

**Dr. Inmaculada SÁNCHEZ-LABELLA-MARTÍN**

Universidad de Sevilla. Spain. isanchez4@us.es. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7383-0537>

**Dr. Manuel GARRIDO-LORA**

Universidad de Sevilla. Spain. mgarri@us.es. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3614-0545>

**Dr. Virginia GUARINOS**

Universidad de Sevilla. Spain. guarinos@us.es. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7270-0087>

## Animation as an advertising resource. Analysis from a gender perspective

### *La animación como recurso en publicidad. Un análisis desde la perspectiva de género*

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#### **Abstract**

This work seeks to analyse, from a gender perspective, the use of animation in advertising. To that end, this qualitative study, of an exploratory and descriptive nature, uses content analysis as an approach tool. Based on an analysis sheet composed of 25 indicators, the analysis adopts a triple approach: narratological, advertising and gender. The sample comprises 22 spots which use animation to advertise products or services, aimed to youth and/or adult targets. The results from the three levels of analysis affirm the use of animation as an important factor driven by the desire of creative professionals to evoke a wide range of emotions. Although most of the advertisements aim to convey product-related knowledge, some of them also aim to influence the audience's attitudes, promoting inclusion, awareness of diversity or respect for gender equality, while others reproduce sexist situations. To some extent, these last spots perpetuate sexism in advertising by using animation representing what could not be shown with live actors.

#### **Keywords**

Animation; advertising; sexism; gender perspective

#### **Resumen**

*El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar, desde una perspectiva de género, el uso de la animación en la publicidad. Para ello, este estudio cualitativo, de carácter exploratorio y descriptivo, utiliza el análisis de contenido como herramienta de abordaje. A partir de una ficha de análisis compuesta por 25 indicadores, el análisis parte de un triple enfoque: narratológico, publicitario y de género. La muestra está formada por 22 spots, que utilizan la animación para publicitar productos o servicios, dirigidos a un target joven y/o adulto. Los resultados obtenidos en los tres niveles de análisis permiten afirmar que el uso de la animación es un factor importante motivado por el deseo intencionado de los creativos profesionales de evocar un amplio abanico de emociones. Si bien la mayoría de los anuncios tienen como objetivo transmitir conocimientos relacionados con el producto, algunos de ellos también tienen como objetivo incidir en las actitudes de la audiencia, promoviendo la inclusión, la conciencia de la diversidad o el respeto por la igualdad de género, y en algunos otros reproducen situaciones de sexismo. Hasta cierto punto, estos últimos spots perpetúan el sexismo en la publicidad a través de la animación utilizada como recurso capaz de representar lo que no podría mostrarse con actores reales.*

#### **Palabras clave**

Animación; publicidad; sexismo; perspectiva de género

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between advertising and animation is determined by several factors. The first is the historical factor and has to do with the development of television as a means of mass communication, progressively surpassing cinema as the main source of entertainment for citizens. When television was introduced into households in different countries, broadcasters had to learn how to commercially exploit the new medium—some countries, such as France, were very reluctant to do so because of the public ownership of the broadcasters (Checa, 2007: 140). Obviously, the reference point would be the United States, where the advertising use of television was present almost from the beginning. It emerged at first in the form of sponsorship of entertainment programmes, and soon after, through the spot, which would end up becoming the main format among advertisers. That is where animation came in as a useful resource for persuading early television audiences. In the case of the United States, its presence was evidently determined by the extremely important American film industry, where animation, driven by Walt Disney productions, occupies a prominent place. In the case of Spain, advertising animation was boosted by Estudios Moro, where the Moro brothers developed a multitude of unforgettable advertising works during the first years of advertising on Spanish public television, such as those made for Tío Pepe and Gallina Blanca. Moreover, it should also be pointed out that the long Spanish post-war period hindered the country's economic recovery, and that, despite the developmentalism of the 1960s, producing conventional TV spots was very expensive, hence the advertisers' commitment to animated spots, which were quicker and cheaper to produce.

Besides the influence of the media and historical context, the relationship between animation and advertising is affected by a second factor which has to do with the way advertising messages are produced, where the artistic ideation of creativity (art director) in agencies, that according to Eguizábal (2015) is key for advertising effectiveness, involved cartoonists and designers for decades. These artists have felt very comfortable giving life to animated creations, with serious influences from the various techniques of classical animation, comics and, more recently, the possibilities generated by digital design. Finally, there is a third factor related to the nature of the advertising message, which is eminently persuasive. This is where animation's unique qualities make it especially valid for creating imaginative and surprising stories, for conveying emotion or even for showing what would be difficult to fit into a conventional audiovisual production with real characters. In short, it is a relationship conditioned by the history of the media, by the advertising profession and by the expressiveness of the animated medium itself.

