

Social appeals in TV commercials: the Christmas messages of Portuguese brands

Os apelos sociais nos anúncios televisivos: as mensagens de Natal das marcas portuguesas

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Abstract

Television still represents an important part of the Advertising investment of many Portuguese brands. Focusing on data about the impact of television on the brands' Advertising budget and having the Christmas season as context, characterized by strong investment in Advertising campaigns, this study seeks to answer the following question: what kind of appeals are conveyed in the Christmas adverts of the brands that invest the most in Advertising in Portugal? Based on a qualitative methodology, this research focused on the content analysis of Christmas advertisements broadcast by generalist Portuguese televisions (public and private) in 2022 that invested the most in Advertising.

The results suggest that retail brands are the protagonists of Christmas Advertising campaigns in Portugal, producing highly visible productions with expressive messages and large budgets. There were also some particularities: retailers emphasize “family” values through their products, while telecommunications companies, although maintaining a commercial focus, incorporate emotionally charged narratives, exploring themes like loneliness and mental health.

Keywords

Television Advertising · Christmas Campaigns · Social Responsibility · Emotional Appeals

Resumo

A televisão continua a representar uma parte importante do investimento publicitário de muitas marcas portuguesas. Centrando-se em dados sobre o impacto

da televisão no orçamento publicitário das marcas e tendo como contexto a época natalícia, caracterizada por um forte investimento em campanhas publicitárias, este estudo procura responder à seguinte questão: que tipo de apelos são veiculados nos anúncios de Natal das marcas que mais investem em publicidade em Portugal? Com base numa metodologia qualitativa, esta investigação centrou-se na análise de conteúdo dos anúncios de Natal veiculados pelas televisões portuguesas generalistas (públicas e privadas) em 2022 que mais investiram em publicidade.

Os resultados sugerem as marcas de retalho como protagonistas nas campanhas publicitárias de Natal em Portugal, realizando produções de grande visibilidade, com mensagens expressivas e orçamentos avultados. Notaram-se, ainda, algumas particularidades: os retalhistas enfatizam o valor “família”, utilizando os seus próprios produtos; as empresas de telecomunicações, insistindo no valor comercial, apostam em narrativas com uma forte dimensão emocional, na medida em que são explorados temas como a solidão e a saúde mental.

Palavras-chave

Publicidade televisiva · Campanhas de Natal · Responsabilidade social · Apelos emocionais

Introduction

Recent academic research has shown that, in a global level, audiences are increasingly demanding more from brands, expecting them to foster a positive impact on their communities through efforts in social causes (Gruber, Kalaiauer & Schlegelmilch, 2017; Hayes, Holiday & Park, 2022; Kim, Cheong & Lim, 2015). Simultaneously, growing criticisms related to sustainability and social inequalities - which are also a consequence of international political crises and the post-pandemic period - have put social changes on the agenda of brands and organisations a bit all over the world (LaVoi & Haley, 2021). What should be the purpose of companies and institutions beyond the production and marketing of goods and services? What social impact should brands have to contribute to solving problems that affect society?

This overview seeks to address Social Responsibility, which can be defined as the actions of a

company or institution towards some values and expectations from a society or group (Hayes *et al.*, 2022). Social Responsibility can be understood as all policies and practices, which go beyond economic and legal requirements, with a positive impact in specific audiences of organisations (Schaefer, Terlutte & Diehl, 2020). As Carroll (2016) has been advocating in his research, a socially responsible commitment lies at the top of the pyramid, i.e., the moment from which companies start investing in voluntary and philanthropic actions that meet society’s wishes and aim to improve its quality of life.

Because of these growing demands, organizations seem to be interested in these campaigns of Social Responsibility, thus minimizing their environmental footprint, or taking a position on issues related to human rights hence supporting minorities and/or disadvantaged groups (Holiday, Hayes, Britt & Lyu, 2020). This involvement with social causes and concerns can represent an advantageous communication strategy for brands, as it allows them to be different and competitive. Moreover, it allows them to disseminate positive attitudes, strengthening engagement with audiences, creating positive associations with the image of the brand and, finally, promoting a respectable reputation within the community (Fernández, Hartmann & Apaolaza, 2021). As stated by Schaefer *et al.* (2020), Advertising has a positive influence that helps organisations in their socially responsible reputation. As brands engage in a common effort to address social causes in their Advertising campaigns, they may be contributing to public awareness of certain issues that affect the entire community (Fernández, Hartmann & Apaolaza, 2021).

