

## DECODING ADVERTISING ON THE SOCIAL SPHERE

### ABSTRACT

Advertising is often seen as a muse that deceives and urges us to consume through its magnetizing narratives. The purpose of this article is clear: to look at advertising as capable of being more than an ally of consumerist drift and recognize in it other attributes, even immaterial aspirations. It is assumed that advertising often translates dominant societal values in a persuasive version. Is it even considered a “star product” in a trading system of extreme complexity.

But advertising can aim to be more in an era of ideological disbeliefs and loss of trust in institutions. Its persuasive nature, inherited from Aristotelian rhetoric, makes it capable of inducing values and catalysing conducts. How? By informing, educating, preventing, revealing and empowering citizens to better deal with social and environmental issues. Advertising is also the discourse that brings citizens closer to science, to health or to politics, as well as to other issues beyond consumption.

This is an utopia for many of us: behavioural advertising, seeking for awareness and mobilization instead of sales. However, studies evidences that a significant diversity of organizations are developing social advertising campaigns – belonging to the third sector, to public institutions or to the private sector.

We then face the dilemma: advertising is held hostage to its capitalist genesis. However, institutions seem to recognize its contribution for social awareness and even for social change. To know the phenomenon of advertising in the social sphere, either through mapping or through the systematization of its uses by the various sectors of society, is the purpose of this article. Also seek to contribute to a conceptual clarification of this complex area.

Ultimately, we are interested in debating the role of advertising in society. It is about reconfiguring its social role, in particular regarding its contribution from a perspective of citizenship.

More than the broadening of its sphere of action, which already seems to be in progress, it is a question of recognition of its capital, as a social change operator.

### KEYWORDS

Advertising, society, citizenship, social causes, social change

# DECODIFICANDO LA PUBLICIDAD EN LA ESFERA SOCIAL

## RESUMEN

La publicidad a menudo se ve como una musa que engaña y nos insta a consumir a través de sus narrativas de magnetización. El propósito de este artículo es claro: Mirar la publicidad como capaz de ser más que un aliado de la deriva consumista y reconocer en ella otros atributos, incluso aspiraciones inmateriales. Es asumido que la publicidad a menudo traduce valores sociales dominantes en una versión persuasiva. Es incluso considerada un “producto estrella” en un sistema comercial de extrema complejidad.

Pero la publicidad puede intentar estar más en una era de incredulidad ideológica y pérdida de confianza en las instituciones. Su naturaleza persuasiva, heredada de la retórica aristotélica, la hace capaz de inducir valores y catalizar conductas. ¿Cómo? Informando, educando, previniendo, revelando y empoderando a los ciudadanos para que manejen mejor las cuestiones sociales y ambientales. La publicidad es también el discurso que acerca a los ciudadanos a la ciencia, a la salud o a la política, así como a otros temas más allá del consumo.

Esta es una utopía para muchos de nosotros: la publicidad conductual, la búsqueda de conciencia y movilización en lugar de ventas. Sin embargo, los estudios demuestran que una diversidad significativa de organizaciones están desarrollando campañas de publicidad social, que pertenecen a sectores terciarios, a las instituciones públicas o al sector privado.

Entonces enfrentamos el dilema: la publicidad es rehén de su génesis capitalista.

Sin embargo, las instituciones parecen reconocer su contribución para la conciencia social e incluso para el cambio social. Conocer el fenómeno de la publicidad en el ámbito social, a través del mapeo y de la sistematización de sus usos por los diversos sectores de la sociedad, es el propósito de este artículo. También busca contribuir con una aclaración conceptual de esta área compleja.

Finalmente, estamos interesados en el debate acerca del papel de la publicidad en la sociedad. Se trata de reconfigurar su rol social, en particular con respecto a su contribución desde la perspectiva de la ciudadanía.

