

---

**RESEARCH**

---

**Recibido:** 08/03/2016 --- **Aceptado:** 12/05/2016 --- **Publicado:** 15/06/2017

---

**ADVERTISING AND ITS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY***La publicidad y su responsabilidad social***María Teresa Pellicer Jordá:** University of Murcia. Spain.[maite.pellicer@um.es](mailto:maite.pellicer@um.es)**ABSTRACT**

The power of advertising is increasing in a society where consumption is already a habit. Its power lies not only in its persuasive capacity but also in its wide presence in the lives of citizens, who envisage hundreds of advertisements every day, although they are not always aware of it. Therefore, for an undeniable influence in society, advertising must work in the development of its social responsibility. On this issue, offering arguments from different authors, we reflect on this article.

**KEYWORDS**

Advertising - ethics - responsibility - society

**RESUMEN**

El poder de la publicidad es cada vez mayor en una sociedad donde el consumo es ya una costumbre. Su poder radica, no sólo en su capacidad persuasiva, sino también en su amplia presencia en la vida de los ciudadanos, que visionan cada día cientos de anuncios, aunque no siempre sean conscientes de ello. Por eso, por una innegable influencia en la sociedad, la publicidad debe trabajar en el desarrollo de su responsabilidad social. Sobre este tema, ofreciendo argumentos de diversos autores, reflexionamos en este artículo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Publicidad - ética - responsabilidad - sociedad

## A PUBLICIDADE E SUA RESPONSABILIDADE SOCIAL

### RESUMO

O poder da publicidade é cada vez maior em uma sociedade onde o consumo já é um costume. Seu poder radica, não só em sua capacidade persuasiva, como também em sua ampla presença na vida dos cidadãos que visionam cada dia centos de anúncios, apesar de que nem sempre são conscientes disso. Por isso, por uma inegável influência da sociedade, a publicidade deve trabalhar no desenvolvimento de sua responsabilidade social. Sobre este tema, oferecendo argumentos de diversos autores, reflexionamos neste artigo.

### PALAVRAS CHAVE

Publicidade - ética - responsabilidade - sociedade

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As we will see throughout this article, advertising has become, this way, one of the fundamental communication tools for both companies (economic character) and for society itself through the transmission of values (social character ) And this quality is highlighted by several authors:

**Enrique Ortega:** "Advertising is one of the activities that can be developed in the different types of organizations that exist to communicate with the different groups outside them. In general, advertising is the communication activity to which more economic resources are allocated, this activity being mainly done in companies, although today it is the State, through its different institutions, which in most countries allocates a greater volume of resources to the advertising activity (Bonete, 1999, p. 20) "

**Rafael Alberto Pérez:** "The vast majority of authors agree today that advertising is communication. Its function is to establish a communication between the sender of the advertising messages and its target group and, therefore, its effectiveness will be given by communication values (Pérez and Martínez, 1981, p. 95).

**Sonia Madrid:** "Advertising is primarily a communications system, which substantially influences the structuring of markets, linking producers and consumers in particular through the mass media (...) but the advertising activity conforms, at the same time, as a producer of messages, an industry that, in order to achieve its goals, must disseminate a culture that has always been renewed (2006, p. 18). "

**Hellín:** "Advertising has gone from being a commercial tool to a form of communication. It expresses the whole social structure through the appropriation of the social and cultural values that are most favorable to it, proposing itself as a

criterion of analysis of the different consumption behaviors and as an object more of cultural consumption that integrates multiple expressive means to provoke a maximum integrative effect (2006. p. 65) ".