Following these data, Social Responsibility has stood out as a trend in the Advertising campaigns of many international brands, which seek to appeal to the emotion and sensitivity of the audience to promote empathy and solidarity in relation to certain social causes. However, although the relationship between communication and Social Responsibility has been studied throughout the latest years (mainly in the field of public relations) (Kim *et al.*, 2015), there is still little research on the potential of social causes in the Advertising campaigns. As Hayes *et al.* (2022) noted, research on Advertising and Social Responsibility is a developing area, scarcely explored and discussed.

The special issue of the *International Journal of Advertising*, published in 2022, subject to the topic “Advertising & Corporate Social Responsibility”, emphasized the relevance of this concept and shed light on this area where socially responsible Advertising strategies are studied (Hayes *et al.*, 2022). By crossing the concepts of Advertising and Social Responsibility, this scientific framework will arguably help organizations in their Advertising strategies, to engage with positive effects in their environment and to promote a closer approach to the interests of customers (Gurrieri, Tuncay, Zayer & Coleman, 2022).

Advertising and Social Responsibility are analysed in this article. As to observe the intersection of these two areas, this study focuses on Christmas television Advertising the most important brands in Portugal in 2022. Following the most recent data of Media-Monitor, an ongoing observatory from the Portuguese media monitor Marktest¹, from the first semester of 2022, we selected the Portuguese brands that have been large investors in advertisement. The Christmas season is a period characterised by an overall notorious brand investment in the Advertising campaigns that deal with empathy and emotional appeals. As for the selection of the medium, television commercials were collected, since television still represents an important part of the Advertising investment of many brands operating in Portugal. On December 8, 2021, *Jornal de Negócios* – a Portuguese economic news outlet – stated that, according to a study by IPG Mediabrands, television still mobilises 50% of the Advertising market share in Portugal in 2021, even during a pandemic period (*Jornal de Negócios*, 2021). Notwithstanding the growing numbers of streaming and on-demand platforms, the traditional consumption of television is still alive, according to a news published on January 24, 2023, in *Notícias Magazine* (Gonçalves, 2023). Following another Portuguese media observatory, *Meios & Publicidade*, as of February 16, 2022, 90% of the Portuguese people still watch television programs on a daily basis, and the

most exposed to television are the elderly, but, still according to the same news, the cases of respondents who said they watch little, or no television are rare. These data suggest the relevance of television as mass media and the willingness of brands to continue investing in the creation of campaigns.

Fernández *et al.* (2021) stated that brands tend to communicate their Social Responsibility on social networks. So, what kind of appeals are broadcasted in the Christmas’ advertisements of the biggest investing brands in Portugal? There is a tendency for brands to associate themselves with Social Responsibility? We intend to look at the television adverts and understand whether their narratives seek to expand the brands’ image of Social Responsibility by associating them with social causes at Christmas time.

To answer the starting question and fulfil the objectives set for the research, we began with an exploratory study using a qualitative methodology, namely a content analysis of the television adverts aired during the 2022 Christmas season by the brands that invested the most in Advertising in Portugal in the first half of 2022. However, before presenting the data of this empirical study, we discuss the main theoretical frameworks around the concept of organizational Social Responsibility, as well as its relationship with the field of Advertising.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Social Responsibility: a management philosophy or an Advertising strategy?

According to Windsor (2001), organisational Social Responsibility is one of the oldest and most fundamental fields of study in the relations between organisations and society. It is, indeed, a concept that has been around for over 80 years and is the key player of a long and varied history (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir & Davídsdóttir, 2019; Hayes *et al.*, 2022). The first texts on Social Responsibility and its connection with the organisational environment are a product of the second half of the 20th century, which finds the main contributions in the United States of America (Carroll, 2016) in the disciplines of Economics and Management. However, it is in the 21st century, especially in the last two decades, that we have been witnessing the emergence of this

1 The Marktest Group is a Portuguese company specializing in market research and information processing, whose activity covers various segments such as measuring media audiences and monitoring Advertising investments, which we considered for this research.

debate about the role of organisations in society (Murphy & Schlegelmilch, 2013).

In a pragmatic approach, Social Responsibility is directly related to the positive impact that companies and institutions have on the lives of the people with whom they relate to. It embodies the ability and willingness of companies to balance their profits with a positive view of society (Hayes *et al.*, 2022). This balance suggests that organisations are socially responsible just because they intend to enhance their image and foster favourable attitudes within publics (Holiday *et al.*, 2020). This perspective of corporate self-interest should not be seen suspiciously. If Social Responsibility deals with social causes, triggered by true and legitimate desire to contribute (and not by expectations of profit or reputation), it is also possible to assume that, regardless its motives, these actions are positive if they bring benefits to the community and influence society in a positive way (Holiday *et al.*, 2020).

