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## THE BRANDED CONTENT AND THE ETHICS IN THE ADVERTISING IN THE CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS

EL *BRANDED CONTENT* Y LA ÉTICA PUBLICITARIA EN LAS ESTRATEGIAS  
DE RESPONSABILIDAD SOCIAL CORPORATIVA. ANÁLISIS DE CAMPAÑAS

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### ABSTRACT

Advertising ethics are more relevant than ever and have become an essential aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility. As such, there is a growing interest in how different advertising formats can be adapted to effectively communicate a company's brand values and purpose. Branded content has emerged as a favored format for achieving this objective, and this article will discuss this in detail. Specifically, we will analyze the branded content campaigns launched in Spain during the last four months of 2022, examining the themes, genres, formats, and types of companies that use it, as well as the advantages and limitations of its use.

**Keywords:** advertising, branded content, values, ethics, corporate social responsibility.

### RESUMEN

La ética publicitaria está más de moda que nunca y se ha convertido en una rama importante dentro de la conocida como Responsabilidad Social Corporativa. Por este motivo, se está explorando de qué modo los distintos formatos publicitarios pueden adaptarse al nuevo objetivo de las empresas de transmitir los valores y propósitos de marca, de un modo eficaz. El *branded content* se posiciona como uno de los formatos estrella para este fin y de eso vamos a tratar en este artículo. Para ello, analizaremos las acciones de *branded content* que se han puesto en marcha en España en los últimos cuatro meses del año 2022, lo cual nos permitirá saber cuáles son las temáticas, géneros, formatos y tipos de empresas que lo utilizan, así como las ventajas y limitaciones de su uso.

**Palabras clave:** publicidad, *branded content*, valores, ética, Responsabilidad Social Corporativa, consumidores.

## **BRANDED CONTENT E ÉTICA PUBLICITÁRIA NAS ESTRATÉGIAS DE RESPONSABILIDADE SOCIAL DAS EMPRESAS. ANÁLISE DE CAMPANHAS**

### **RESUMO**

A ética publicitária está mais na moda do que nunca e tornou-se um ramo importante da chamada Responsabilidade Social Corporativa. Por esta razão, está a ser explorada a forma como diferentes formatos publicitários podem ser adaptados ao novo objectivo das empresas de transmitir os valores e propósitos da marca de uma forma eficaz. O *branded content* posiciona-se como um dos formatos estrela para este fim e é sobre isso que vamos falar neste artigo. Para tal, analisaremos as acções de *branded content* que foram implementadas em Espanha nos últimos quatro meses do ano 2022, o que nos permitirá conhecer os temas, géneros, formatos e tipos de empresas que o utilizam, bem como as vantagens e limitações da sua utilização.

**Palavras chave:** publicidade, *branded content*, valores, ética, Responsabilidade Social Corporativa, consumidores.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Advertising has changed a lot in recent years, just as society and its citizens have, as have consumers, companies, and the market itself. This is where the consolidation of Corporate Social Responsibility (Navarro, 2012) comes in, which is nothing more than the application of ethics to the company (Cervera, 2015, p. 43) under a firm commitment, with a focus on social values and the objective of helping to improve society. To materialize this defense of values by brands and transmit it to their consumers and citizens, various tools are used, including advertising. This is where the main novelty of this article lies, as it studies one of the elements of the CSR equation (advertising) that is not normally studied, even in CSR-related master's programs, which have a clearly marketing-oriented focus. For this reason, the article does not focus on CSR as such, but on advertising as an indispensable tool in this type of business strategy. In this sense, there are numerous advertising actions that demonstrate that Corporate Social Responsibility is a present (Arrufat, 2021, p. 82) and exponentially growing company policy, actions that must be adapted to the values defended by each brand, which involves the search for new formats within the advertising genre that allow for the effective transmission of that business ethics. One of the advertising actions that allows for this objective is known as *branded content*, a new advertising format that adapts to the needs and characteristics of these new social and market models. As Pintado and Sánchez explain, *branded content* "is the English term used to refer to strategies based on content funded by the advertisers themselves and through which a connection is reflected, as well as the ideal values of a certain brand" (2017, p. 227). The White Book of *Branded Content* defines it as "content produced or co-produced by a brand that informs, entertains, inspires, and/or educates

and that unites what the brand wants to show with what the audience it targets wants to see.

Values have always been present in advertising, especially since the 1920s, because as Eguizábal indicates, "advertisements are not morally neutral messages, perhaps nothing human is, but even less so is a discourse designed with the purpose of getting the public to do things, things that may even go against their interests in various areas" (2011, pp. 47-48). In this scenario, that of selling products and services with a series of associated values (Ongay, 2018, p. 33), is where this new advertising format takes on greater prominence and does so for several reasons.

In the first place, it enables the effective transmission of brand values and purposes, ultimately leading to increased engagement, brand image, and notoriety (Pintado and Sánchez, 2017, p. 227). These values allow for the creation and strengthening of an emotional bond with consumers, which in turn builds trust in the brand. Branded Scope, a study conducted in 2020 through interviews with advertisers and agencies, identifies the top five values of branded content as engagement, entertainment/utility, brand image, competition differentiation, and notoriety (BCMA Spain, 2022). The study also highlights the increasing recognition of branded content as a strategic discipline.

