

# IROCAMM.

INTERNATIONAL	REVIEW	
OF	COMMUNICATION	
AND	MARKETING	MIX

the *mainstream* review on  
communication

**N. 1, VOL. 2.**  
[www.irocamm.com](http://www.irocamm.com)

**VOL 2**

**N. 1**



**PUBLISHERS**  
University of Sevilla

**PUBLISHING LOCATION**  
Seville – Spain

**E-MAIL AND WEBSITE**  
info@irocamm.com  
www.irocamm.com

<https://editorial.us.es/es/irocamm-international-review-communication-and-marketing-mix>

**ORIGINAL DESIGN**  
LA HUERTA  
www.lahuertaagencia.com

**ISSN**  
2605-0447

**DOI**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM>



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**IROCAMM.**

INTERNATIONAL	REVIEW
OF	COMMUNICATION
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## Brand management from a cultural approach.

Case study of consumer brands that operate in the Spanish market.

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### Abstract

The relationship between brands and culture is not something new for brand managers. Starting from a situation of social tension characterized by the anxieties and the vital desires of a society, the management of brands based on the cultural branding model, allows to build brands that manage to absorb and reflect the culture that surrounds them becoming containers of identity myths that advertisers take advantage of to create attractive messages for their audiences. This approach, devised by Douglas B. Holt (2004), proposes to work on the collective nature of the brand through its interaction with everyday situations and its relationship with the cultural environment that surrounds it. This communication proposes to analyze the cases of Campofrío and IKEA as potential cultural brands. The results indicate that, in effect, these brands manage to advertise themselves as iconic brands that have been able to take advantage of the social tensions and disruptions experienced by the Spaniards such as feminism, brain drain or political polarity, to issue a relevant and attractive message for potential consumers.

### Keywords

Advertising; cultural branding; culture; icon; myth.



# 1. Introduction

There are many perspectives from which to address the management of major brands. The market has evolved towards a sophistication that can be evidenced in the creation, production or distribution of the products that inevitably require a deep revision in the communicational field. Specifically, the brands have been moving towards a scenario in which they are configured as a fundamental strategic value (Fernández Gómez, 2013) that require a refinement of the content of the messages they broadcast to their target audience. In this sense, brands have been acquiring a great transformation manifested in a greater interest in the construction of messages that interact fluidly with the cultural universe of the consumer.

The study of brands from a cultural perspective has been recognized by various disciplines, such as anthropology, history or sociology, which recognize the complexity of their formulation and development, taking into account psychosocial factors (Schroeder, 2009). In the specific field of communication, the relationship between brands and culture is not something new for brand managers. The well-known model of cultural branding (Holt, 2004), starts from a situation of social tension characterized by the anxieties and the vital desires of a society, to build powerful brands based on the absorption and reflection of the culture that surrounds them. The implementation of this model requires a great knowledge of the culture that surrounds the market of the target audience to which the messages are directed by the experts. It is a complex process that is based on the communication of stories capable of linking the identity of individuals with the brand, that is, of generating significant myths for the lives of consumers that appeal to their insight.

This communication aims to analyze the specific case of two brands with wide recognition and tradition in the Spanish market: Campofrío and IKEA. After a preliminary exploratory analysis of the most significant advertising campaigns of these companies, we can see a possible application of this model for the development of the communicative actions of both brands. To this end, this research aims to find out if, in effect, the advertising campaigns broadcast on television have followed a cultural branding model to attract their consumers, evidenced by a series of previously defined guidelines and mechanisms.

## 2. An approach to the theory of cultural branding

This approach, devised by Douglas B. Holt (2004), proposes to work in the management of the brands, taking into account the collective nature of the same through their interaction with everyday situations and their relationship with the cultural environment that surrounds them. It is an operationalization of culture that assumes that the brand is inserted in a cultural dynamic, which implies that the meanings associated with it are reality collective.