Taking into consideration the advertising persuasion and the resources used for the construction of the message, and based on another area of interest related to this work, it should be commented that, from the gender perspective, advertising has been and is a questioned professional practice that bears a social accusation to promote, among other aspects, gender inequality through its messages (Blanco Fernández, Velasco Rodríguez and González País, 2019). Although Rey (2008) affirms that "advertising is forced to an incessant remodeling of its discourse; a remodeling that takes place every time a new trend emerges, or a social change appears, or there is a transformation in customs" (2008:14), the existing literature is hesitant about the perpetuation of sexist stereotypes in the advertising field. On the one hand, there are studies that state that "sexism in advertising has been changing as society has evolved and is not present in the same way for each type of product" (Martínez Rodríguez, 2018: 16). On the other hand, works such as those made by Simancas González (2019), Vega Saldaña, Barredo Ibáñez and Merchán Clavellino (2019), Díaz Campo and Fernández Gómez (2017), Gil Benítez and Guerrero Salazar (2016) and Cortese (2015) point out the existence of roles and stereotypes that still promote inequality and the assignment of certain values based on gender, also in children's advertising.

Using the tools of advertising discourse analysis and audiovisual narrative, this text addresses a specific issue related to the variables mentioned above, which is the way in which gender is addressed in advertising produced by means of animation.

### Animation as an advertising resource

When one talks about animation, one immediately thinks of films for children, of some films for adult audiences, and perhaps, lastly, of advertising. The fact is that, generally speaking, animation is associated with cinema and childhood due to the relationship inherited from the world of Disney. Even so, the use of animation in other media is not exceptional, as advertising has been using this technique for a century, regardless of the target audience.

The work of Millán Salcedo (2013) takes a brief look, from the 1920s to the year 2000, at some of the advertisements of international brands in which animation is used to sell a product. Some of the examples mentioned in that work are still valid: *Planters Company*, in 1916, created its mascot "Mr. Peanut" (conceived as a silent animated character, now voiced by Robert Downey Jr.); *Kellogg's*, for its product *Frosted Flakes*, recreates the character of "Tony the Tiger" (Leo Burnett agency, 1958); *Burger*

King, in the 1960s, designed "The Burger King", which has changed in appearance over time. Its most current version is known as "The Creepy King". The *General Mills* brand brought "Jolly Green Giant" to life and *Procter & Gamble*, among other advertisers, created "Mr. Clean" (2013: 23-43). According to this author the idea of associating a brand with a visual concept goes back to the time when brands began to define their identity through combination marks (2013: 4). Shortly afterwards, in an attempt to be remembered, brands began to create characters that managed to evoke empathy in the consumer and create memories of the brand, the product and its positioning (Venegas Gandolfo, 2018; Landívar Artieda, 2014; Camará, 2000). With all of this, for Comesaña Comesaña (2011) and Franz (2003) it is evident that animation serves as a support to insert advertising messages creating a more attractive discourse.

Along these lines, researchers and professionals in the field are committed to animation because of its ability to exert influence in advertising. "Animation can explain anything that the human mind can conceive", argues Chong (2010: 22); "with animation, fantastic worlds could be created so that more versatile characters, rather than real, human actors, could communicate the attributes of brands" (Millán Salcedo, 2013: 44). In this sense, Wells (2009) states that "animation is a versatile technique that is part of our popular culture" (2009: 6) and that, from its narrative and aesthetic dimension, it is also conceived as an essential tool capable of getting across different messages. On the other hand, Sáenz (2006) points out that animated characters give shape to the stories and must be constructed with a physical, sociological and psychological dimension, allowing them to manifest "attitudes typical of the target audience" (Camará, 2000: 90-91). Likewise, Puebla (2011) defends the creation of characters with identity and capacity to convey emotions.

In spite of this, and although authors such as Rodríguez Fernández (2009) state that "animation will be a common part of advertising spots" (2009: 59), others, such as Straiton (2006), point out that the use of animation in advertising depends on the product category. The approach of this expert in the field of animation in advertising is supported by the actions of *Procter & Gamble*, which, except on one occasion, does not use animation in its spots "because its research has shown that this technique is not persuasive for cleaning products, which require live action to show greater effectiveness and verisimilitude" (Straiton, 2006: 1).