Be that as it may, the ideal concept of Social Responsibility is a management philosophy that follows the entire organisational existence, from the establishment of a mission that commits to the creation of products/services that consider the needs and well-being of all stakeholders, to the implementation of direct actions aimed at improving the quality of life of the community. According to Carroll (2016), Social Responsibility is better understood as a phenomenon that should be embodied in the identity and culture of organisations. Schaefer *et al.* (2020) noted that audiences are most likely to develop positive associations when they understand some of positive connection between social affairs and the very brand identity. This is especially important when the reputation of the company or institution is at stake (Li, Kim & Alharbi, 2021)

In the last decade, public interest in Social Responsibility has been increasing (Gruber *et al.*, 2017). Employees, consumers, partners, suppliers, media and all stakeholders expect companies to have a positive impact on communities and to contribute to solving humanity's major problems (pandemic, political and humanitarian crises, social inequalities, the struggle for equality and human rights, etc.) (Gruber *et al.*, 2017; Hayes *et al.*, 2022).

Yet complex and challenging, scholars tend to acknowledge that the benefits of this social commit-

ment are clear. When citizens fully understand the interplay between the social fact and the identity of the organisation, they also perceive the relationship between the values of organisations and their purposes. Hence, they tend to engage more easily with both the company and the social cause (Gruber *et al.*, 2017; Hayes *et al.*, 2022; Silva, 2022)

In fact, currently, the central argument that has occupied the debate around Social Responsibility is that organizations should play a more active social role, given their privileged position in society (Balonas, 2014; Eisenegger & Schranz, 2011; Silva, 2022). This is, moreover, a thesis that is in line with the 2030 agenda defined by the United Nations, which contains 17 goals to promote sustainable development, whose achievement will also depend on the participation of companies and institutions. This list of goals includes: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduce inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals (United Nations, 2023).

From the organisations' point of view, these goals imply the impact of actions on their target audiences and on the society. And this seems to be the main challenge that companies and institutions are facing nowadays: recognizing the purposes of all their publics, thus aligning them with the mission and organizational objectives.

Despite this difficulty in articulating interests, what is certain is that all over the world, organizations and brands have tried to promote socially responsible discourses in their advertisements, to get closer to their audiences. However, as several academics have pointed out, the debate surrounding the Advertising of Social Responsibility actions is still tense.

1.2. Advertising and social causes: Social Responsibility trend

The debate surrounding the publicity of Social Responsibility actions dates to at least the 1980s, when the concept of greenwashing became widespread as the

best way to describe the attempt by organisations to cover up reprehensible practices and “clean up” their image by implementing and disseminating actions designed to promote ecological causes.

Although this type of organisational conduct has evolved in a positive way, there is still a certain mistrust regarding the publicity of brands’ social actions. As Ihlen, Bartlett and May (2011) once remarked, Social Responsibility deals with some level of suspicions, as it serves the self-interest of brands, though some reinforce these campaigns with a strong social commitment, thus thinking about the improvement and protection of their reputation. So, this is also a matter of ethics and socially positive attitudes. In this sense, Murphy and Schlegelmilch (2013) did emphasize the use of Social Responsibility as an instrumental strategy to have some sort of advantage with competitors, by promoting an illusion of positive reputation.

Bearing in mind this contextual framework, it is safe to consider that organisational messages about social responsibilities are regularly regarded by audiences as a strategy to obtain positive images (Morsing, 2006). Thus, the communication of social actions is not always beneficial for organisations as it may create distrust rather than a positive contribution to society (Etang, Lugo-Ocango & Ahmad; 2011; Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010; Waddock & Googins, 2011). The more companies expose their support for social causes, the more they seem to be to be exposed to criticism.

This is, indeed, a complex debate. Citizens ask for organizations to be ethical and transparent, as they also expect actions for the progress of the environment and society in general. In one hand, there is an expectation for companies and institutions to engage in Social Responsibility activities but, on the other, the public does not appreciate when these campaigns are widely disseminated (Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen, 2008; Silva, Ruão & Gonçalves, 2021). The challenge for organisations seems to lie in their ability to credibly show their commitment to building a socially responsible commitment, also corresponding to the sustainable development goals proposed by the UN in its 2030 agenda.