Más que la ampliación de su esfera de acción, que ya parece estar en progreso, es una cuestión de reconocimiento de su capital, como un operador de cambio social.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Publicidad, sociedad, ciudadanía, causas sociales, cambio social

## ADVERTISING TODAY

Defining advertising is an invitation to enter into a state of permanent tension. Often, advertising is the translator of the dominant values in a persuasive version, therefore, a “product” star in a trading system. However, advertising is also used to induce trends, behaviours, lifestyles. It legitimates the unthinkable in a past that does not even need to be distant. See social roles changing in a glance: in a TV spot, a happy and confident man prepares the meal in the kitchen or feeds his baby. Another TV spot shows a well-succeeded businesswoman solving meals with pre-cooked solutions. Not a long time ago, the same man would be reading the news while his wife was cooking.

Advertising changes the way we see it. After decades of television ads extolling the virtues of laundry detergents, SKIP proposes something seemingly dissonant: happy children get dirty while playing in mud puddles under rain: “Skip: is good to get dirty”. It is a new conception in the way of educating children: less rigidity, more freedom. Ray Ban also presents a discourse of legitimation concerning relationships. “Never Ride” campaign promotes a glasses collection, featuring a homosexual couple walking down the street under the reproachful look of a man who turns back to observe them (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Never Ride Campaign (Ray Ban)

Source: [https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/rayban\\_lovers](https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/rayban_lovers)

The soothing and involving way through which advertising introduces new ideas leads to effective attitudinal changes in society. Novelty

is framed by an engaging, seductive speech, with a mixture of sounds, colours, movements and words of easy adherence. Many times, advertising campaigns suggest questionable behaviours: “yesterday, the reality of smokers who smoked because the media smoked, is present today in the super-obese, who gain weight because the media insists on sugary snacks and soft drinks” (Queiroz, 2007, p. 224). Paradoxically, it is the advertising narrative itself that is in charge of introducing new behaviours, as evidenced by Coca Cola’s campaign on healthy lifestyle habits<sup>1</sup>.

Deconstructing this two structuring concepts – product/reflex of dominant lifestyles as well as new social models inducer – we might conclude that advertising is, above all, socially inclusive (Cornu, 1990).

Is it also normative: reveals to us what is Good and what is Bad, what is Beautiful and what is Ridiculous, what is Young, what is Mature, what is Modern. Through dissemination on a large scale, it creates implicit typologies and definitions due to its creative, vibrant and persuasive narrative.

## IS THE DEVIL AMONG US?

Is advertising manipulative? Traditionally associated with economic and business fields, advertising became a quite sophisticated technique throughout the twentieth century, benefiting from marketing and technological innovations. Always linked to brands and consumer goals, became hostage of its success in this area. For this reason, advertising is often associated with negative assumptions such as “misleading” or “false”.

Advertisers themselves seem to have always lived in an inner conflict – feeling a certain embarrassment at being seen as accomplices of the consumer society. The humorous title of Jacques Séguéla’s book (Figure 2) – a well-known french advertiser responsible for the first political campaign using the advertising technique for President Chirac – somehow summarizes a general sentiment: *do not tell my mother I’m an advertiser. She thinks I’m a pianist in a brothel* (1979).

But the idea of rejecting advertising seems to be changing. Lipovetsky stresses it: “there is, among apocalyptic theorists, a discourse according to which the desire to consume would derive from advertising manipulation. It is false. Advertising can not make you want the undesirable. In rich European countries, the obsession with “having” has passed. Today, the

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<sup>1</sup> Campaign 2013 on fight against sedentarism, guided by a narrative that highlights the benefits of an active and healthy lifestyle. “What if we get up from the chair?”, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqW8MlRsWts>

main concerns are related with unemployment, insecurity, the future, the education of children, a new quality of life and new forms of spirituality” (Lipovetsky, 2000. p. 7). This point of view had already been suggested by Mattelart: “societies are no longer advertising phobic. Modernity requires it” (1990, p. 115). Or, as Jhally argues: “ads do not lie to us. They show us, rather, the mediating role that commodities can have in the relationship between individuals and expectations” (1995, p. 35).



Figure 2: Séguéla's book on advertising  
Source: <https://editions.flammarion.com/Catalogue>

Today, advertising tends to be a media entertainment proposing enchanting narratives: aesthetically surprising images, smart word games, contagious songs or sounds. In sum, a set of techniques shaped on art and imagination. This cheerful side of advertising tends to conquer the “distrustful” citizen, fascinated by short yet intense narratives.