## 2. DISCUSSION

Advertising corresponds to the third need established in Maslow's pyramid, which is the social or belonging one, referring to "the need to relate to other people, friends and family and professional colleagues" (Vives, 2005, but it also satisfies the fourth one, which is the "need for esteem, self-esteem, respect and feeling good about oneself." This, of course, occurs in developed countries only, since basic and physiological and safety needs are met and "therefrom it derives to a large extent its power of attraction and success, since it penetrates into the most sensitive of our being (Vives, 2005, p. 18). The author adds that "we are also, to a greater or lesser extent, sellers of a personal image that we aspire to buy. We all have something to sell, even if it is only our own person. Returning to Maslow's pyramid, this need for belonging compels us to show a way of being that we want to be accepted by others. Each person is a brand in itself "(Vives, 2005, p. 19).

Advertising knows the great power it has and also knows perfectly how to use it. It knows the necessary strategies, strategies that go through making the advertising an emotion, a feeling, to achieve the success of an advertisement and, therefore, a product. To this end, it is very common to resort to infants and children - it is shown that "observing the smile of a child is one of the actions that produce more gratification to human beings" (Vives, 2005, p. 93), animals - whether they are tender or frightening - and more commonly models (Vives, 2005, p. 93). "Advertising has changed its paradigm and, therefore, its strategy, since, as Eguizábal explains, "over the years, advertising gradually abandoned its rational approaches, so nineteenth-century-like on the other hand, to offer another type of more emotional benefits. (...) At the same time, advertisements began to speak less of goods and more of people (Eguizábal, 2009, p. 20). It was, as the author adds, the "leap from publicity d object to advertising of the subject" (Eguizábal, 2009, p. 20). According to the bourgeoisie - which gave rise to advertising - the appearance becomes a protagonist, to the point that, as Moliné says:

"Our society lives, as Herbert Marcuse says, on the false needs imposed on it by the interests of certain groups. Needs, behaviors, impulses, amusements and consumption of products no longer obey man, but are created and, in this sense, imposed. People recognize themselves in their comforts: they find their soul in their car, in their hi-fi appliance, in their house, in their kitchen equipment. However, faced with this negative view of advertising and the role of the advertiser in contemporary society, there is positive vision (...) advertising as a service that guides the consumer. This positive view is based on the fact that life is not perfect and, therefore, when deciding which products to acquire, a kind of guiding activity is needed. (1973, p. 127).

This publicity of the subject is the one that allows the subject to create a new attitude, to consolidate an attitude about a product or service and to change an attitude

toward the brand (Bassat, 1994, p. 66) "or, as Eguizábal explains, allows him to define" who are the winners, who have penetrated the universe of consumers. They are the ones who know or the determined ones. They are the ones that are worth (2009, p. 21). Although it is true that advertising also shows the values already present in society. Society and advertisements make a very effective exchange in terms of creation and maintenance of culture. In this sense, we find opinions of several authors that corroborate it:

**Joan Costa:** "Advertising is a reflection of our customs. Advertising is an instrument of progress, of communication, tailored to the needs of man and with enormous possibilities to improve our quality of life (1992, p. 26)."

**María Elisa Almedia:** "Advertising is a reflection of society, which detects their demands and their dissatisfactions. It can change and differentiate a product, but not society and its behavior (1990, p. 1).

**Fernando Martorell:** "Advertising not only serves to inform the potential consumer or to stimulate demand. Advertising is a supersign that forms part of our culture and our learning (1990, p. 89)."

**Luis Bassat:** "As Nestor Luján very well said in one of his newspaper articles, advertising is a reflection of our customs (1994, p.26)."

**Eguizábal:** "The mirror of the social thing that is the advertising discourse has never so perfectly fulfilled its narcissistic mission. The surface of the messages gives us back the dreamed image of ourselves, the illusory image of our aspirations to perfection. (2009, p. 261). (...) To some extent, advertising, providing imaginary differences and provoking obsessive adhesions, is both an author and a portrait, at the same time, of social atomization. The decomposition of discourses (religion, art, politics, and history) is followed by the decomposition of institutions. Man and family are blurred (also race, culture, nation, etc.), while others, children, woman, couple, reinforce their position in society (2009, p.407).