Although publicising the support for social causes can improve the organisations’ reputation, it is also positive for their publics and for society, which learn about and get involved in these actions (Bal-

nas, 2014; Fernández *et al.*, 2021; Gonçalves, 2013). Gonçalves (2013) concluded that the communication of socially responsible strategies is positive for several reasons: 1) allowing the entity to position itself in the competitive market and to keep up with international trends in terms of economic, social and environmental intervention; 2) giving the organisation’s audiences and society in general its right to information by making its activities known; 3) setting as an example and results in the replication effect, since through publicity it shows competitors and other companies and institutions that it is possible to apply good Social Responsibility practices; 4) it always implies prior preparation work that is real; 5) finally, making little sense to do well and not say it, although it is necessary to consider the form and weight with which actions are publicised. This last statement brings us to the main challenge of disseminating Social Responsibility which deals with the notion of how and when to communicate, so that the information is well received and does not cause distrust among the receivers.

According to Holiday *et al.* (2020), identity, culture and the mission of the organization is crucial for Social Responsibility. If all of the latest are legitimate and credible, positive attitudes are likely to be found in the public, promoting their involvement and adherence to the cause. Credible and truthful socially responsible messages give rise to positive evaluations of organisational behaviour (Schaefer *et al.*, 2020). When this is the case, Advertising has a positive influence on the perception of the company as being socially responsible (Fernández *et al.*, 2021).

The integration of social commitment in the overall strategy of the organisation, as well as the credibility of the message, seem to be the key factors for the success of this Advertising/Social Responsibility binomial. These facts are central to the effectiveness of the socially responsible behaviour of organizations (Silva, 2022). Social Responsibility seems to be oriented towards building relationships of trust with all organizational audiences.

According to Balonas (2011), individuals are increasingly sensitive to issues such as equal opportunities, children’s rights, the defence of minorities, civic information on AIDS and other health problems, ecological awareness, including animal abuses. To support these concerns, Advertising has

been directing its discourse towards raising citizens' awareness of the problems of the moment, seeking to change various behaviours towards major issues that in recent years have worried society in general, such as domestic violence, the disrespect for human rights, environmental protection and the fight for equal rights and duties.

The empirical study that we presented next is precisely related to the analysis of the Advertising messages emitted in Portugal by five brands, in their television commercials broadcasted during the Christmas season of the year 2022, as to understand the fundamental messages of the Advertising.

2. Methodology

What kind of appeals are broadcasted in the Christmas' advertisements of the biggest investing brands in Portugal? There is a tendency for brands to associate themselves with Social Responsibility? As to provide insights in these questions, this research analyses advertisements broadcasted on television in Portugal, during the Christmas season of 2022. Television continues to represent an important amount of the Advertising investment of many Portuguese brands (*Jornal de Negócios*, 2021). Moreover, it continues to have a relevant space in the media consumption of the Portuguese population (Gonçalves, 2013).

Considering the research problem as well as the theoretical framework presented, we present an exploratory study that uses a qualitative methodology, namely content analysis, a technique that has proven to be suitable for observing advertisements, as evidenced by some research (Applequist & Ball, 2018; Boyland, Harrold, Kirkham, & Halford, 2012; Koudelova & Whitelock, 2001). To choose the Advertising films to observe, we selected a convenience sample, following Grimes and Peirce (2013), who argue the simplicity of the resources associated with this procedure which, however, makes it impossible to generalize the results.

Following the MediaMonitor data published by Marktest (2022), according to the amounts invested in Advertising, in the first semester of 2022, in Portugal Modelo Continente Hipermercados SA, Altice Portugal, NOS Comunicações, Lojas Lidl Companhia and Pingo Doce – Distribuição Alimentar SA were the most investing brands in the

Portuguese Advertising market in the first semester of 2022 that, cumulatively, also participated in the Advertising campaigns during the 2022 Christmas season. Nonetheless, it is important to underline two particularities in this sample selection: 1) in the case of Altice Portugal, it was considered the television advertisement promoted by MEO, a telecommunication brand which represents one of Altice's main assets; 2) as of the brand Continente, two television commercials were broadcasted in the Christmas season, so the sample of this research was composed of six Advertising films.