Lipovetsky stresses this idea: “probably advertising reveals more clearly the nature of the humorous phenomenon: films, billboards and ads renounce to sententious and austere speeches and favours a style made of word games of indirect formulas, (...) in short, an empty and light humorous tone at the antipodes of the mordant irony” (1989, p. 137).

Advertising distracts and makes us disconnect from reality.

Nowadays, advertising wants less to be convincing than to make people smile, frighten, amuse (...). It's the age of creative advertising, the spectacular party: products must become stars, products must be transformed into "living beings", person-brands with a style and a personality. (Lipovetsky, 1987, p. 250)

This entertainment vision reduces the historical negative load. On the other hand, it turns advertising into something irrelevant, superficial. Therefore, it is important to consider the role which advertising might play. According to Volli, advertising is "the most widespread and capillary communication channel (...) an aesthetic and ideological mass instrument, a kind of reservoir from which we extract the way we look at the world, discover beauty, have fun and dream" (2003, p. 7).

If advertising has the virtuosity of seduce citizens, why not think of using it consistently in favour of social causes and behavioural change in a context of citizenship?

## ADVERTISING BEYOND CONSUMPTION

The aim of this article is to find paths to reconfigure the role of advertising in society. The proposal is to "look at advertising as a mean to exercise citizenship and to seek the improvement of conditions and life in society. To value its potential for persuasion and creativity in favour of social change" (Balonas, 2012)<sup>2</sup>.

However, this is not obvious. The classic definitions of advertising stress its role on goods and services consumption. Undissociated from modern economies, advertising was born and grew in this environment and that's where it gained matureness. In addition, advertising carries a pejorative sense due to its connection to consumption. "There is, among apocalyptic theorists, a discourse according to which the desire to consume would derive from advertising manipulation", says Lipovetsy (2000, p. 7).

According to Dourado, advertising "was usually blamed, demonized, and criticized for conveying the so-called mass culture and cultural industry, capitalism and consumption, in which the consumer is considered to be an innocent victim" (2011, p. 298).

Advertising is also seen as a mean of organizing the social field, setting patterns of behaviour, providing interpretations of reality, disseminating

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<sup>2</sup> Article published in the newspaper *Público*, titled "Advertising, yes! Thank you", available at [www.publico.pt/portugal/noticia/publicidade-sim-obrigado](http://www.publico.pt/portugal/noticia/publicidade-sim-obrigado)

values or even introducing new ways of relating to others. In this way, concerning the sphere of consumption, it can be understood as “a power center in which advertising has a determinant social function legitimizing, through its language, not only the social behaviors of individuals, but also their forms of integration into the system of social representations” (Rosales, 2001, p. 39).

The ability to influence individuals’ social behaviours as a cultural production actor (Viganò, 2011) can be the clue to recognize the impact of advertising on the social sphere in fields as diverse as politics, public policies, health, education, religion or civil society organizations.

Unlike commercial advertising, which

creates a dreamlike world in the desirable sense, which can be associated with the identity of the brand (...) social advertising is intended to be taken seriously, and only works if the audience recognizes it as realistic and relevant and, therefore, is willing to negotiate the meaning of communication based on this premise. (Peverini & Spalletta, 2009, p. 132, quoted in Viganò, 2011).

Therefore, we have come to realize that an area originally developed to respond to market logic has been adopted by a diversity of social agents as a way to contribute to ... social change. In sum, it is fair to conclude that advertising can reach new meanings and achieve an age of maturity and relevance in society. To understand its role, we will focus on social advertising in its interaction with three domains: the private sector, the public sector and the non profit sector.