This perspective is clearly different from other conventional brand management models. In effect, the cultural branding model goes beyond classic management in which brands and products are consumed for their ability to satisfy needs. This model allows us to understand the objects of consumption from their intangible properties, those that only exist in the mind of the individual and that do not emanate from the observed object (Batey, 2013). In effect, Holt's theory assumes that consumption choices are not made only considering functional utility, but also cultural meanings.

Given that the brand is conceived as a cultural artifact (Holt, 2004), the consumer is seen as a key element in the branding process, since both the subject and its context are key to the creation of its value (Heding, Knudtzen and Bjerre, 2009). The product is understood by consumers as a simple conduit through which they can experience the stories that the brand communicates (Holt, 2004: 36). Then, the value of the product lies in its ability to provide consumers with a way to experience those stories.

Holt understands that the product market is based on substitutability and consists of the evaluation of products through their usefulness. In this way, cultural branding proposes a so-called "myth market" in which products compete with others in the achievement of myths that resolve cultural contradictions that worry consumers (Holt, 2005). Thus, it is noted that although the global conjecture that culture is something that is in constant movement, the ideology must be relatively stable for members of society (Holt, 2004). The principles of cultural branding rest on a series of archetypal constructions that legitimize this premise and that are included within the antecedents that support this theory.

Although there are periods of disruption in which radical changes occur, in general, the author emphasizes, society lives in a certain equilibrium (Holt, 2004). In this view, Ollé & Riu add that any cultural change, social event or economic movement can have an impact on the context of the brand and the meanings that are configured around it (2009: 112). These cultural changes, termed by Holt as cultural disruptions, lead to the

idea that when interruptions are reached, iconic brands must reinvent their myth, or their relevance will fade (2004: 23). Those recognized as "iconic brands" are sensitive to these disruptions and, precisely, they are understood as an opportunity to reach the consumer (Holt, 2004: 39-40). At this point, it seems logical to ask about the relationship between these myths and the culture of consumption. Holt argues that myths rest on what he rightly calls populist worlds and that they establish themselves as groups that express a distinctive ideology through their activities (2004: 58). This is what the author says when he affirms that they are powerful cultural sites because the public perceives that the ideologies of these worlds are authentic (Holt, 2004: 58). In this sense, for the myth to be configured as an agent that legitimizes the meaning of the brand. For this, the myths take advantage of these populist worlds as a raw material to incorporate the so-called iconic brands (Holt, 2004: 59). It is, therefore, a mechanism that predisposes the consumer towards the incorporation of a series of values that he wants to add to his life.

In short, brands become important cultural agents. Far from being understood as simple mediators, they would be ideological references that help shape economic activity, rituals and social norms through myth (Schroeder, 2009: 124). In fact, for the cultural model, the consideration of a brand as an icon results, precisely, from the capacity that it has to satisfy social needs at a given historical moment (Holt, 2004: 2). Therefore, brands would not really compete in a product market, but in a "myth market", in which goods and services offer stories capable of orienting the consumer and solving even the cultural contradictions that concern him (Holt, 2005: 26). Precisely these cultural contradictions are key to the implementation of the model, whose active principle is developed around the social changes experienced by consumers.

### 3. Icon brands as a result of the cultural branding management model

As we have been commenting, the values that the myths contain are experienced thanks to what the author calls "icon marks". The main purpose of cultural branding would be to develop the iconic character of a brand, as this would help it to deeply connect with consumers who feel identified with the myths (Fernández, 2013: 155). The iconic brand is a system, it has a mechanism that allows it to absorb and reflect the culture that surrounds it. In this sense, it is sensitive to social tensions and changes, and therefore operates as a means to reach the consumer more transcendently (Holt, 2004: 39-40). Ollé & Riu (2009: 112) point out that any cultural change, social event or economic movement can have an impact on the context of the brand and the meanings that are configured around it. These cultural changes are identified by Holt as cultural tensions, and are assumed by the model as keys to managing the brand. When these disruptions are reached, the brands must reinvent their myth, or else their relevance will vanish (Holt, 2004: 23). In this scenario, those that legitimately and effectively represent ideas or myths that are assumed -and are constituted as- important to society are recognized as "iconic brands".