#### **Animated spots: What is being told and how?**

The idea that advertisements for certain products or services should be responsible for provoking feelings and sensations is a must in today's advertising. If we also add animation to this formula as another element to shape the message, the advertising copywriters' intention to create emotions becomes evident.

Studies such as that of Amorós and Comesaña (2016) show that the relationship between cartoons, advertising and minors provokes admiration for the characters and, therefore, the consumption of certain brands. In the case of adult audiences, advertisers make use of the nostalgia that cartoons can awaken in this target audience, who long for their childhood, to capture their attention and thus achieve memorisation of the advertised brand. Although the use of animation as a strategy is effective in creating different spots, it also "serves to be able to remember immediately" (Venegas Gandolfo, 2018: 179). In view of this claim, authors such as Marugán Solís (2017), Caballero Moreno (2020), and Palacios Chavarro, Marroquín Ciendúa and López Giraldo (2020) argue that the element of humour becomes a key factor. Despite the fact that, in the subcategory of animation, advertising shows more unconscious material and subliminal messages (Payares Turizo and Niño Aragón, 2020) and is capable of transporting audiences to magical places beyond traditional reach (Selby, 2009), it is of interest to analyse what is implicitly and explicitly conveyed through these spots (Barthes, 1971).

Analysing the advertising discourse from the connotative point of view and interrelating it with the interpretation of the spectators is complex given the different sociocultural aspects it entails. We agree with Almagro González (2010) as to the lack of psychosocial theories focused exclusively on the advertising field and its imaginary representations. Even so, the author considers "the need to analyse the way in which imaginary representations are embodied in the filmic fabric of advertisements" (2010: 24) to be essential. To this end, although experts such as León (2001) rely on myth-analysis to get to know the social imaginaries represented through advertisements, Almagro González believes that it is necessary to "resort to the semiology of the image and the semiology of advertising insofar as the meanings go beyond what is represented" and states that "the connotative aspect of images makes them vehicles through which objects and characters go from possessing a tangible materiality to becoming signifying symbols that on many occasions refer back to the imaginary instances of the spectator subject" (2010: 24). The entire approach advocated by the author arises as a rejection of Moscovici's theory of social representations (1979), which he considers incomplete. Almagro González (2010) considers that "social representation is not only limited to cognition or language but must take into account the processes from which the knowledge acquired by the objectification and anchoring of individuals shape their symbolic world" (2010: 29-30).

Under these premises, it is necessary to reflect on the concept of 'anchor' proposed by Tversky and Kahneman (1974). This is a term that, while originating in the economic sciences, is frequently mentioned in psychology and advertising. In the field of advertising, it is conceived as a prior knowledge base. It refers to the information referents related to consumer experiences, but also includes the ideas and/or pre-conceived notions that are part of our imaginary and our culture. Thus, the consumer has identifying elements from which to find a certain familiarity and, with it, the ability to connect with the advertising message displayed. Based on this, and considering the sexist representations in advertising, it is likely that the public will overlook such representations as they are part of their social imaginary, to the point of normalising them. To say that gender inequality is part of our collective imaginary is therefore a statement addressed in the work of Arrieta Zamora (2016), Eisend (2019), Mendieta Díaz (2020), Ramos Frendo (2020) and Verdú Delgado (2014), among others, and as such, advertising has reflected it (Capella, Hill, Rapp and Kees, 2013). The fourth wave of feminism (Brunet Icart, 2020; Aguilar Barriga, 2020) establishes a new situation from the social point of view and from the point of view of individual female freedom, where the call for equality echoes in all discourses; however, advertising, at times, continues to recreate sexist situations that perpetuate an androcentric vision (Barberán Minda and Vega Játiva, 2020). The ethical responsibility of advertising professionals hangs over this reality, which leads to the need to justify why these representations are made (Tuncay Zayer and Coleman, 2015). Although works such as those by González Anleo, Cortés del Rosario and Garcelán Vargas (2018), Lin (2019) and Vaca Torres, Carpio Jiménez, Barrazueta and Ordóñez (2019) timidly point towards a change in favour of equality in the field of advertising, all the previous factors show why a continuous review is essential.

## 2. Methodology

Considering the analysis of advertising discourse and audiovisual narrative, this text presents a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive study that addresses a specific issue related to the treatment of gender in advertising produced through animation, and it does so through a triple approach (narratological, advertising and gender) that is scarcely covered in the academic literature on communication. Thus, the aim of this work is twofold. Firstly, it aims to analyse the construction, from a narrative and advertising point of view, of those advertisements that use animation and present products or services aimed at a young and adult target audience<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, it aims to describe sexist representations, paying attention to the humanised characters in their spheres of action, as well as the references and resources that they implement.