## **CONTROVERSIES ON SOCIAL CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY**

Concerning the private sector, launching advertising campaigns in the context of corporate social responsibility strategies is not a stress-free issue. Dellazzana & Melo, (2010) emphasize the growing companies’ interest in being connected with social responsibility through advertising but they underline the paradox between ethics and profit. Bueno (2005, quoted in Dellazzana & Melo, p. 486) says that the most inattentive citizens will think that we reach an ideal state of commitment to society and that we are “facing a formidable group of socially responsible organizations” when we open a newspaper, listen to the radio or watch television. This author considers that there is “hypocrisy and cynicism, which rely on the complacency

of the media, almost always focused more on their financial health” (Bueno, 2005, p. 127). According to Bueno business ethics is regulated by vigilant citizens.

Dellazzana and Melo, on their part, defend that advertising ethics should always be above profit, even if it is the ultimate goal. Even if the advertiser’s job is to create messages on behalf of a brand, this professional must be aware of the content he creates, even if he is not the legal responsible (2010, p. 487). Therefore, the responsibility is transferred to the producer of the message – the advertiser – and not only to the promoter (the company).

There is a need to balance companies, consumers and their values as citizens (Azevedo, n.d.). For that, advertising must rely on credibility and valued information. In a word, must be reliable.

However, in many situations, there is a paradox: in terms of corporate social responsibility, organizations should not over-communicate nor stop communicating. As O’Sullivan points out, “if you do not say enough about your charitable initiatives, consumers believe that companies are hiding something and if you are saying too much they think that charities are being exploited by companies” (1997, quoted in Bronn & Vrioni, 2001, p. 217).

Seeking to define what is a “citizen company”, Gonçalves (2006) points the 80s as the decade when this idea emerged, once society began to value companies that are more open and flexible, attentive to internal cohesion and social problems, fulfilling their citizenship obligations.

Advertising plays a key role in developing a new image for the companies in a sense that the intention is to build a more emotional discourse that shows how the company occupies a central place in the progress of society (...) Advertising shows its power in the creation of an ambitious corporate identity: a company with the status of an institution interested in the public good and in the well-being of citizens, with the same legitimacy of public institutions. (Gonçalves, 2006, p. 278).

## ADVERTISING APPLIED TO THE THIRD SECTOR

One of the most delicate challenges of the third sector is to know how to establish partnerships with companies and with the state, which seeks in civil society an ally in the response to social problems that it has no capacity to solve alone. In common, these three sectors need to communicate

their strategies, dealing with different agendas but taking social causes as a major purpose. Therefore, advertising is a voice that announces who are the promoters of causes and their relationship, although its primary function is to promote and raise awareness of social projects. In this sense, advertising seems to play an increasing role in the media landscape (Benet & Nos Aldás, 2003, p. 8).



Figure 3: Campaign promoted only by a third sector organization (AMI)  
Source: <https://ami.org.pt>

Advertising is also a tool for third sector organizations to compete in an increasingly busy marketplace, namely, to support fundraising goals. To gain visibility and reputation, organizations must raise awareness of their social projects and to demand some kind of action – cash donations, volunteering or other contributions (as shown in Figure 3). And they have to do it in a reliable way. Alongside other dimensions of communication (such as public relations or media advice, for example), advertising is pointed out by Viganò as “a decisive instrument for the support of the individuals who work in the universe of the third sector”. This author stresses that the vitality of forms of social advertising occurred in recent years is part of a logic of competition founded on fundraising” (2011, p. 30). He also underlines the strategic role that advertising plays in “building / strengthening the trust pact with the audience (...) capable of competing in a particularly congested global market”.

## FORMS OF ADVERTISING ON THE SOCIAL SPHERE

It is very common to talk about social advertising but the expression seems to serve too many purposes. In this particular study, a focus on the so-called “advertising for social causes” is given, although we admit advertising inserted in corporate social responsibility, which may correspond to “advertising related to causes” (Almaraz, 2009) and not “social publicity” as Volli (2003) or González and Rufí, (2009) point as it seems a too fluid definition.

As a contribution to the debate in this area, González and Rufí (2009, p. 83) address the issue “social”, by distinguishing three contexts: (1) the “social” of advertising (the social function of advertising); (2) the “social” in advertising (advertising with cause); (3) the advertising of “social” (social advertising).