The strength of those iconic brands that reach consumers is based on the universal character that characterizes the stories that incorporate these brands. This idea responds to one of the features that precisely characterize the myth, that is, its universality. Following Campbell, the fundamental themes of mythology have been constant and universal (1994: 31). In fact, as Cassirer affirms that anthropologists and ethnologists have often been surprised to find the same elemental thoughts distributed throughout the surface of the earth and in the most diverse social and cultural conditions (1994: 114). That is why the myth has a feature of universality that, according to Campbell, is evident in the parallels that present the different myths over time (1991: 29). In this way, the importance of myth as a resource for brands is also evident thanks to the universality that characterizes the stories. In this way, cultural icons are examples of symbols that people have accepted as shortcuts to represent important ideas. The essence of the icons is that what they represent is considered as the most irresistible symbol of a set of values or ideas that society appreciates as relevant (Holt, 2004: 183-184).

Advancing his theory, the American emphasizes that the iconic brands do not imitate the existing culture, so that they are erected as cultural innovations that, through stylistic techniques, determine the way of acting and thinking of the audience (Holt, 2004: 85). In fact, the author warns that for these myths to be accepted by the public, the communications of the iconic brands must exude charisma; a distinctive characteristic that, according to the author, is based on a convincing style that symbolizes the populist worlds (Holt, 2004: 65). In effect, the myths of the brand triumph as long as the chosen myth is founded on the authentic populist world of the brand and provided that, in turn, it is executed through a charismatic style (Holt, 2004: 65). In

this sense, brands have an important impact on the global culture, which, through this model, helps to change the culture at a deeper level, to influence how people understand themselves in relation to the ideals of the nation (Holt, 2004: 85). To that end, Batey argues that brands that become culturally dominant offer their consumers a vocabulary, both literal and metaphorical, a brand narrative of which they can be a part and a way of life (2013: 302). At the same time, Holt alludes to that everyday life lived by consumers through the myth comes from the authenticity that, as we saw, incorporated the populist worlds. In short, the cultural branding approach proposed by Holt not only presents as an illustrative model of how brands operate in relation to culture, but also, in the author's opinion, constitutes an answer to the problem found by the author. brand management at the time of understanding how brands create identity through cultural symbols (cfr 2005: 6). In short, the approach of cultural branding is not only presented as an illustrative model of the relationship between brands and culture, but also, in Holt's opinion (2004: 6), constitutes an answer to the problem he faces. brand management at the time of understanding how brands create an identity in a symbolic way.

## 4. Methodology

This communication aims to analyze the cases of Campofrío and IKEA as possible brands that have managed their communications from a cultural branding model. For this, a qualitative methodology based on an interpretative and critical approach to its audiovisual pieces has been carried out. The criteria for the selection of brands respond, on the one hand, to the importance and value of brands by consumers, and, on the other, to their a priori, connection with the cultural model. In the case of Campofrío, this brand has been the company most chosen by the Spanish in the ranking of brands of Great Consumption according to Brand Footprint 2018. As for IKEA, it has been recognized by the Foro de Marcas Renombradas as one of the most important brands considered as real and coherent among its consumers in the year 2018.

The sample of the advertising pieces analyzed consists of all the audiovisual campaigns broadcast on television from the period of 2008 to 2018 of both brands. For the collection of the pieces has gone to the official channel of YouTube of both brands. In tune with the interpretative approach, through this selection we did not seek a statistical representation of the results, but to deepen in the significant richness of the selected pieces.

In order to carry out an analysis of the cultural content of the selected pieces, an analysis of the discourse based on the operationalization of the cultural branding model proposed by Holt has been carried out. It should be noted that to enrich this interpretative approach, the works of Williamson (1978) and Bernárdez (2007) have been taken as reference, from which this type of analysis is understood as an interpretative exercise. Regarding the processes of meaning, characterized by a structural approach to the text capable of deepening in symbolic and cultural aspects. This perspective will allow us to look beyond the text, recognizing those contextual and cultural aspects, insofar as culture is understood as a system of beliefs and practices of symbolic value (Geertz, 1990).