The sample used consists of 22 spots. They have been selected following three criteria: 1. Importance (international advertisers), 2. Relevance (the subject matter under study is core to the story represented) and 3. Availability. In addition, it has been taken into account that 4. They must present products and/or services aimed at a young and adult target audience, 5. They must use animation, 6. They must be used at a national and international level, 7. Issued in any media in the last five years. Thus, the sample is showed in Table 1:

**Table 1. Spots analyzed**

### **Audi**

*The doll that chose to drive*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-siux-rWQM>

*Forever and ever*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfsscCAMKL8>

*A shorter letter*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWrawfNpi8U>

### **Apple**

*Share Your Gifts*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhpHXvHHIG8>

### **ChocoFlakes (Cuétara)**

*Get smart, sweetie (two versions)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8l6iCgw9uc&list=PLOs1Kep84DjplaC1QxZWQu7qWt9p1LRmq&index=11>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9QuPqR-esE>

*ChocoFlakes Ken*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6VWvWveAGw>

### **La Piara**

*La Piara, as nice as pie*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C82eDqTdFhE>

### **Red Bull**

*Confession*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXXjU4KUic0>

*Hotel Mama*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbXudRDwUNg>

*Last Will*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEOSrjJmiWI>

*The Three Wise Men*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTBdC-PNVHK>

*Adam and Eve*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyWxoQ1Jlws>

### **Trina**

*Three Oranges and a Destiny*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfRz-2wqaOA>

### **Android**

*Rock, Paper, Scissors*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0KyZNoVhD8>

### **Erste Group Bank**

*What would Christmas be without Love*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcx7hBWeULM>

### **Heinz**

*A can size for every Aussie!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6i5LvyywRp4E>

### **Loterías y Apuestas del Estado-España**

*Justino*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEJNNs9N3Ew>

### **Coca-Cola**

*Happiness Factory (two versions)*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdFO\\_meO7II](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdFO_meO7II)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhjrlY50hoQ>

### **Seguros Génesis**

*Snoopy*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z702hcg34eY>

Source: Own elaboration.

The approach tool is content analysis, understood as "a research technique designed to formulate, on the basis of certain data, reproducible and valid inferences that can be applied to their context" (Krippendorff, 1990: 28), and, more specifically, considering it as a practice of persuasive communication that "is used as a procedure for the selection and analysis of communicative products that objectively belong to that communication, that are significant for understanding it from a theoretical perspective, and that are valid or pertinent for testing conditions, both particular and general" (Piñuel, 2002: 40). In advertising communication, "content analysis has been successfully tested to test hypotheses and make inferences" (Clemente and Santalla, 1991: 64-65). However, as the spots in the sample belong to a narrative category, it is also necessary to use audiovisual narrative as an analytical technique.

The analysis template for data collection, which was developed by the authors themselves (although the advertising block uses classifications from Joannis (1996) and SRI<sup>[2]</sup> International), consists of 25 indicators divided into three blocks:

Narrative analysis.

1. Character type by gender (F/M). 2. Age of the characters (F/M). 3. Character as a person. 4. Character as a role. 5. Character as an actor. 6. Stereotype. 7. Human/non-human character (H/NH). 8. Type of action. 9. Active character. 10. Passive character. 11. Acting scheme. 12. Simple structure. 13. Complex structure. 14. Transformations. 15. Behavioural change. 16. Other spatial-temporal issues.

Gender analysis.

17. Patriarchal attitudes according to the gender of the characters (F/M) (verbal, behavioural, action, relationship with the same sex, relationship with the opposite sex, apparent or explicit sexual orientation, and evolution or change in attitudes).

18. Non-patriarchal attitudes according to the gender of the characters (F/M) (verbal, behavioural, action, fixed, evolving, contradictory and withdrawn)

Advertising analysis.

19. Target audience according to socio-demographic variables and according to SRI International's VALS system. 20. Communication objectives (in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours). 21. Strategic creativity (in positioning and target). 22. Campaign axis according to its type (rational or emotional), definition and creative concept. 23. Type of message (product, result, universe). 24. Expressive creativity according to Joannis and others. 25. Rhetorical figures. 26. Other advertising factors.

### 3. Results

#### Results obtained from the narrative analysis

Firstly, this analysis addresses general questions focusing on formats. These formats vary widely and include nano-film (4), micro-film (3) and short film (2). The genres chosen to tell the stories are comedy (in the form of a gag or sketch), romantic comedy, romance, fable and realistic drama. 90% of the world models represented are non-plausible fiction, creating fantastic and magical universes in all cases, either through the humanisation of non-human characters or through the actions or events that take place.