Social advertising is, for González and Rufí, purely commercial. These are “commercial campaigns with a social appearance” (2009, p. 91) which, according to Volli, is “advertising the advertising” (2003, p. 148).

González and Rufí distinguish this type of advertising from “advertising for social change”. Although both are based on social causes, what distinguishes them is their purpose (2009, p. 79). This idea can be reductive because corporate social responsibility can also aim to social change. For example, campaigns promoted by pharmaceutical laboratories to carry out medical exams to prevent diseases are promoting an effective behavioural change.

Thus, the association of the expression “social advertising” to commercial interests does not seem to contribute to a clear definition as it addresses to a single promoter – the private sector. The State can be included, with other purposes than profit.

Dourado points out the lack interest of the academia for studies on social advertising, stressing the confusion generated by conceptual instability: “we are currently witnessing the inclusion of social advertising concept, a typology easily confound with corporate social responsibility, social marketing and institutional advertising itself” (2011, p. 289).

In order to clarify the terminology currently in use, we propose a categorization of advertising on the social sphere (Table 1) based on the type of entities that promote causes:

PROMOTOR	CONCEPTS	CONTEXTS / GOALS
Public sector	Institutional advertising (Almaraz, 2009) or Public campaigns (Pinto-Coelho, 2005) Public interest advertising (Taricco, 2009) Advertising for social causes (Balonas, 2007)	- Social marketing programs - Behavioral and social change policies - Social awareness
Private sector	Cause related advertising (Almaraz, 2009) Advertising for corporate social responsibility (Balonas, 2007)	- Corporate social responsibility programs
Third sector	Advertising for social causes (Balonas, 2007)	- Behavioral and social change - Social awareness - Fundraising
Partnerships between sectors	May include any of the previous categories	May include any of the previous contexts/goals

Table 1: Categorization of advertising on the social sphere

Another problematic emerges: how to clearly distinguish advertising for social causes (identified as an ally of the public sector and the third sector) and advertising embedded in corporate social responsibility (applied to the private sector)?

First and foremost, the cause is the unique goal in an advertising for social causes context, while in the advertising for corporate social responsibility there are double aims: to benefit the cause and the brand (Balonas, 2007, 2011). Several authors even point to the brand as the ultimate goal, with commercial valuation under a social “cover” (González & Rufi, 2009; Kreshel, 2009; Volli, 2003).

Secondly, in advertising for social causes, sometimes we witness *pro bono* advertising: campaigns are raised due to a solidarity chain in which all agents offer their services and their experience as citizens: advertising agencies, photographers, producers, graphic artists and media companies (Balonas 2007, 2011). This is the most genuine form of social advertising in the sense that every professional is acting as a citizen. And it is directly related with the concepts of participation and citizenship.

In favour of advertising on corporate social responsibility, Alvarado López points its contribution for social causes awareness and, in certain contexts “with a greater credibility than those offered by certain public institutions (sometimes very discredited) before the eyes of the hyperconsumer admirer of brands in which he believes faithfully, whatever the message they propose” (2009, p. 147). There is an appropriation of the discourse on the social, “returning it to society, filtered by its language, that is, simplified,

stereotyped, expanded, with the consequent loss of transcendence of certain themes”. However, the author warns to the “abuses” of the “social” in advertising, advising that this form of advertising must have in consideration “the audience’s intelligence, the regulatory and legal aspects as well as the systems’ self-regulation, self-criticism. (...) A challenge for new advertising and for the new university”, says the author (2009, p. 148).

