational or solidarity nature that can be introduced into advertising messages in certain situations such as the COVID-19 global pandemic (Buitrago and Martín-García, 2021), in which many advertisers joined the univocal message of "stay at home". On the other side would be effects such as manipulation, idealization, consumerism, stereotyping, dissatisfaction, frustration, exclusion, pollution, etc. These are usually considered intentional (Xu, 2020) and constitute the basis for the most common criticisms that are made of advertising (Marcuse Group, 2006), in defense of which it is often argued that they are evils of capitalism, of which advertising would be only an instrument.

Beyond the controversy surrounding the reflection on the impact of advertising on society, a third dimension of the relationship between the two is proposed here, which focuses precisely on the capacity of advertising as a social institution, which implies acknowledging its omnipresence in everyday life and the undeniable power it has as such an institution (Bala and Verma, 2018; Caro-Almeda, 2010). This is precisely where we must start in order to break its partial and instrumental character and turn it into a transformative communication force for the benefit of social change and a more just society (Pacheco-Barrio and Alvarado-López, 2022). This would require radical changes within the system, that is, making decisions from within the industry to promote a systemic transformation that, considering the impact that advertising has on society as previously stated, places social goals and ethics at the center. Being aware of the utopian nature of this proposal, which would require, among other changes, a transformative commitment from all companies in the sector - advertisers and advertising agencies in particular - phenomena such as cause marketing or the more recent purpose-driven marketing could be seen as approaching it. However, as we will analyze later, both seem to be rather a new partial and instrumental response to the efficacy needs of advertisers than symptoms of a systemic transformation of advertising.

2.2. Social appeals in advertising. Contextualization and taxonomy

Appeals to social issues in advertising are, as previously mentioned, one of the ways to construct the predication by which the advertised products or services and, by extension, brands acquire meaning, added value, and competitive advantage. To do this, it is necessary to find the most suitable attributes to differentiate and at the same time assign notoriety to the "object" of the campaign, depending on the objectives previously established by the advertiser.

In general, advertising predications have been studied from the classical approach of semiotics (Peninou, 1976; González-Martín, 1982; Caro-Almeda, 2002), psychology (Bermejo-Berros, 2007), or marketing. Thus, the consequences of their use on the effectiveness of messages and campaigns have been investigated (Kahn and Meyer, 1991), as well as the types of predications (Smith and Deppa, 2009) and their relation to the benefits they have in building value for brands (Keller et al., 1994). Drawing on the proposals of various authors, especially Caro-Almeda (2010) and Smith and Deppa (2009), we could distinguish between referential or tangible attributes, associated with the physical and/or functional characteristics of products, and intangible attributes, which are associated with the product and/or brand by incorporating symbolic values from the context - social, cultural, etc. - or the emotional benefits that brand provides compared to others.

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The first would be one in which the appeal comes from the same product or service or from the company itself, that is, it is internal and is part of the physical or functional attributes they possess, or in other words, it is inherent or essential. In the case of corporate advertising, the attribute would have to come from a social action or CSR program to which the institution has committed itself firmly. It is precisely the communication linked to CSR that has generated greater interest among researchers in the last two decades regarding its effectiveness in positively influencing the image or reputation of the company (Andreu et al., 2015; Pyle et al., 2022).

Secondly, we would be dealing with cases in which the socio-conscious appeal is external to the product, service, or company, and comes from the specific association of that brand or company with a third-sector entity that defends a certain social cause. This type of collaboration centralized what in the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century was called cause-related marketing (Varadarajan and A. Menon, 1988), and was not without criticism due to the limited duration and social effectiveness of some of the alliances. The social appeal is incorporated here in an instrumental, strategic, or tactical way, to provide added value that it does not inherently have, but that can give it differentiation, notoriety, value, or benefits.

Thirdly, we would be dealing with advertising in which the socioconscious appeal comes from social reality, which is also, as in the previous case, external to the product, service, or company, and is incorporated into them through a communication strategy that may be more or less long-lasting. Again, we are dealing with an instrumental use of the social, which requires brands and communicators to be very attentive to reality and through which communicational effectiveness would be sought by adding

to the brand a value of empathy, solidarity or support for a particular social problem or concern, i.e., emotional attributes that would confer a distinctive halo of goodness, solidarity or humanity and be able to connect with consumers at a particular moment.

These are the three categories of socially conscious advertising appeal that will be applied in the analysis of award-winning advertising campaigns in Spain at the Eficacia de la Publicidad Awards between 2011 and 2020. The aim is to investigate whether social appeals have been present or not in Spanish advertising awarded for its effectiveness during a decade in which what started twenty years ago as a punctual trend or a fad has consolidated (Daw, 2006). Of these categories, the first one would be on the path towards a radical transformation of advertising communication, offering symptoms of a systemic transformation. This would necessarily have to result from companies assuming that their responsibility in contributing to social change is a priority and that they should even reconvert themselves into social enterprises without ceasing to pursue profitability (Coleman, 2022).