As for the Christmas setting, present in 6 spots, it is eye-catching, with the most elaborate production and realisation, the longest duration and the products with the highest economic value and brand value.

Another remarkable element is the absence of dialogue in 8 of the spots, giving prevalence to action, visuality and the aesthetic component. On the other hand, despite the use of animation, the characters are mostly human or non-human but humanised, so the use of animation has nothing to do with the impossibility of finding real actors in a casting—it is intentional.

The importance of the aesthetic and emotional aspects, together with the brevity of the formats, results in very simple narrative, diegetic and temporal structures, with only two cases of a higher level of diegetic complexity consisting of a story within a story or two different levels of reality between the imagination and the "reality of the character". The same happens with the enunciation, where only a few narrators and narrator signs appear, apart from the odd institutional voice, whose presence is usually contained in the final label.

From the analysis of the characters, we know that the number is uneven: between 2 in the shorter formats and 3 in the longer ones. There is always only one main protagonist who does not get an antagonist, given the brevity of the stories.

Of all the characters found (67), 24 are female, 32 are male and 11 are asexual. They are within the binary system of sexuality and there is no representation of non-heteronormative characters (we can see profiles of male and female characters in Table 2).

Male numerical superiority also means narrative superiority, with 11 advertisements featuring male protagonists. Of the remaining ones, only 4 are female characters and 2 share male and female protagonists.

The ages represented in both sexes are variable: babies, children, adolescents, young people, mature, elderly and of undefined ages in humanised and non-humanised characters.

The characterisation of the female characters (with the exception of the cases of mature women and grandmothers) corresponds to beautiful, slim and blond girls and young women.

The characterisation of male characters alternates between young and handsome men (although more varied: brunets and blonds, tall or not, thin or not, white and in one case black) and ageing, mature protagonists.

The roles of women are the young working girl (1), fairy (1), passive inanimate doll (2), active doll (1), fearless but love-struck princess (1), dreamy and good girl (1), passive teenager (1), young trickster (2), grandmother (1), mother (4). The latter role is highly represented, appearing as the young pregnant mother in the kitchen, the mother who has just given birth, the mature mother shopping in the supermarket, and the older mother hanging out and chatting with the neighbour. It is important to note that the women's roles, with the exception of the young girl from Apple, are linked to their family role (daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, etc.) and their activities are reduced to domestic or caring environments (shopping, cooking, laundry, etc.).

The male roles, being more numerous, are also varied but the most common is that of the hooligan (4 spots), accompanied by the good boy (2), the efficient notary (1), the stubborn grandfather (1), the good-natured priest (1), the fathers (4). The paternal role is also highlighted in the analysed sample and the presence of new masculine behaviour is observed in the distribution of domestic tasks, such as cooking, knitting and taking care of the children.

Finally, the study of the actions reveals that the actions of the female characters respond to patriarchal patterns of domestic care, personal grooming or provocation of the male characters, as well as passivity in the face of male actions. It is worth noting the portrayal of the working woman, who lives alone and has hobbies.

The portrayals of male characters involve action, in the sense of physical action, and tend to be reflexive, seeking personal gain from the action. In several cases, violence is used, with the exception of two portrayals of caring fathers and another two of mature, ageing workers.

The masculinisation of the actions of female characters is observed as an equalising element, such as competitiveness in car races or the desire to drive, as if it were still something exclusive to the male character and strange to the female character.

Actions of solidarity, kindness, change of inappropriate behaviour (such as rejection of someone or integration into the group) occur in those spots where the characters are not human (objects or animals) and do not have dialogue.

Sexist actions and dialogue are used to the extreme to provoke laughter (in ChocoFlakes Ken under the scheme of the comic gag). In these comic spots, the power of suggestive dialogue is also used to sexually mark the discourse, using "pears" in the literal sense, but with a wink to the figurative sense. And there is explicit narrative sexism in the plot development, as there is in Red Bull's ads, thanks to the recurrently developed dialogue.

**Table 2. Profiles of male and female characters**  
**Characters according to representative superiority**

Male (main protagonists of the spots)

Female

Asexual

**Characterisation of the characters**

**Male characterisation**

Young and mature ageing protagonists

Physical appearance: brunettes and blondes, diversity in height and physical constitution (slight, strong and medium). Mostly Caucasian.

**Female characterisation**

Girls and women.

Physical appearance: blondes, according to Western beauty canon and slight build.