Secondly, it represents a non-intrusive form of advertising that doesn't interrupt the consumer, as they voluntarily seek out the content. Branded content is designed to be entertaining, informative, and interesting for the audience. As Toledano et al. explain, this new format "involves less obvious mechanisms than traditional advertising: the product is less prominent, its objectives are less obvious to the public, it is not irritating, it provides some value to the consumer, etc." (2021, p. 35). Consequently, the audience is more receptive and attentive to the content.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

As previously stated, branded content is becoming an increasingly strategic resource for brands, which are utilizing it with greater frequency. Thus, this research is guided by three primary objectives:

- To identify the formats used in branded content campaigns, as well as their respective technical characteristics.
- To determine the themes explored in branded content, as well as the values conveyed through them.
- To ascertain the commercial sectors that employ branded content as an advertising strategy.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, we have gathered all branded content campaigns that were featured in *El Publicista* magazine, a renowned publication for industry professionals that covers news related to branded content in any format or

medium, from July to December 2022. This period includes two major holiday seasons (summer and Christmas), which correspond with higher consumer spending and thus greater investment in advertising and marketing initiatives according to seasonal marketing trends. We have identified a total of 16 campaigns, which we present below:

1. Brand name: Ecovidrio. Title of the action: Circular love.
2. Brand name: Naturgy. Title of the action: Frequently asked questions.
3. Brand name: KFC. Title of the action: The massacre.
4. Brand Name: Stoller. Title of the action: Table for three.
5. Brand Name: Getlife. Title of the action: Get light talk.
6. Brand Name: ING Direct. Title of the action: Nomads
7. Brand Name: Leroy Merlin. Title of the action: We all make the change.
8. Brand Name: OIVE. Title of the action: Stories with wine.
9. Brand name: Mapfre. Title of the action: We move by what moves you.
10. Brand name: Caixabank. Title of the action: Redefining the professional future.
11. Brand name: Mc Donald. Title of the action: Everything has its origin.
12. Brand name: Adolfo Domínguez. Action title: Repeat more, think less.
13. Brand name: Pepsi. Title of the action: Nutmes Royal.
14. Brand name: BBVA. Title of the action: Sharing knowledge.
15. Brand name: La Sagra. Title of the action: The origin of inspiration.
16. Brand name: La Caixa. Title of the action: Voices for progress.

The criteria based on which we have analyzed these branded content actions are the following:

- Promoter entity
- Typology (interviews, shorts, series, etc.)
- Format (written, audiovisual, sound)
- Genre (fiction or real facts)

- Duration
- Protagonists (known or anonymous)
- Theme (transmitted value)
- Age range of the public represented

#### **4. RESULTS**

After the analysis, we draw the following conclusions:

-Regarding the promoting entities, 25 percent of the analyzed campaigns were sponsored by banking institutions, 18.75 percent by food companies, 12.5 percent by alcoholic beverage companies, and the remaining 12.5 percent by insurance companies. The remaining campaigns, each from a different company, represent energy, recycling, DIY, fashion, and non-alcoholic beverage sectors.

-Regarding the type of content used, micro-videos with interviews were used in 37.5 percent of the campaigns analyzed, followed by miniseries in 16 percent, short videos in 16 percent, and documentaries in the remaining 8 percent.

-Regarding the format, all of the campaigns analyzed used audiovisual content.

-Regarding the genre, 50 percent of the campaigns analyzed utilized fictional content, while the remaining 50 percent featured real testimonials.

-Regarding the duration of the content, in 56.25 percent of the campaigns analyzed, the audiovisual content lasted less than 5 minutes, while in 25 percent of the cases the duration ranged between 5 and 10 minutes. In 12.5 percent of the campaigns, the content lasted between 10 and 15 minutes, and in 6.25 percent of the cases, it exceeded 20 minutes.

-In terms of the protagonists featured in the content, 56 percent of the cases include known individuals, while in 43.75 percent, the participants are anonymous..

- Regarding the theme, mental health or mental sustainability and environmental sustainability are the focus of all the branded content actions studied.

- Regarding the values that are transmitted - and concerning the theme item - environmental sustainability is the most used value, followed by mental health (self-improvement, motivation, fight for dreams, etc.).

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

After conducting this research and in accordance with the objectives set out in this study, the following main conclusions have been reached:

-The most common format used for producing branded content is micro-videos with interviews, followed by miniseries, shorts, and documentaries. The content is always in audiovisual format and has a duration of less than 10 minutes. Additionally, in 50 percent of the analyzed cases, fictional elements are introduced, while real testimonials are used in the remaining 50 percent. Participants are also evenly distributed between anonymous and well-known individuals, with the latter being slightly more prominent.

- The themes that are the focus of all the studied branded content actions are mental health (also referred to as mental sustainability) and environmental sustainability.

-The brands that use branded content as a strategy are primarily banks and food companies, followed to a lesser extent by alcoholic beverage and insurance companies.

As secondary conclusions, also derived from this analysis, we highlight the following:

-Branded content actions convey a consistent, cohesive, and clearly defined brand vision. However, the crucial work that follows is to ensure that the content aligns with the advertising and communication efforts of various brands. By doing so, this innovative format becomes a vital component of corporate social responsibility strategies for companies.

- The actions carried out are original and relevant to the brand's target audience and show its social utility.

- Stories are the focus of branded content actions and they are always very human stories.

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