We located as a precedent the study by Estanyol (2020) in which the award-winning campaigns in 2018 in the RSC category within the PR Daily Corporate Social Responsibility Awards, Cannes Lions PR Lions, and IPRA Golden World Awards were analyzed in order to learn about the most notable RSC practices. The results showed how the most successful practices are:

The most successful practices identified were: aligning CSR actions with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) proposed by the UN; linking CSR topics to the mission and purpose of organizations; involving employees in CSR actions; and finally, using increasingly bidirectional channels to facilitate dialogue between organizations and their stakeholders (Estanyol, 2020, p.1).

3. Approach and Objectives

In this framework, the use of social appeals in advertising recognized in Spain for its effectiveness in the Eficacia Awards during the second decade of the 21st century is proposed as the object of study. These awards are given to campaigns whose results have been noteworthy based on business variables such as sales, market share, profit sensitivity, engagement, obtaining new customers, and penetration, as well as intermediate effects achieved in communication such as brand valuation and awareness (Casalá-Surribas, n.d.).

This study starts with the hypothesis that, although the social dimension of a campaign and the use of social issues is an added value for its effectiveness, advertising as a system does not assume its role as a social institution. Consequently, its involvement in improving societies is limited. The general objective is to identify the social appeals used in the most successful campaigns by the Spanish advertising industry. At the same time, the study investigates the opinions and justifications that professionals in the sector have about the current use of these social appeals and themes, and their benefits and consequences. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Understand the importance given to the social dimension of advertising in the Eficacia Awards.
2. Quantify the use of social appeals and identify the advertisers and sectors that have used them.
3. Understand the distribution of these types of appeals in the award categories.
4. Analyze the type of social appeals used in the winning campaigns: their origin and the social themes used.

5. Understand the evaluation that professionals in the sector (advertisers, advertising agencies, and media agencies) make of the use of these appeals, exploring their justification, their more or less strategic character, and their main consequences for brands, companies, and consumers.

4. Methodology

This study is developed through a mixed methodology developed in two parts. The first part aims to identify and establish usage patterns of social themes within the most awarded campaigns of the Spanish advertising industry from 2011 to 2022. Specifically, this phase seeks to address specific objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4. To demonstrate whether institutionalized social concern is having an impact on advertising effectiveness, an exploratory study is proposed, whose methodology is based on content analysis according to the indications of Wimmer and Dominck (1996). The universe is formed by the campaigns awarded in the Efficiency Awards for Commercial Communication, convened by the Spanish Association of Advertisers from 2011 to 2022. These awards are selected because they are "the only awards in Spain that focus on results achieved through communication action (notoriety, sales, or other profitability), and place efficiency as the true goal of advertising activity" (Efficiency Awards). The last twelve years from 2011 to 2022 are analyzed since it is considered enough time to verify the impact of social appeals on advertising developed in recent years, in a context where social networks gain presence and the relationship between brands and users changes towards a bidirectional model in which greater social commitment is demanded from them (Goleman, 2012). The year 2011 has been established as the beginning of the study in order to cover the ten editions that include the years from 2011 to 2020. However, the sample has been extended until 2022 with the intention of making the research as current as possible.

The sample consists of campaigns awarded in all categories of awards, with the exception of marketing categories, which are not the object of study, and special categories due to their contextual and unstable nature. In addition, all possible levels of awards - grand prize, gold, silver, and bronze - were taken into account. To carry out the analysis, it was also considered a criterion that all campaigns had an audiovisual piece and were accessible in the online format. A total of 192 units of analysis were delimited. In total, 192 units of analysis have been delimited. Of the content of each unit of analysis, the data related to:

- Campaign indicators (advertiser and sector).
- Efficacy Awards indicators (total number of awards, categories, and year of award).
- References to social appeals (possession of social appeal, type of social advertising, and type of socio-conscious appeal).

To exploit this information, a grid of 25 analysis categories (Table 1) was designed, where different indicators of the award-winning campaigns, awards obtained, and the use and type of social appeals are collected.

Table 1. *Grid used in the analysis.*

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
1	Advertiser
2	Sector
3	Use of appeal
4	Types of advertising that uses social themes
5	Types of socio-conscious appeals based on their origin
6	Total number of awards Effectiveness
7	Category Grand Efficacy Award
8	Brand Building Category
9	Best Integrated Campaign Category
10	Best Product and Service Campaign Category
11	Best Tactical Action Category
12	Best regional/local campaign category
13	Category Best campaign in own media
14	Best Earned Media Campaign Category
15	Most Innovative Strategic Category
16	Commercial communication effectiveness category
17	Efficiency category for commercial communication-€250,000
18	Efficiency category for commercial communication-€300,000
19	Media effectiveness category
20	Category best action in branded content
21	Brand/product/service launch category
22	Community building category and own audience
23	International Category
24	Category social demonstration of a brand
25	NGO campaign category

Source: Author's own work.