**Roles**

**Male roles by frequency of representation**

Hooligan, fathers (sometimes representing new masculinities), good boy, efficient notary, stubborn grandfather and the good-natured priest

**Female roles by frequency of representation**

Mothers, young trickster, passive inanimate doll, active doll, working girl, dreamy and good girl and passive teenager

**Actions**

Female characters: characters respond to patriarchal patterns

\*Highlight: working woman, who lives alone and has hobbies.

\*Highlight: masculinisation of the actions of female characters.

Male characters: action-based representations

Asexual characters: Actions of solidarity and kindness.

Source: Own elaboration.

**Results obtained from the gender analysis.**

In the analysed spots, patriarchal and non-patriarchal situations are observed in the way male and female characters are represented. While the most frequent forms are behavioural, *machismo* is also detected through the dialogue and the actions of the protagonists. In addition to the male characters, the female characters reproduce androcentric discourses. The brands that perpetuate the gender difference through their ads are Audi, ChocoFlakes, La Piara, Red Bull and Trina.

Upon closer analysis of the characters that engage in situations of gender inequality, 10 are male and manifest some type of patriarchal behaviour through the behavioural, verbal and action indicators (in this order, according to the most frequent). 11 are female and are listed as victims of the former.

The patriarchal attitudes implicit in the behaviour of the male characters manifest themselves through different situations: courtship (detected in the spot *La muñeca que eligió conducir* [The doll that chose to drive] by Audi, when the cars simulate whistles and compliments when they roar their engines and approach the main doll, replicating an attitude akin to harassment), the man's bravery and lack of control at the sight of a naked woman (in Red Bull's *Adam and Eve*), the behaviour of the man as the 'conqueror and saviour of the girl' (romantic love in *Por siempre jamás* [Forever and ever]), and the stereotypical behaviour of the boy in *Por siempre jamás*, playing the stereotype of the adventurous boy with a predilection for cars and superheroes. In the ChocoFlakes spots, we can observe the violent behaviour of the brand's mascot towards the female character, but also against the metrosexuality represented through the Ken doll, whose physical aspect contrasts that of the main character. Thus, the mascot reproduces the stereotype of the rough and violent man.

On the other hand, the way in which Chocoflake's mascot addresses the girl also reveals patriarchal attitudes through the verbal aspect. Similarly, in the Red Bull spots *Confession* and *Adam and Eve*, male



characters refer to women jokingly in a sexual context. In *The Three Wise Men*, the figure of the 'man as controller of the woman' (who is shown as playing the role of the caring mother) is observed.

As for the actions carried out, once again, we see the superiority of the (male) ChocoFlakes mascot when he throws the doll that co-stars in the spot through the air, thus reproducing violence towards women.

Finally, the indicator 'relationship with the same sex' also accentuates gender inequality. *La Piara, más buenos que el pan* [La Piara, as nice as pie] projects the idea that strength is a virtue inherent to men. This can be seen as Popeye appears next to a child, both showing the strength acquired after consuming the advertised product.

Some of the female characters also perpetuate gender inequality through their behaviour, their verbal communication, their actions and their relationship with the opposite sex (in this order, according to frequency).

The female characters, through their behaviour, reproduce female stereotypes in the two Audi spots (on the one hand, the representation of the coquettish girl, with delicate gestures and dressed in a pink dress and high heels; on the other hand, the fairy-tale princess). Similarly, in *Last Will*, the woman in the role of lover is depicted as a femme fatale with a sexy and exuberant look.

As for the verbal references, it is striking how in *La muñeca que eligió conducir* the character in the role of mother maintains a dialogue with her child in which sexism in toys is accentuated. The idea that there are some toys for boys and others for girls is normalised. In this same spot, and according to the actions carried out, female stereotypes are perpetuated by those characters that portray the role of mother and by stereotypes based on artistic discipline (ballet dancer), as well as by the portrayal of women who are fond of make-up. The ads *The Three Wise Men* and *Hotel Mama* show the role of the mother who is anchored to the domestic space, and the humorous tone of the spot is based on this portrayal.

Finally, and in relation to the indicator 'relationship with the opposite sex', we must comment on the interpretation of the Trina spot, *Tres naranjas y un destino* [Three oranges and a destiny]. It shows two pears lying in the sun in a sexy pose, which is a way of attracting the attention of the male characters (the oranges). This shows the use of the female body as a resource to be claimed by men.