Advertising, culture and society coexist and strengthen ties to become a perfect team to create, consolidate and even eliminate values. The question now is what are the values of today's society? Perez Gómez (Correa, Guzmán and Aguaded, 2000, pp. 79-82) lists the values present in today's Western societies. They would be:

- Uncritical and moral eclecticism: the economic trend towards globalization and the universal imposition of unique models of action and thought (...) has led to an amorphous and anonymous pragmatic and utilitarian social ideology.
- Individualization and weakening of authority
- Transcendental importance of information as a source of wealth and power
- Scientific mythification and distrust of technological applications.
- The paradoxical simultaneous promotion of exacerbated individualism and social conformism.
- The obsession with efficiency: Our society is a community that does not forgive failure and accepts, naturally, that any human activity must be governed by patterns of performance and competitiveness.
- The ahistorical conception of reality.

- The primacy of the culture of appearances. Appearances are a value of change in postmodern society (...) and ethics becomes pure aesthetics at the service of consumer persuasion and seduction.
- The empire of the ephemeral in the paradise of change.
- Mythification by pleasure and drive. The utilitarian and pragmatic ideology like the postmodern one is based on hedonistic ethics. For many you forgive, the satisfaction of emotionality and even personal self-realization passes through the accumulation of goods and services through a meaningless consumerism.
- Worship of the body and the mythification of youth. The cult of the body creates miraculous products that the advertising speech offers us, with the promise of stopping time or restoring it. (...) We simply refuse, like Peter Pan, to be older (Correa, Guzmán and Aguaded, 2000).

To these values, Hellín (2006, p. 73) adds the following:

- Personal ethics takes refuge in the *carpe diem* and there is an imposition of a pragmatic thought attached to everyday reality, the pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction of the present without too much concern for its fundamentals or its consequences.
- Disenchantment and indifference. Loss of faith in progress and lack of stable foundation for human behavior has led to the generalization of disenchantment and indifference. We are anxious to learn to live in the uncertainty caused by lack of a stable reference.
- Autonomy, diversity and decentralization: at the social level, personal and collective autonomy, respect for diversity and the desire for decentralization are demanded. Thus, each individual, group or community must accept the challenge of being the protagonist of their own present.
- Primacy of aesthetics about ethics. Appearances, forms, simulation and also manipulation dominate the terrain of representation in the social media and in the language of the media, which is then transferred to the street. The medium is still the message itself and the content displaces the content.

We can see all these values spoken about by Pérez Gómez and Hellín in any current ad. As Bonete says, "surely, not a few readers of these pages will think that this moral crisis is a fiction, that men are as moral or immoral as ever and that the audiovisual media are not to moralize their recipients and consumers, but above all, as companies, to make money and gain influence in the market of material and cultural products (1994, p. 24). In this regard - about morality - the following statement is made in the book entitled 'On Human Misery in the Advertising World':

"Human misery in the advertising medium is both this impoverished life that exalts omnipresent advertising and the misery of the advertising media themselves, which illustrate, in a caricatured way, the moral impoverishment undergone by the market society ... In societies like ours where inequalities are commonplace, this logic is due to a desire for social advancement. In general, individuals aspire to ascend in the social hierarchy and want to highlight the status acquired through the possession of objects that symbolize it. The aspiration of the less fortunate is to access the same

level of consumption as the most favored, and the concern of the rich is to maintain a type of consumption that distinguishes them from the poor (Marcuse Group, 2006, p. 23)."

Summing up a little what we have seen so far - and regardless of whether we are experiencing a moral crisis or not - we can say that advertising has a great social responsibility because it influences - with the values and models of behavior it conveys in its advertisements - the life of the people. This is what Cardús states when he says that "an obstacle to adolescence is the excess of stimuli to which boys and girls are subjected. I am not referring to stimuli of all kinds, but to excess a particular type of stimuli. Especially, those that abound in the channels of mass popular culture, that is, those fostered by the culture of leisure and which, logically, have a consumerist nature. But excess of stimuli extinguishes desire. And, paradoxically, our children, the most stimulated generation in history, can become the most unmotivated that have existed (2001, p. 150).