Once the categories were defined, coding was carried out. For the categories related to campaign indicators such as advertiser (1) and sector (2), the classification used by Infoadex was taken as a reference, which is the entity in charge of controlling advertising investment in Spain to prepare their reports. The coding of the categories related to social appeals (3, 4, and 5) is based on the typology created by Alvarado-López (2009) in their study on the uses of social issues within advertising, which is taken here as variables, and to which a new type called "Mixed" has been added, as it combines socio-conscious appeals from both social reality and the product, service, or company. This is because in the pre-analysis phase, the presence of both appeals in the same message was detected, something that was not contemplated in the initial design of the categories and which we understand is related to the development that this phenomenon has had in the last twelve years. Finally, for the coding of the categories related to the Eficacia Awards (7-25), the obtaining or not of the award and the sum of all awards (category 6) were taken into account. To check if there was a connection between the number of award-winning campaigns per year in the Eficacia Awards, Pearson's correlation was performed with a significance level of $p = .05$.

The second part of the study aims to investigate the reasons and implications that the use of social themes and appeals currently has in advertising from the perspective of professionals in the sector. Specifically, we will try to approach, through their testimonies, how they perceive this phenomenon, what causes it obeys, whether it is considered a brand or CSR advertising strategy, and what are its consequences (benefits and/or drawbacks for brands, companies, and consumers) (specific objective 5). To do so, we use a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured professional interviews (Taylor and Bodgan, 1987; Vallés, 2002) that allows us to firsthand understand the opinion of advertising professionals about the use of social themes in advertising, in line with works such as Cordón-Benito and Maestro-Espínola (2022).

A total of twenty-one interviews were conducted: seven with professionals from media agencies, seven with professionals from advertising agencies, and lastly, seven with representatives from different advertisers.

These subjects were selected because they are the ones responsible for the development of advertising campaigns (creative agency) and their dissemination (media agency), with the advertiser, as the payer, being ultimately responsible for their communication (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 1988).

In order to maintain anonymity and at the same time provide identification of which of the three options the interviewee works in, each response is coded in advance with MED (media), ANU (advertiser), or (CRE) creative agency and the assigned interview number. The selection of these professionals took into account the following criteria:

- a) Have more than five years of experience in the advertising profession.
- b) Be in contact with large-budget investments.
- c) Work in agencies and brands operating in Spanish territory.

Throughout the process, account managers were selected, as they have greater control over the current advertising landscape. The interview consisted of the following questions:

- 1- Have you noticed an increase in the number of advertisers using social issues in their advertising in recent years?
- 2- If yes, why do you think this has happened?
- 3- Do you believe the use of social issues is beneficial for advertisers?
- 4- Can the frequent use of social issues be detrimental to advertisers? To what extent?
- 5- Do you think it is important for social advertising to be accompanied by a prior CSR strategy?
- 6- Do you think brands that use social issues in their advertising also have real CSR actions?
- 7- When monitoring audience response on social media and other digital channels, do you observe a growth in positive sentiment towards the brand?
- 8- In case the responses are negative, what does the user criticize the brand for when emitting social content in their advertising?

Likewise, the interviewees were given the opportunity to add any contributions they deemed appropriate about the topic that were not covered in the eight questions. The interviews were conducted during December 2022, and in the following sections, we share some responses, quoted verbatim, that represent trends expressed and that help us understand the reality about the analyzed topic in a more direct and close way towards the communication profession.

5. Results

5.1. Quantitative analysis: Social Appeals in the Effectiveness in Commercial Communication Awards (2011-2022)

The analysis of the Eficacia Awards from 2011 to 2022 shows that none of the general categories of the awards gives special attention to social issues until 2020. It is necessary to investigate the special categories - which are not the subject of this study due to their more temporary nature - to observe that from 2011 to 2015 there was a category dedicated to social responsibility which was divided into two from 2016 onwards: one dedicated to the social responsibility of an NGO and another to that of a company. These categories were renamed in 2017 as 'Best NGO Campaign' and 'Social Relevance of a Brand', but they still maintained their special nature. It was not until 2022 that the awards incorporated these categories into their general list of awards, calling them 'Social Demonstration of a Brand' and 'NGO Campaign'.