As far as non-patriarchal attitudes are concerned, although the ad *La muñeca que eligió conducir* was one of the ads that most accentuated gender inequality, at the same time, it was the one that represented the greatest number of non-sexist attitudes. In it, we find the presence of 2 male and 3 female characters who, through the action indicator, demonstrate activities free of sexist connotations. Its intention is to eradicate sexism in toys (something that can also be seen in the spot *Por siempre jamás*), to eliminate the traditional association between strong men (represented by the soldier) and the rosy world linked to girls, as well as to break with inequalities in sport by showing women playing football. Even so, the intended commitment to gender equality is not real, as the message is constructed on the basis of the sexist connotations explained above.

On the other hand, and in reference to the indicator 'defined attitude', it is observed that the *Por siempre jamás* ad highlights the representation of a new masculinity regarding domestic chores.

Finally, in terms of the 'evolving' attitude, the Share Your Gift spot (Apple) shows that the brand is committed to linking technologies to women.

### **Results obtained from the advertising analysis**

The advertisements are primarily targeted at young (16), mature (11) and/or adolescent (7) audiences, with a minority targeting infants (1) and none targeting the elderly. In relation to gender, the target audience is distributed proportionally between men (15) and women (13), and it is common for the campaigns to address both. The habitat of the target is often indeterminable. Regarding social class, 18 of the 22 ads are aimed at the middle class. Exceptionally, as in the case of Audi ads, they target an upper-middle class audience, or even more popular audiences, such as Red Bull's *Hotel Mama*. According to SRI International's VALS classification, almost half of the ads (10) are aimed at the 'hardened' type, as in the Erste or Heinz ads, to a greater extent than at the 'believers' (5), either reflected in the Genesis' Snoopy ad, or the 'experimenters' (3), the target audience of the Red Bull *Adam and Eve* spot.

In terms of objectives, the predominant ones are the communication ones related to the transmission of knowledge (14 out of 22 ads), in some cases communicating the properties of the product (energisers in the ChocoFlakes spot or Red Bull), and in others announcing a mere discount for good drivers (Génesis)

or the diversity of product formats (Heinz). There is also a significant number of advertisements (7) whose communication objective focuses on attitudes, and they favour inclusion, equality, diversity or responsible consumption. At Android or Erste, we can talk about real Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) campaigns. Finally, some ads—the least—, have behavioural objectives (in *Justino*, Lotería de Navidad).

In general, no major strategic innovations have been found in positioning or target groups that are not already common in advertising, such as the defence of diversity or gender equality, except perhaps for the very young, urban, single woman as an audience for the Apple ad, and Audi's positioning in favour of responsible consumption in its *Una carta más corta* [A shorter letter] ad. In this case, an unusual message in the automotive sector (reasonable consumption) with a history of patriarchal features has been followed to advertise a family car.

In terms of the campaign axes, they are primarily emotional (Coca-Cola being the paradigm with the axis of happiness), except for three of them that have more rational axes.

On the other hand, creative concepts are indirect in all cases (22), since they build a story to communicate indirectly the strategic axis of the campaign, increasing its persuasive capacity. And when it comes to conceiving these advertising narratives, 11 stories focus on the results of product consumption, generating a 'result message' (La Píara, *Justino* or all the Red Bull ads); while in 7 cases a 'universe message' is conceived around the product (Heinz and Trina); and, finally, on 4 occasions a 'product message' is constructed (Genésis spot or *Happiness Factory*).

Following Joannis's classification, the resources of expressive creativity are used intensively in sympathetic hyperbolisation (15 ads), followed by significant personification (11 times), in some cases through the construction of characters of their own (*Justino* from Lotería de Navidad, Geoff from Heinz or the hedgehog from Erste Group) or pre-existing characters (The Virgin Mary or The Three Kings in Red Bull, Snoopy in Genésis...). Qualitative transfiguration is also used to make the pieces more expressive and spectacular in 7 cases, and there are also 5 unexpected references as core elements of the stories.