### 3. CONCLUSION

From that social responsibility of the publicity that we believe demonstrated, the need arises for an ethics, for a conscience on the part of advertisers and publicists, given the social responsibility that they have and their great and proven influences in the society. Lopez shows the need for ethical, crucial values, "because with a trunk full of knowledge, man can be wrecked" (2008: 274). Benavides also speaks of this subject when he says that "until relatively recently, when the ethics of advertising was commented, its referent was always the content of the advertisements; it was a purely instrumental ethic based on the contextualization of the contents of a story. However, the new commitments seem to appeal to more structural content and, therefore, talking of ethics or social responsibility of advertising leads to irremediably thinking about the structure of the market, its objectives and its possibilities for achieving a balanced, equitable and just society. (...) Advertising should help the advertiser to manage its brand and make it possible and viable a business model, giving it transparency and social legitimacy. And if these concerns are transferred to political communication - where there is usually almost absolute absence of ethics - all that old set of routines that have made it a harmful communication for society and embarrassing for the politician should be abandoned. "

This way and in order to conclude, we can say that the need for a real and effective advertising ethic is not necessary but essential, due to its growing and proven influence on society, until it becomes one of the main channels of communication of values and behavioral models. Only if advertising - and all the agents that compose it - is aware of its great social responsibility, we can get a kind of advertising that meets its two facets, the economic and the social. Only in this way can we obtain ads being respectful with the individuals that make up the society. Advertising can continue to be effective even if it is ethical and that is what we must encourage.

#### 4. REFERENCES

- Alberto Pérez, R. y Martínez Ramos, E. (1981). *La estrategia de la comunicación publicitaria*. Madrid: Instituto Nacional de Publicidad.
- Bassat, L. (1994) *El libro rojo de la publicidad*. Barcelona: Ediciones Folio.
- Benavides, J. (2012) *Questiones Publicitarias, I*, nº 17, 71 - 93.
- Bonete, E. (1999). *Ética de la comunicación audiovisual*. Madrid: Tecnos.
- Cardus, S. (2001). *El desconcierto de la educación*. Barcelona: Ediciones B.
- Costa, J. (1992). *Reinventar la publicidad. Reflexiones desde las Ciencias Sociales*. Madrid: Fundesco.
- Eguizábal, R. (2009) *Industrias de conciencia.*, Barcelona: Península.
- Ferrer Roselló, C. (1990). *Los otros leones de la publicidad*. Madrid: Dossat.
- González, J. A. (1986) Publicidad y consumo simbólico. *Infancia y aprendizaje*, 35-36, 99-108.
- Grupo Marcuse. (2006). *De la miseria humana en el medio publicitario*. Barcelona: Melusina.
- Guaita, C (2008). *Contigo aprendí*. Madrid: San Pablo.
- Hellín, P. (2006) *Publicidad y valores posmodernos*. Madrid: Miranda Comunicación.
- Madrid Cánovas, S. (2006). *Semiótica del discurso publicitario*. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia.
- Moliné, M. (1973). *La publicidad*. Barcelona: Edit. Salvat.
- San Nicolás, C. (2003). *Aspectos de la comunicación y creatividad publicitaria*. Murcia: Universidad Católica San Antonio.
- Vives, A. (2005) *¡Maldita publicidad!* Barcelona: Edición Península. Barcelona.

**AUTHOR**

**María Teresa Pellicer Jordá**

She holds a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Public Relations and a PhD from the Faculty of Communication of the University of Murcia, where she works as a lecturer in Advertising Research Techniques, Advertising Responsibility and Self-Regulation and Audiovisual Communication Deontology. She has written two books entitled 'Advertising as a Cultural Industry' and 'Ethics and Advertising Strategies', as well as many articles in specialized journals. In addition, he has extensive experience in the field of communication, since for several years she worked in renowned media in the Region of Murcia.