Regarding the campaigns awarded in the general category, the results show that only 21.5% (n=41) make reference to some kind of social resource in their creativity. Year by year, the evolution in the use of this resource stands out, while in the years 2011, 2012, and 2013 none of the awarded campaigns appealed to social issues, in 2020 this resource appears in 58.8% (n=17) of the awards. It should be noted that the call for the 2020 Efi Awards closed on May 31, 2020, so advertising campaigns aired from March to May of that year, in an already pandemic context, entered this edition. From 2020, the trend of using social appeals in the Efficacy Awards declines again. This type of resource began to appear in the most effective campaigns in the mid-2010s (2015), but it was not until 2019 that it consolidated, occupying more than 25% of the awarded campaigns. To demonstrate the relationship between the years and the number of awards, the Pearson statistical test was performed with a significance level of $p=.05$. This statistic yielded a value of .359 with a p-value of .000, demonstrating that there is a moderate positive correlation between the years and the number of awarded campaigns in the Efficacy Awards that use social appeals in their creativity.

Table 2. *Award-winning campaigns in the Efi and social appeal.*

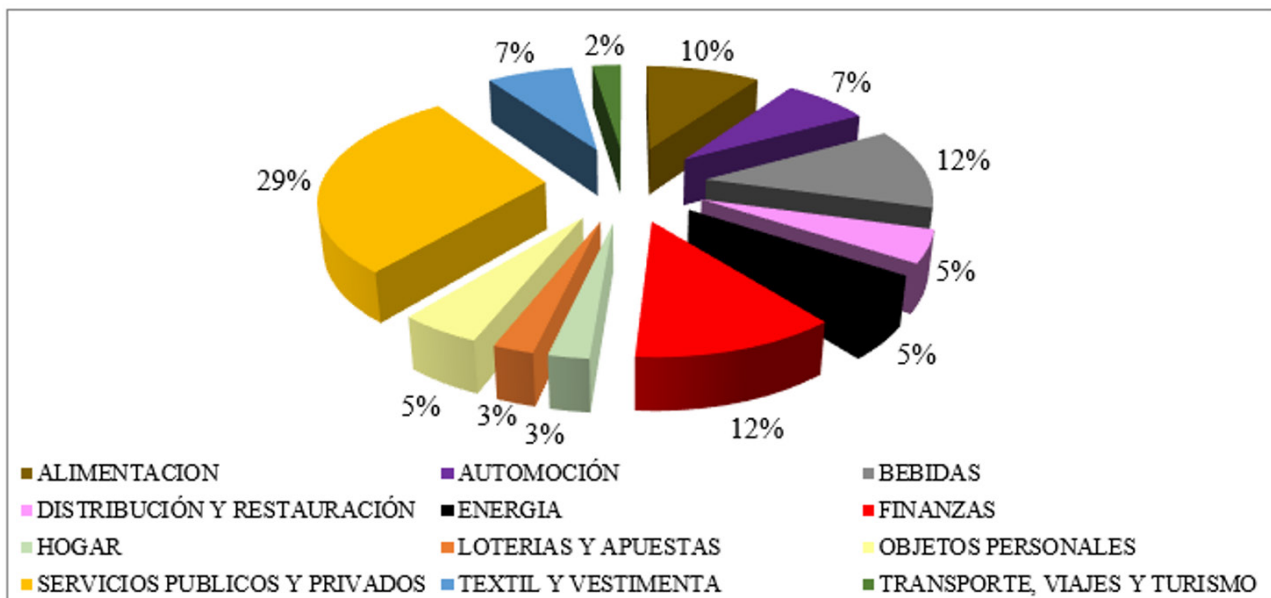
YEARS	DOES NOT USE SOCIAL THEMES		USE SOCIAL THEMES		TOTAL	
	Nº cases	%	Nº cases	%	Nº cases	%
2011	7	100%	0	0%	7	100%
2012	12	100%	0	0%	12	100%
2013	12	100%	0	0%	11	100%
2014	17	94.4%	1	5.6%	18	100%
2015	14	87.5%	2	12.5%	17	100%
2016	12	80.0%	3	20.0%	15	100%
2017	11	91.7%	1	8.3%	12	100%
2018	19	86.4%	3	13.6%	22	100%

2019	14	73.7%	5	26.3%	19	100%
2020	7	41.2%	10	58.8%	17	100%
2021	11	55.0%	9	45.0%	20	100%
2022	15	68.2%	7	31.8%	22	100%
Total	151	78.5%	41	21.5%	192	100%
Correlation Pearson	.359 (.000)					

Source: Author's own work.

Of the forty-one award-winning campaigns in the Efi that use social themes, thirty belong to different advertisers, and we only find four advertisers who have used this resource twice (Adolfo Domínguez, Correos, Gas Natural Fenosa, and Multiópticas), and one who has used it three times (Campofrío). By sectors, the data shows that the Public and Private Services sector (n=12) followed by the Finance (n=5) and Beverage (n=5) sectors are the sectors that use this type of appeal the most, while this resource is less used in sectors such as Transport, Travel and Tourism (n=1), Home (n=1), and Lotteries and Betting (n=1) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sectors that use social appeal in their campaigns.