Based on the principles of Bardin's content analysis (2009) and on analysis of previous works that focused on the observation of advertisements (Applequist & Ball, 2018; Boyland, Harrold, Kirkham & Halford, 2012; Gobé, 2002; Koudelova & Whitelock, 2001), an analytical model was created according to the following categories of analysis:

- Brand circulation (acting in Portugal and/or in an international dimension);
- Type of product or service provided;
- The slogan that was the defined for the commercial;
- Communication objective of the advertisement (whether it is the launch of a product/service; its demonstration; the comparison and differentiation of products/services; the reinforcement of brand values; brand positioning; or a rebranding);
- Genre of the advertisement film (in what format the story of the advertisement is told, namely a romance, a drama, a comedy, a family situation, a musical or the presentation of a solution to a problem);
- Scenarios/location of the advert (understand if the story takes place at home; outside; in a commercial space; in a fictional setting; or none of these);
- Characters in the commercial (identify whether the character or characters are celebrities; authorities; ordinary people; children; animals; or none of these);
- Sound dimension of the commercial (to characterise the sound integrating the commercial, i.e. if there is music; words and or/ speech; sound effects; or silence);

- Psychological state of the characters (if the characters in the commercial are continuously frustrated or unhappy; continuously excited and happy; or if there are changes in their psychological state depending on events in the story);
- Function of the music (ranging from a supporting approach, an emotional expression/remembrance, a jingle, a symbolic representation, a sense of fun; or a social validation, consent and a physical reaction);
- Reward associated with the commercial (a reward, quality and/or performance; saving money; saving time; family approval; approval from friends and/or peer group; social approval; personal satisfaction; or security, just to name a few);
- Appeal of the commercial (whether the story intends to invest on romance, beauty, joy, socialization, solidarity, health or comfort and convenience).

After creating the analysis model made up of the categories mentioned, a table was drawn up (a summary of which can be found in Table 1) and filled in by viewing and observing the adverts selected for the study. Once the six TV commercials had been analysed, the results were summarised in the following discussion, organised according to the order of the categories presented above.

3. Results and discussion

An analysis based on the variables “brand circulation” and “type of product or service marketed” describes the leading companies in the Advertising investment in Portugal. Continente (the number one in the ranking provided by MediaMonitor), Lidl and Pingo Doce are part of the group of the main food distribution chains present in the Portuguese territory that are also dedicated to the retail of several products, such as household cleaning products, decoration and small furniture for the home, personal care and beauty, children’s products, games and toys, among others. In second place, we have the telecommunications companies leading the Advertising investment market. NOS Comunicações and MEO (which is part of Altice Portugal) are two of the five telecom

operators that monopolize the television, internet, landline and cell phone markets in Portugal. From these five brands, Lidl is the only one performing an international circulation. Although Altice is a multinational company, MEO is a Portuguese brand. From this point on, this article briefly describes the story behind each commercial starting with the slogan.

As already mentioned, Continente presented two television commercials during the Christmas season 2022, with different stories. “There’s no Christmas like ours²” is the slogan of the campaign that the hypermarket created with the purpose of comparing and attributing higher quality to its food products for the Christmas dinner (Figure 1). Taking advantage of a comic situation, the story takes place at the home of a couple who receive their parents for dinner on Christmas Eve. Fearful that there may be a shortage of food, the mother starts to take out of a bag several typical Portuguese products (such as *pão de ló*, *bolo rainha*, [both Portuguese traditional pastries], among others), which she describes as she arranges on the table. For her part, the daughter repeatedly says “that wasn’t necessary”, in an expression that shows both humor and disapproval at the same time.

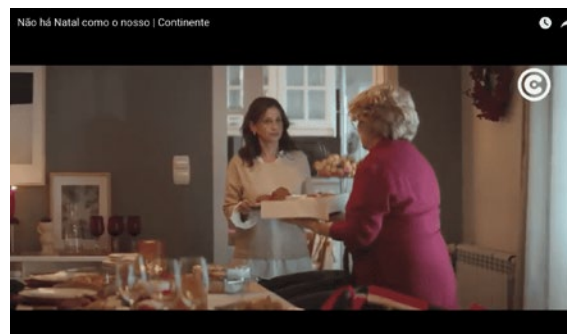


Figure 1. Frame from the “There’s no Christmas like ours” commercial for the Continente brand. Source: Continente (2021)

The other Advertising spot of the Continente brand with the slogan “It’s already Christmas at Continente and there are so many toys for everyone” is a message sung by the Brazilian children’s youtuber Lucas Neto and the symbol of the brand’s Christmas toys, Popota (Figure 2). Throughout the commercial, the characters

² All the slogans have been translated by the author, as the original version is in Portuguese.

sing and dance in a fun jingle, while showing the supermarket's aisles full of toys. In this film, the music is the main character since it is a sung message (jingle).