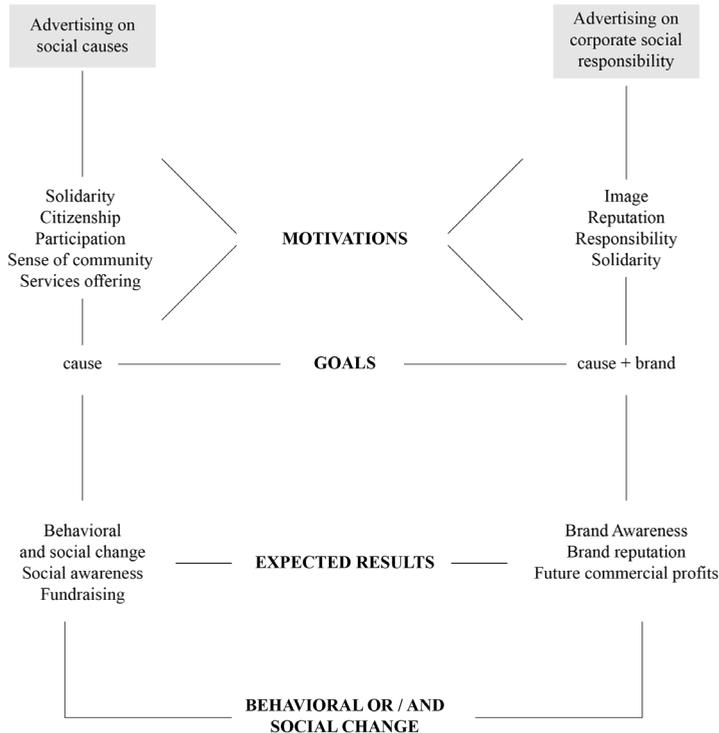


Figure 4: Social advertising forms: differences and similarities

A central aspect, above referred, is the distinction between purposes. As shown in Figure 4, on advertising for social causes – the cause is an end in itself – we are closer to concepts such as solidarity, citizenship, participation, sense of community and services offering. Concerning advertising for social corporate responsibility – in which the cause is associated to the brand – image and reputation emerge as key concepts as well as responsibility and solidarity. Therefore advertising in favour of social causes appears to be the purest way of acting towards citizenship: it results from *pro bono* services (quite frequently) and does not seek corporate reputation or

the consumption redemption (Balonas, 2007). Nevertheless, advertising on social causes and advertising on corporate social responsibility are both legitimate forms as social change agents (Alvarado, 2009; Balonas, 2007).

### **SOCIAL ADVERTISING: IS IT REALLY HAPPENING?**

To accept the expansion of the advertising sphere in society implies a deeper knowledge of the social causes campaigns' phenomenon. Seeking for answers we have been carrying out mapping and critical analysis of social advertising in Portugal, hoping that this kind of research can be applied in other countries. We intend to provide reliable contributions towards a reconfiguration of the concept, proposing a reflection on its usefulness as a resource in favour of social change.

A study on social advertising centred on printed ads, carried out taking into account the Portuguese context between 1992 and 2005 (Balonas, 2007) has allowed to conclude that advertising in favour of social causes – without mentioning brands – was the most frequent (Figure 5). However, since 2000, the growth of advertising on corporate social responsibility was remarkable, surpassing the first form of social advertising. The following years – until 2005 – revealed a balance between the two forms. Theme wise, advertising on social causes has revealed more diversity in causes comparing with advertising for corporate social responsibility.



Figure 5: Banco Alimentar food campaign  
Source: <http://www.alimentestaideia.pt/>

Later, a research concerning advertising on social causes was carried out by through mapping TV spots throughout the first decade of the 21st

century (Balonas, 2013). The aim was to quantify and identify the most recurrent causes as well as the type of promoters, most frequent promoters, target audiences and desired behaviours.

One of the main conclusions is that there is a significant diversity of promoters: 184 different entities were detected in 452 TV ads. These figures reveal that we are living in an age that demands for intervention from many actors. They also show a significant communicative pressure on the social sphere.

In what concerns the social themes approached by campaigns, the most popular were about humanitarian support, illness prevention and the environment. Moreover the study demonstrates a large variety of themes: 27 different social issues.

In addition to these conclusions, the increasing number of TV spots along the years under analysis validates the vitality of advertising on social sphere. It is also important to note the increase in partnerships between public – private – third sector, mainly on the last year (2010). This discovery reveals that society is looking for new ways to solve social issues, including the State (Public Sector), emerging as a partner alongside organized civil society.