Source: Author's own work.

The forty-one campaigns awarded in the last twelve years that used social appeals in their creativity obtained a total of fifty-two awards in the successive editions of the Eficacia Awards. Campaigns that use social resources are mainly awarded in the category of Most Innovative Strategy (n=8), followed by Best Integrated Campaign (n=6), and then Grand Prize for Effectiveness and Best Regional/Local Campaign with five awards each. It is noteworthy that campaigns that reward the most "economical" strategies (Eficacia Comunicación Comercial Less than 300,000 euros and Eficacia Comunicación Comercial Less than 250,000 euros) hardly use the social resource, and it is also not used in campaigns awarded for Launches of Brands/Products/Services (Table 3).

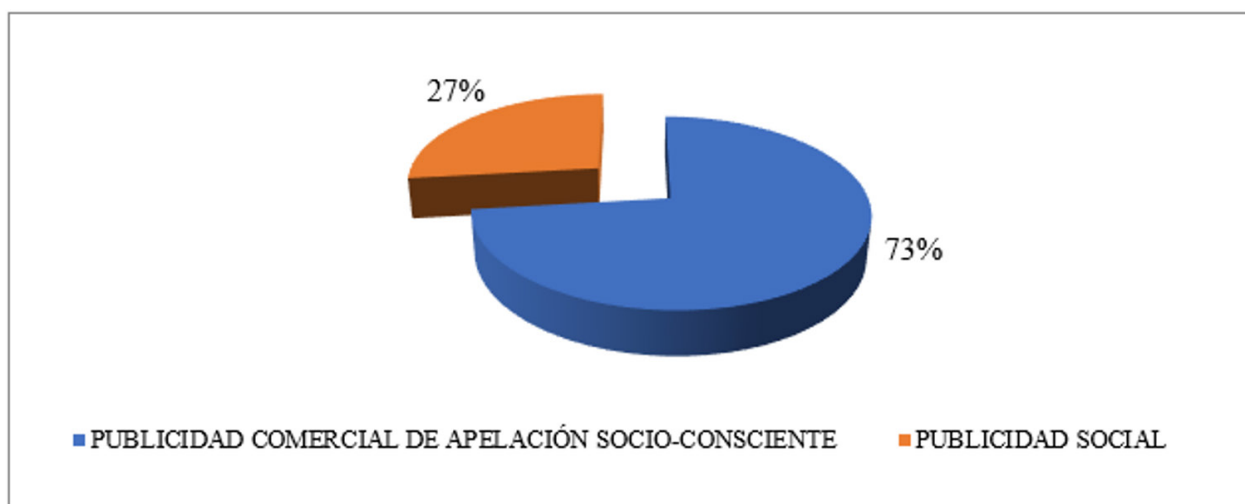
Table 3. *Distribution Efi Awards categories for social appeals.*

EFI AWARD CATEGORY	AWARDED CAMPAIGNS	
	Nº cases	%
Most innovative strategy	8	15.7%
Integrated Campaign	6	11.8%
Effectiveness(Gran Premio)	5	9.8%
Best regional/local campaign	5	9.8%
Best campaign through earned media	4	7.8%
Effectiveness Commercial Communication	4	7.8%
Building a brand	3	5.9%
Media effectiveness	3	5.9%
Best product/service campaign	2	3.9%
Best Tactical Action Campaign	2	3.9%
Best own media campaign	2	3.9%
Social proof of a brand	2	3.9%
NGO campaign	2	3.9%
Commercial communication effectiveness -€250,000	1	2.0%
Efficacy better action in branded content	1	2.0%
Most original and disruptive strategy	1	2.0%
Commercial communication effectiveness -€300,000	0	0%
Brand/product/service launch	0	0%
Construction of community and own audience	0	0%
International Campaign	0	0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100%</i>

Source: Author's own work.

Regarding the origin of the forty-one campaigns that use social themes in their communication, 73% (n=30) are commercial campaigns that use some type of social appeal in their ads, while 27% (n=11) are social advertising campaigns (Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Types of advertising for social purposes.*



Source: Author's own work.

Among the socially conscious commercial campaigns (n=30), 63% (n=19) use a social appeal that comes from social reality, while 13% (n=4) have an appeal that comes from the product, service, or company, and 23% share both appeals. It is noteworthy that there are no cases in which the advertiser makes a social appeal through its association with another entity, indicating that this modality is not commonly used.

Table 4. *Types of social appeal of the winners of the Efficacy Awards.*

ORIGIN OF THE APPEAL	EFI AWARDED CAMPAIGNS	
	Nº cases	%
Socioconscious appeal comes from social reality	19	63%
Socioconscious appeal comes from the product, service or company	4	13%
Socioconscious appeal comes from the association of several entities	0	0%
Mixed, socio-conscious appeal from the social reality and the product, service, or company	7	23%
Total	30	100%

Source: Author's own work.