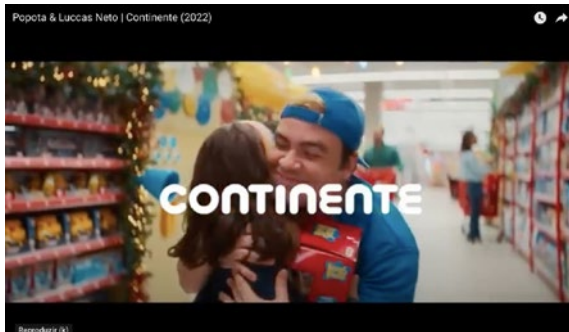


Figure 2. Frame from the commercial “No Continente is already Christmas” from the Continente brand. Source: Continente (2022).

MEO, a brand belonging to Altice Portugal, presented a Christmas Advertising campaign focused on gender equality. Following the slogan “We are all entitled to differences and let it not make any difference”, the Advertising film is inspired in a drama about a group of children who promote a protest movement to show adults that Santa Claus exists after all (Figure 3). The various protest situations are reported by the media, and it is in this context that the brand promotes its services, showing people getting informed about the movement on television, over the internet or by telephone. In this film, characters barely talk to each other, and music plays an important role in the dramatization of the message.

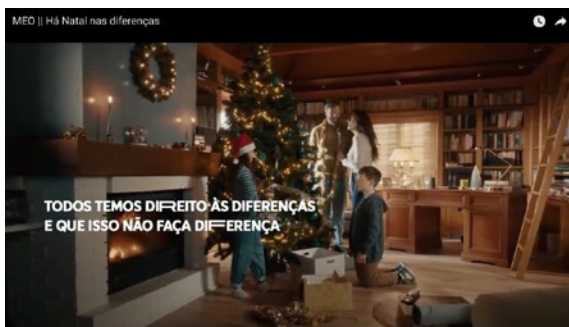


Figure 3. Frame from the commercial “We all have the right to differences and let that make no difference” from the MEO brand. Source: MEO (2022).

The telecommunications operator NOS also promoted a Christmas campaign with the slogan “This Christmas offer attention” (Figure 4). The scene is a carousel, which shows the twists and turns of a family's life, centred on the moments shared between a child/adolescent and his parents. The central moment of the story is when the life journey of this now young adult ends up in a divorce. In that moment, we see a distressed and disoriented man who receives on his cell phone the message from his parents with the text “We are here”. The commercial message is emphasized by the presence of the song *Don't you (forget about me)* (James Morrison, 2018), originally produced by Simple Minds and adapted by James Morrison, which assumes the emotional function of the commercial.



Figure 4. Frame from the commercial “This Christmas offers attention” from the NOS brand. Source: NOS (2022).

“Celebrate without the usual rush. Relax, it's Christmas” was the slogan chosen by Lidl for its Advertising strategy (Figure 5). The campaign's TV spot takes on a humorous tone by focusing on a male character who, faced with a city environment of stress and confusion preceding Christmas Eve, remains immune to the tension, and starts his supper preparations with shopping at a Lidl hypermarket, where we see him. Choosing all the necessary foods. Then he heads home and, relaxed, while reading or exercising, prepares dinner to welcome the whole family. The commercial ends with the traditional family gathering around the table to share the meal and open the gifts. Again, the message is emphasized by the adaptation of the song “Easy like Sunday morning” by Lionel Richie (1977), which in this case serves to give the ad a funny and upbeat tone.



Figure 5. Frame from the commercial “Celebrate without the usual rush. Relax, it’s Christmas” from LIDL brand. Source: Bárbara Sousa (2022).

Finally, the Pingo Doce supermarket presented its Christmas campaign with the slogan “Because a Happy Christmas is when we get together and savour it” and used the jingle as the main element of its commercial (Figure 6). Throughout 60 seconds it is possible to hear an audio message that is accompanied by several scenes of everyday life linked to the purchase of food products and their preparation. Between scenes that go from the supermarket to homes, we can see several family situations, with people always in a good mood, using Pingo Doce brand products that appear in close-ups. The commercial ends with a scene of a family at Christmas dinner and a table full of food, with the final spoken message “At Christmas sit at the table with the quality and savings of Pingo Doce”.



Figure 6. Frame from the commercial “At Christmas sit at the table with the quality and savings of Pingo Doce” from the Pingo Doce brand. Source: Pingo Doce (2022).