In term of the use of rhetorical figures, all advertisements contained at least one figure of speech, as is usual in advertising discourse. The frequency of occurrence is as follows: personification (15), metaphor (13), hyperbole (11), metonymy (8), antithesis (8), comparison (5), parallelism (3), ellipsis (2), and, with only one occurrence, rhyme, anaphora, reticence, irony and reification. In total, there are 70 uses of rhetorical figures, both in the textual and audiovisual components, with an average of more than three figures per animation. Personification is very present, because usually animals or things adopt human qualities in audiovisual animation. Metaphors and metonymy are also very common. Examples of the former include the flower in the Android ad as a metaphor for peace and friendship, on a visual level, or the slogan "Welcome to the Coke side of life" by Coca-Cola, where happiness is replaced by the brand, on a textual level. Examples of metonymy are the red on Geoff's cheek from the Heinz ad, as part of the romantic scene obscured by the closed door in the image, and, in the text, the famous slogan "Red Bull gives you wings", as part of the action that enables the person to "fly" in different stages of life. As advertising is hyperbolic per se, it is easy to find examples of this resource in the *Justino* spot, *Happiness Factory* or the exaggerated and violent behaviour of the ChocoFlakes mascot. Another group of related-function figures is antithesis and comparison, which add up to 13 cases. Outstanding examples of antithesis are the portrayal of the widow and lover in Red Bull's *Last Will* ad, the use of blue or pink in the Audi ads, or the day or night work in the Lotería de Navidad ad. And by way of comparison, we find the children in the ad for Audi's Letter to the Three Wise Men, the behaviour of the different rocks in the Android ad, or the life of the hedgehog and that of the others in the Erste Group ad. There are also striking parallels, even anaphoric, in the case of Erste Group and Lotería de Navidad.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

Considering the results drawn from the three levels of analysis, it can be affirmed that the use of animation is an important factor beyond the aesthetic-visual aspect, driven by the creative team's voluntary and intentional desire to evoke a wide range of emotions.

In order to foster emotion, from a narrative point of view, there are few elements that animation can add over and above what a real image could do. In other words, the use of animation itself does not add anything more to the story than what a real actor could do. It is particularly relevant that the non-human animated characters are the ones with the most non-sexist behaviour—especially the asexual ones that are not identifiable with any gender, and also lack the ability to speak. The rest of the humanised characters always engage in actions and emotions that, in some way, explicitly show verbal or behavioural sexism, thus demonstrating a reinforcement in the use of the traditional feminine representation of Western social imaginary, despite a timid representation of a new masculinity and a new, more masculinised femininity. From this, it can be inferred that the use of animation at this narrative

level is more related to two elements than to the creation of a story in itself: on the one hand, it is showed the awakening of the endearing childlike emotion of the adult consumer, a statement that Venegas Gandolfo defends in 2018. On the other, in line with the research published by Millán Salcedo in 2013, it is observed the possibility of generating unrealistic universes where the characters can be excused from doing or saying things that would definitely be alarming and reprehensible behaviour in any current advertising campaign performed by real actors.

From the point of view of advertising strategy and creativity, it can be said that the campaigns analysed are primarily aimed at middle-class young people, a target audience that welcomes animation as a form of expression, as well as emotionally charged messages, as is the case in most of the TV spots studied. Although most of the advertisements aim to convey product-related knowledge, a third of them also aim to influence the audience's attitudes, promoting inclusion, awareness of diversity or respect for gender equality. In any case, the latter is not a differentiating factor between this type of advertising and that which uses other forms of expression. Something similar happens with the intense use of result messages, hyperbole or humour, which are very present in the advertisements analysed, but also in audiovisual advertising as a whole. However, this study finds some qualities of animation that differentiate it from other types of images; for example, the absolute presence of indirect creative concepts in the corpus, making animation a skilful expressive resource for the indirect communication of the campaign axes through complex stories; as well as the prominent presence of significant personification, with animation facilitating the construction of referential or significant characters for the target audience. In this sense, and focusing on those spots that reproduce sexist situations and gender inequality, the results obtained in this study confirm what Barberán Minda and Vega Játiva (2020) affirm about how advertising, on occasions, continues to recreate sexist situations that perpetuate gender inequality. The way in which these brands perpetuate sexism by using animation as a resource that is capable of showing that which goes beyond reality is a cause for concern. Likewise, and although authors like Marugán Solís (2017), Caballero Moreno (2020) and Palacios Chavarro, Marroquín Ciendúa and López Giraldo (2020) defend that humorous element is important in advertising, the results of this study consider dangerous how, in some cases, humour permeates the essence of the sexist message. In a situation where the young audiences targeted by these spots are intoxicated by the sensations that these messages bring them, they do not notice their conceptualisation from a gender perspective. If we combine this with the fact that young people do not identify the situations of gender-based violence reproduced by animated characters (Sánchez-Labela Martín, 2016) or, in some cases, those that occur in real life (Bajo Pérez, 2020), the scenario becomes even more complex.

## 5. Bibliography

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**Notes**

1. Based on the INE, the young audience is the population under 16 years of age and the adult audience is the population between 16 and 64 years of age. Available in <http://envejecimiento.csic.es/documentos/documentos/enred-indicadoresbasicos2019.pdf>
2. SRI International VAL's system. Available in [www.sri.com](http://www.sri.com)