5.2. Qualitative analysis: the growth of social advertising and credibility in the viewer

Not only do quantitative data indicate that we are facing an increase in the relevance that brands give to content with clear social content. The profession itself indicates this, focusing on the fact that the reason lies in the audience's demand for brands to make a greater effort in their relationship with society.

(ANU/1) Yes, I believe that consumers are increasingly demanding that brands get involved in what is happening in society.

Brands listen to and analyze current trends in their target audience. They observe that the strictly commercial relationship that was presumed in the past has been replaced by another in which the brand is asked not only for a good value proposition but for a real social bond that has a positive impact on people, and not just through emotional messages that do not go beyond advertising. Concrete or permanent events, such as the crisis caused by the pandemic in 2020, climate change, or the pressure that is particularly reflected on social media, are three of the reasons for this increase in the social interest of brands, although for some of our interviewees, it is not done out of conviction because other entities are doing it too.

(CRE/8) Yes, in the face of a society that is increasingly aware following the 2020 health crisis, advertisers have joined the goals of the 2030 agenda to demonstrate in their communications that their products and services are sustainable or socially responsible. (CRE/9) Yes. I imagine that, in part, it's due to "pressure". It's not well seen for advertisers to only set economic objectives, but they have to "give back" in some way the damages they may cause (in some cases it may be just a show). (CRE/13) The increase in concern for climate change and other social issues is forcing brands to be present in these areas.

There is a predominant trend among the interviewees that revolves around the need for the message's social orientation to be carefully crafted by true professionals who focus on the benefit of the social activities in which the brand works. An excess of vehemence or continuous reference to the entity can be perceived as fictitious, as a trend in which one must be present to improve positioning. The real contribution to the cause must be clear, and in the responses of advertising professionals in creative and media agencies, there is a claim for their role in this regard.

(ANU/1) I think it's very difficult to address social issues correctly because, even if consumers are demanding it, it can be perceived as brands taking advantage of the social context for commercial gain, or in the case of sustainability, engaging in "greenwashing." //(CRE/5) I think it is an additional argument to distinguish the brand and gain notoriety, but it has to be accompanied by a coherent strategy that addresses that social issue and, to a greater or lesser extent, contributes something to the cause.

The coherence between the brand, its values, and the social issue addressed must be present and identified. The viewer's distrust is latent, and only through demonstrated facts will they unquestionably believe the entity as socially responsible. Advertising plays an important role here, but if everything remains in a creative, emotional, and constructive message, and then the promised actions are not fulfilled, the feeling can turn against the brand and result in a significant loss of credibility.

(CRE/5) Social advertising is effective as long as it is consistent with its own brand. For example, if the advertiser presents itself as the savior of the world or gives lessons, and then they themselves pollute or do the opposite... coherence is very important and the issue should not be perceived as a resource to make money.

We must highlight the confusion that exists within the professional sector itself when mentioning social advertising since it is used generically when in the majority of the obtained responses they are really talking about commercial advertising with social appeal. For this commercial advertising with social appeal to be effective, there must be a real perception that the brand is interested in the issue it addresses. The viewer's mistrust of persuasive communication has always existed due to the very nature of advertising, focused on the positive aspects of the product or service and even exaggerating the benefits of its consumption. Choosing the right elements to communicate will be decisive.

(MED/18) It's always a recurring topic that, when done well, works. The audience realizes when you're trying to white-wash a brand through something social, and if you do it, it must make a lot of sense for the brand, and in that case, it can work.

As we have mentioned before, only through coherence can results be achieved that go beyond short-term goals. Positioning requires time, and focusing on a social cause just because it is trendy or because other advertisers are doing it will backfire on the brand.

(CRE/9) It is true that if an advertiser champions a cause that does not quite fit with the brand image, the consequences may not be as expected (e.g. Repsol or Cepsa supporting or donating money to organizations dedicated to saving the sea). //(MED/7) I don't think there is generally an excessive use of this theme. It is most likely that when it is not done well, there is a certain rejection of the communication given and therefore towards the brand.

The credibility of brands within the industry follows a similar trend to that of the general public. There are many doubts that advertising that uses social appeals always translates into coherent actions as stated in the creative pieces. Knowing the entire process from within is not synonymous with trust.

(ANU/19) The client may have the perception from the outside that they do respect certain values, but when you work with them, you realize that even if they defend certain values, they do not always respect them 100%.

When monitoring the response and degree of trust from viewers, positive and negative messages coexist, with strategy and coherence in message creation is once again cited as strong points to exploit.

(MED/7) On social media, you can find everything, but when communication is well thought out and managed, positive sentiment increases.