From these stories, we were able to generically characterize each of the commercials consider-

ing their communication objective, the genre of Advertising film used, the scenario or scenarios selected, the characters chosen and their state of mind as well as the sound dimension of the commercial and its function. This information is all set in Table 1.

In the telecommunication operators, the humorous tone and the music are both elements that seeks to produce funny moments in the audience. Both NOS and MEO turn into drama to cast themselves as brands that have a word to say about problems that affect today’s society. As of NOS, the message point at loneliness and the importance of looking away and paying attention to others. MEO deals with the right to be different and the freedom of expression and opinion. Besides aiming at a socially responsible positioning, both brands also try to show their services throughout the films, integrating them in several scenes. In both TV commercials music is also the main sound element, which contributes to the dramatization of the message and to the intensification of emotional expression. However, MEO also uses the dialogue between characters to reinforce its positioning. NOS, on the other hand, uses the song Don’t you (forget about me), adapted by the artist James Morrison, as the element responsible for the emotional component of the commercial.

Despite similar objectives, the scenarios and characters used by the operators were different. NOS created a fictional scenario and portrayed the twists and turns of an individual’s family life using the metaphor of a merry-go-round. In turn, MEO chose a group of children to star in their film and told their story in a combination of outdoor (streets of a city) and indoor (school, media newsroom, and home) settings.

So, based on these features, what kind of rewards do brands promise with their Christmas campaigns? And what are the appeals used in the Advertising communication strategy of the brands that invest the most in Advertising in Portugal? This was the crucial aspect of the article, as stated in the very beginning of the text.

Following Table 1, similarities were also found in the rewards and appeals suggested by brands in the same product segment, which is not surprising given the previous results.

Advertiser	Slogan	Communication goals	Genre of the Advertising film	Scenario	Characters and state of mind	Function of sound and music	Reward associated with the ad	Appeal
Modelo Continente Hipermercados SA	<i>"There is no Christmas like ours"</i>	Food product demonstration Product comparison and differentiation	Comedy	Domestic environment (home)	Continuously happy family	Speech accompanied by fun background music	Practical reward	Appetite and socialization
	<i>"At Continente it's already Christmas and there are so many toys for everyone"</i>	Product Demonstration (toys)	Musical	Commercial Space (store)	Continuously happy celebrity	Jingle	Higher product quality Family approval Saving money	Fun
Alice Portugal (MEO)	<i>"We are all entitled to our differences and let it not make a difference"</i>	Brand positioning Service demonstration	Drama	Outdoor spaces and domestic environment (home)	Children who go from a state of discouragement to cheerfulness	Speech accompanied by background music that promotes conformity to the message	Personal satisfaction	Union and solidarity
NOS Comunicações	<i>"This Christmas offer attention"</i>	Brand positioning Service demonstration	Drama	Fictional setting: carousel	Ordinary person who goes from a central state of discouragement to cheerfulness	Music that supports emotional expression	Personal satisfaction	Solidarity
Lojas Lidl Companhia	<i>"Relax, it's Christmas"</i>	Food product demonstration Brand positioning	Comedy	Exterior and domestic environment (home)	Ordinary person and family continuously happy	Party music	Time Savings Product quality Family approval	Appetite, socialization and fun
Pingo Doce Distribuição Alimentar SA	<i>"Because a Happy Christmas is when we come together and savor"</i>	Demonstration of food products Reinforcement of brand values	Family situation	Commercial space and domestic environment (home)	Ordinary people and families continuously happy	Jingle	Product Quality Money saved Approval from family and friends	Appetite, socialization and fun

Table 1. General characterization of the television commercials

As shown in Table 1, the three supermarket chain brands - Continente, Lidl and Pingo Doce – focused on the quality of their product, as to be approved by families and/or friends, hence saving time or money. These rewards were sustained by the appeal to appetite (provoked by the presentation of plans close to the food products), socialization and family unity, very much associated with the Christmas festivities.

Ignoring the socially responsible Advertising, Portuguese telecom operators also took advantage of the values of the Christmas season, but as a tool to solidarity and unity of the audience around current social causes. In doing so, they centred their messages on promises of the personal satisfaction that the audience can feel when they undertake good deeds.

This reward linked to personal satisfaction is not, in fact, a recent discovery. In 1943, when Abraham Maslow presented his psychological theory on the hierarchy of needs, he stated that the quest for self-fulfilment is a craving that lies at the top of the pyramid (Maslow, 1943). According to this psychologist, once the basic physiological, comfort, and safety needs have been met, individuals focus on their relationship with others, seeking to satisfy their social and emotional needs. This desire is translated into the participation in solidarity movements and the need to raise the awareness of the whole society to certain causes (Balonas, 2011). This desire to protest and show support for society's problems is, in fact, a trend that has developed in the last decade (mainly by the action of the so-called generation Z) and that brands try to follow.