Looking at the campaigns as a mirror of anxieties and expectations of society – and specifically observing the Portuguese case – we may conclude that the environment, as well as health issues, are the most recurrent themes. But we can also say that Portugal expresses a consistent sense of solidarity – humanitarian issues are themes with significant presence on television, inviting citizens to help on scarcity or in tragic situations, mainly through monetary contribution.

Looking to the “agenda” of each sector, it is clear that the State invests on public health – prevention and awareness is a form to reduce public investments. But it also invests in environmental campaigns – due to the pressure of European institutions towards sustainable practices. For the same reasons, but also for the reputation factor, the private sector has a significant presence in environmental campaigns, as we had already concluded in the study focused on printed ads (Balonas, 2007).

Civil society organizations seem to be dedicated to humanitarian support and disease prevention although we can say that this is the most multifaceted sector since it promotes many different social causes. In fact, the third sector is the one with more campaigns. The high number of organizations promoting campaigns belonging to this sector is symptomatic of the complexity of social problems.

On the other hand, the predominance of geographically closed causes instead of global humanitarian issues, as referred on the *Consumer intelligent lab report* (Projeto C, 2011) is confirmed by the findings. Campaigns are mostly circumscribed to the Portuguese reality<sup>3</sup>.

## FINAL NOTES

Citizens are implicated throughout the article. Mainly, it is about them and for them that this debate is presented. Seeking for a more balanced society and also a better citizenship, the aim is to contribute with a not-so-obvious social tool, such as advertising. Social advertising addresses the new citizens, more informed and more distrustful of institutions: “consumers became smarter, more aware, demanding, unfaithful and quite unpredictable” (Melo, 2008). But on the other hand more participative and cooperative (Innerarity, 2006, p. 241). Therefore, ready to participate in new activism forms or react positively to humanitarian and social messages.

Organized citizens, aiming to participate in social changes, are on the genesis of the third sector growth, in many forms: non-profit organizations, NGOs, associations, foundations, among other typologies. The growing presence in numbers and in diversity – as mentioned in the research – bring out other problems, such as the need for professionalization to survive with sustainability in a competitive social market<sup>4</sup>.

In fact, the era of episodic philanthropy must lead to deeper and consequent actions, whether within the state, within the private sector or the third sector. The imperative to act in depth – through social programs based on good practices in social marketing – entails better prepared dossiers, as well as the ability to program and monitoring processes. This also includes a more responsible approach from the advertisers.

One of the most relevant aspects to improve is segmentation. In the study previously mentioned, the majority of the campaigns were addressed to the Portuguese population in general instead of working the public in a differentiated way, contrary to what best practices in advertising recommend. Perceiving each segment’s attitudes and expectations should be part of the advertising campaign design towards more efficiency. Above all, social advertising must seek for medium or, ideally, long term effects. Short-term effects are often related with creative advertising that entertains and

<sup>3</sup> Complete research study available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1822/28623>

<sup>4</sup> For further readings on Third Sector: Balonas, 2017.

that is “ego-friendly”. But, to be taken seriously, creativity must follow a communication strategy, where the segmentation issue is included.

If guided by best practices, can social advertising be effective? According to Ruiz, when compared to commercial campaigns, social campaigns tend to operate very slowly: it takes longer to understand their influence. But when social advertising campaign ceases, the induced change and the observable consequences are more persistent over time (2003, p. 129). While commercial advertising seeks to generate a very immediate influence on behaviour to incite to action (buying a product) and obtain a “tactical conversion” of the consumer, social advertising, on the contrary, must follow a longer and deeper process to modify beliefs, ideologies and changing attitudes in the long term (Ruiz, 2003, p. 129).

Moreover, a study conducted by Vecchiato et al. (2010) concluded that human brain reacts more to social advertising than commercial advertising. There seems to be more brain activity when individuals see an advertisement for social causes than when exposed to a common product advertisement. The authors point out as a probable cause the representation of threats to the individual, which raises their degree of attention.

Despite these encouraging points of view, there is a long way to be pursued by society and by the academia in order to change perceptions concerning advertising’s role on society. More than the extension of its sphere, which already seems to be in progress, the recognition of its value, as an operator of social change is still in debate.

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