A bad previous experience with a company cannot be solved with social advertising. It is common to find negative responses on social media to corporate social responsibility campaigns that have nothing to do with the content and more to do with complaints about the commercial side. Similarly, the accusation of opportunism is very present in listening, and there is a lot of skepticism because the viewer generally does not follow up on the degree of fulfillment of the brand's social promise.

(CRE/13) They usually resort to more general negative aspects that go beyond communication: abusive prices, precarious working conditions, poor customer service, etc. Improving the basics is demanded before taking a step further. //(CRE/21) Comments are usually focused on criticizing the brand "for taking advantage of a certain moment" since there is usually more follow-up when the action is taken, and then they forget about the social part. On the other hand, there will always be critics against the social movement that the brand is working on, who will do everything possible to make this action not work.

To conclude, it is perceived that brands do not consider the social benefit as part of their communication strategy, and this is limited to specific moments that do not represent a significant investment compared to the total advertising budget, focused on profitability and economic benefit.

(CRE/21) I think that for the most part, they usually look for more specific actions rather than working it as a vertical of the company. //(MED/11) CSR is not mandatory, I mean, advertisers in their annual reports add the objectives they want to achieve at the CSR level, but if they do not fulfill them, no one goes after them. My opinion (although it may be very skeptical) is that there is a lot of talk, but when it comes down to it, economic profit remains the most important.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The present study has allowed us to verify that social themes have a "special" consideration in the advertising industry. Within the one hundred and ninety-two cases analyzed from the Efficacy Awards, in the last twelve years, only forty-one campaigns were found to use social appeals. However, it is true that in 2022, these social themes have become more general and occupy the same importance as traditional categories such as Best Integrated Campaign or Best Tactical Action. Regarding the origin and social themes used, the data shows how the majority of the award-winning campaigns for their effectiveness within the general categories are commercial campaigns that use some type of socio-conscious appeal (73%). Within these, the most used, based on Alvarado-López's classification (2009), are those that come from social reality, that is, those campaigns in which the brand and/or advertiser take advantage of their communication to support or denounce a social problem (Alvarado-López, 2009).

We understand that the initial hypothesis is corroborated as social appeals are present in just over 21% of the advertising that has been considered effective in the last decade. However, the fact that these

appeals are mostly contextual, part of commercial campaigns, and considered as part of an innovative strategy, indicates that the advertising system rewards efficacy over social efficiency. In other words, the use of social themes is primarily an instrument of the advertising system to achieve certain communication objectives and does not respond to a systemic commitment to improving societies.

In this vein, the study has made it possible to verify how it is from 2014 when certain social consciousness appears in advertising, which has increased in the number of awarded cases in the years 2019 and especially 2020, with 58.8% of the awarded campaigns having some type of social appeal, to later experience a significant decrease (13.8%). It is precisely the fact that in 2020 (due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on advertising and which led many brands to modify their campaigns to adapt to the social needs of the context), there is an increase in the use of social appeals in advertising awarded for its effectiveness and then a decrease, which shows that the incorporation of these themes is more of an instrument than a commitment. From this, it follows the confirmation of the second part of the hypothesis raised, namely that advertising does not assume its role as a social institution and, consequently, its involvement in the task of contributing to the improvement of societies is currently scarce.

Most advertisers do not use social appeal consistently or regularly in their campaigns: only three have done it twice and one has done it three times. Among sectors, Public and Private Services and Textile and Clothing are the ones that use social themes more frequently in their advertising communications. It is noteworthy that these campaigns often win awards in the category of Most Innovative Strategy, which could be understood as evidence of their strategic and instrumental nature, and, on the other hand, of the novelty that introducing social themes into advertising still represents. It is also demonstrated that we are far from a radical change that would bring us closer to what Dahlen (2021) calls Truly Good Advertising (TGA), "...Advertising needs to be truly good, in the sense that it is good in and of itself. Truly good advertising (TGA) gives something to consumers whether the advertiser's aim to sell is fulfilled or not" (Dahlen, 2021). That is, a holistically better advertising, capable of doing what seems impossible: satisfying all sectors involved, including society, which would undoubtedly be necessary for its own survival.

Consulting advertising agencies, media professionals, and advertisers, we find common positions that revolve around the positive evaluation of social advertising as long as there is coherence between the reality of the brand and the social actions it transmits. These professionals are fully aware of the skepticism that exists in the public when a public or private entity becomes a champion of a social cause, and it is accepted that a part of society is against it for considering it false or opportunistic. However, it is observed that long-term, continuous, and honest work generates a positive impact (Luque-de-Marcos and Baraybar-Fernández, 2018) on the positioning of the brand and that the work of advertisers and communicators should play a fundamental role in the process, finding the precise tools so that the message is credible and a communicative noise is not generated that does not benefit the brand.