However, returning to the analysis of NOS and MEO commercials, and as we discussed in the literature review, brands also seek benefits when they get involved in the Advertising of social causes. All tend to associate their products or services with the solution to the problem. This was precisely the option of the two telephone operators. NOS ended its Advertising film with the message “this Christmas, pay attention, we help you with more data, calls and SMS”. MEO was not so keen in this objective, but showed the audience that television, cell phone and internet packages can be a very important means in supporting freedom of thought and expression.

As noted in the theoretical framework, this reciprocity of benefits should not, however, be looked

down upon. Advertising has always been and will always be a persuasive communication technique in which brands invest to achieve certain strategic objectives. This does not preclude a growing desire to extend the benefits of Advertising to society, and by alerting and, if possible, contributing to the alleviation of certain social problems.

Final remarks

Within the field of Advertising for social causes, this study seeks to discuss the appeals that were used in the Advertising communication strategy of the most high-profile Portuguese brands in the Christmas 2022 season. The main objective of the research was to understand if the commercials have followed the trend of Social Responsibility, manifested by the appeal for certain social causes.

Supported by the advantages of the qualitative methodology, a convenience sample was selected, during the Christmas season 2022, in Portugal, by the five brands that invested the most in Advertising that year. Then, it was defined a content analysis of six commercials, supported by 13 study variables that allowed, firstly, to contextualize the Portuguese Advertising market and, secondly, to understand the way brands plan and prepare their Advertising strategies to communicate with audiences.

The data collected and analysed in this article concluded, in a first level, that hypermarket chains lead the ranking of Advertising investment in Portugal, according to data from the first half of 2022. Continente occupies the first place in this table, and Lidl and Pingo Doce are also in the first five positions. Moreover, the telecommunication operators represented a market segment that also invests a great deal of its budget in Advertising. In Portugal, Altice (MEO) and NOS are the telecom companies that advertise the most.

The second conclusion of this work is that brands that operate in the same market segment tend to compete, also, for the audience's attention, as they tend to promote Advertising campaigns that focus on the same promises and the same appeals, a function socially attributed to Advertising and that, apparently, is repeated in this study. The analysis of the TV commercials showed that Continente, Lidl and Pingo Doce preferred to highlight and differentiate

their food products, making use of the concept of fun and family unity around the table, very present at Christmas time. The promises are quite similar: quality products, as the whole family joins the same picture of food and socialization.

The telecommunications companies, NOS and MEO, follow a different path. By excluding the humorous tone of their messages and focusing on the creation of dramatic and emotional stories that alert the public to emerging social causes. NOS pays attention to the situation of loneliness in which many people feel, particularly after a pandemic period. MEO deals with the appeals of civic engagement towards the respect of difference and freedom of expression. The emotional and psychological states of the characters, combining precise scenarios and particularly emotive songs, support the drama, as these two brands seek to activate the dimension of personal satisfaction that can be achieved when the audience focuses on the other. It should be noted that NOS and MEO do not ignore their commercial goals by showing, throughout the commercials that their services can help solve these problems, starting by giving them a voice.

This article suggests that the Advertising appeals used in the Christmas campaigns of these five Portuguese brands assume an increasingly social role, stimulating the awareness of individuals to current problems. This was seen in the analysis of the NOS Comunicações and MEO (owned by Altice Portugal) Advertising films, which orient their Christmas messages in such a way as to draw attention to current social causes. However, it is also true that the concept of family at the table, socialization and union, very characteristic of the festive season, is preferred by the largest Portuguese hypermarket chains.

Notwithstanding these conclusions, this study presents some limitations. Firstly, the analysis of Advertising campaigns does not allow one to determine all the findings discussed in the literature review. It was not possible to understand whether the commercials broadcast by NOS Comunicações and MEO are the result of strategies that sought to incorporate social commitment in the overall management of organisations. Such a finding would imply an internal audit of these companies' practices and interviews with the communication departments

of those brands. Future studies should consider this combination of research techniques.

Thus, although this research focuses mainly on the characteristics of a circumscribed and small sample, we hope to bring a modest contribution to the broadening of knowledge in the field of social cause Advertising. We also believe that the analysis model created will serve as a basis for other works that intend to engage in content analysis of advertisements.

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