We consider it necessary to reflect, both within and outside the profession, on the implications that the use of socio-conscientious appeals by commercial advertising has, from a commercial, communicational, and above all, social standpoint. It's fine to talk about a positive impact on brands, but what about society? Do they care? Is the impact of these campaigns on the social reality or issue used, or at least on the perceptions that citizens have of it, measured (or measured by brands)? Is it necessary (legitimate, ethical...) for brands to "capture" or instrumentalize broadly social issues for corporate or commercial purposes without going further? To what extent is it not an easy resource in a context that demands constant improvements in issues such as equality, diversity, climate change, health, etc.? In this sense, it is worth mentioning the critical opinion of Toni Segarra, undoubtedly one of the most prestigious professionals in Spanish advertising, when he states:

This phenomenon you mention of marketing campaigns with a social backdrop or cause has to come to an end at some point. We have to go back to making proposals that are commercially effective but we don't know where people are positioned on these maps... If the difference between my brand and another brand is that I've removed plastic from the packaging, when all the others remove plastic from the packaging, there will be no difference. I think there's an extraordinary myopia in this idea of purpose understood as brands inventing things to try to make the world better. No, a brand makes the world better, or should make it better, by existing, by providing what it was born to provide. (Segarra and Torrejón, 2022).

The debate is open in the profession and perhaps the solution is the one suggested by Segarra, to go back to the moment when brands communicate through their advertising what they offer commercially. However, that would mean going back to an earlier time, ignoring the current consideration of advertising as a social institution and its communicational force, and even returning, in a radical twist, as de-Andrés and Chaparro-Escudero (2022) suggest for communication, to the etymological origin of advertising as "making public" above its commercial instrumentalization.

Regarding the limitations of this study, we are facing a common issue in qualitative analysis, which is the sample size. We are aware that it could be larger. However, the professionals from the three fundamental entities of the advertising system are represented: media agencies, brands, and creative agencies. Another limitation is the absence of SMEs in the sample of interviewed professionals. As larger businesses are covered by the entities they work for, we have focused on them to establish more global conclusions. These small and medium-sized companies are not usually represented in the Efficacy Awards.

Regarding the quantitative part of our research, we focused on campaigns with a high budget that allows them to participate in the Eficacia Awards, so the results are not generalizable to small local or regional advertisers.

This work opens up future lines of research to verify the real commitment of advertisers beyond the simple mention of social issues in advertising. Checking whether these contents have continuity and coherence in social media planning, where contact with the user is closer, is the next challenge to be addressed.

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AUTHOR/S:

Noemí Martín García
University of Valladolid. Spain.

Cum Laude PhD from the University of Valladolid, with a degree in Advertising and Public Relations from the Complutense University of Madrid. She developed her professional career as a Media Planner for ten years at the media agencies Havas Media and Mindshareworld. Since 2018, she has been a professor of Advertising Effectiveness Research and Advertising Media Planning and Management in the Advertising and Public Relations degree at the University of Valladolid. She is the author of several book chapters and articles on the relationship between advertising and different media, which have been published in journals such as *El Profesional de la Información*, *Icono 14*, and *Mediterránea de comunicación*, among others.

noemicarmen.martin@uva.es

H-index: 4

Orcid ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3478-5021>

Scopus ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57197751677>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=EXfBVUAAAAJ>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Noemi-C-Garcia>

María Cruz Alvarado López

University of Valladolid. Spain.

Doctor in Advertising and Public Relations from the Complutense University of Madrid and Full Professor at the University of Valladolid, teaches in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations and the Master's Degree in Communication for Social Purposes. Her research focuses on the history of advertising, social advertising and communication for social purposes. She is a member of the Research Group on Audiovisual and Hypermedia Research GICAVH and has published texts in *Icono 14*, *Comunicar*, *Revista Latina*, *McGraw Hill* or *Fragua*.

mariacruz.alvarado@uva.es

H-index: 10

Orcid ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1659-7249>

Scopus ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57211466028>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=cTkqvviAAAAJ&hl=es>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Maria-Cruz-Alvarado>

Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/MariCruzAlvaradoL%C3%B3pez>

Alberto Martín García

University of Valladolid. Spain.

Bachelor's degree in Advertising and Public Relations from the University of Valladolid and a PhD in Communication from the same institution, with a thesis entitled 'Analysis of the figure of the community manager as the voice of brands on social media'. His research focuses on social media. For more than twelve years, he has combined his work as a freelance community manager with teaching at the Maria Zambrano Campus in Segovia, where he teaches courses on the Structure of the Advertising System, Advertising Writing, and Creative Ideas, Methods, and Strategies. He has written four novels, and his penultimate publication, entitled 'Raquel's Silence', won the Caligrama Talent Award 2019.

alberto.martin.garcia@uva.es

H-index: 4

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2254-8811>

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=iIMJm_sAAAAJ&hl%20

ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alberto-Martin-Garcia-2?ev=hdr_xprf