## 5. Discussion of the results

The analysis of the sample has yielded a total of 22 advertising pieces that have offered an interesting starting point for the enrichment of the theory of cultural branding. Among the pieces analyzed, important differences are observed with respect to the brands. On the one hand, the case of Campofrío is the one that manifests a discourse closer to cultural branding in the design of its campaigns. Of the total of the 11 campaigns, only the campaigns "Vegetarians", "4 senses" and "Take care more", have shown a less proximity to the cultural discourse. Although they maintain a style and commercial objectives similar to the rest of the campaigns in which the consumer is appealing in a direct and recognizable way, the theme and the message communicated do not conform to the variables described by Holt's theory.

Something similar happens, although to a greater extent, in 5 of the campaigns of the IKEA brand, the so-called: "Bienvenido a la república independiente de mi casa", "No es más rico el que más tiene sino el que menos necesita", "Oh Dios mío", "#Terapia" and "LLave Allen Mansión". These pieces manifest a strategy that appeals directly to consumer insight whose objective is to publicize the products of the brand without considering the cultural mechanisms. However, the remaining campaigns do reveal cultural content in their strategies.

First of all, we highlight the IKEA campaign "Donde caben dos caben tres" (2009). Inserted in a social context characterized by the Spanish economic crisis, the piece shows the daily life of a large family that gathers to eat in which one of the first-born announces that he needs to return home due to what is suggested by an

economic problem. The narration of the announcement is interrupted by that moment and a lot of emphasis is placed on the looks of the rest of the relatives who seem to receive the news with some expectation and uncertainty. This scene is very significant in cultural terms since it clearly reflects the social context experienced. At a time when many Spaniards felt uneasy and uneasy due to the labor and economic situation, IKEA manages to draw attention to that moment that appeals directly to the cultural situation experienced by our country and that is a nod to the consumer he feels fully identified with the situation of the character who needs to return home. The narrative continues with the acceptance of the father of the family who without any problem declares that "where two fit, there are three", making reference to the fact that, if their parents lived at home before, why not make room for one more, in this case, your son. From that moment, what follows is a series of situations that reveal what could be conceived as a cultural myth characteristic of Spanish society: generosity. Through the images IKEA manages to show numerous situations in which acts of sharing are given. Share a sofa, a drink, a table. These are situations carefully selected by the brand in which not only the furniture of the brand is shown, but at the same time, the moments of generosity are evident in a context of joy played by a melody that constantly repeats the idea that where two fit, fit three. Somehow with this piece IKEA shows us that the home is a safe place to go when things go wrong and reminds its target the greatness of generosity that characterizes the Spanish culture. In this sense, from a strategic point of view, the linking of this cultural context and the company is an undoubtedly successful approach since it manages to present the product in a much more sophisticated way.

Other paradigmatic campaigns are those of "La otra carta" and the recent Christmas campaign titled "Familiarizados". Both share traits that point towards a use of the cultural branding strategy. In this case, the brand focuses on family ties. As previously mentioned, iconic brands take advantage of social tensions at certain moments in a culture, to launch a clear message to cling to. In the specific case of these campaigns, the tension is identified with the generalized social situation of not having time. Work schedules, traffic jams or social demands, warn the life of these characters established in a chaos that does not allow spending quality time with their families. This tension is manifested in the pieces through the ignorance of some children who do not know what their parents are doing but they know the lives of other people thanks to social networks. This is the case of the "Familiarizados" ad, which shows that families do not know many aspects of their relatives because they do not spend time together. Time is spent on other issues such as television or social networks. In the case of "La otra carta", something similar happens when some children are proposed to write two letters. One for the Reyes Magos and one for the parents. Surprisingly, in the parent's letter, children ask for non-tangible issues such as "spend more time with my parents" or "play more with them". These findings reveal that, in effect, society lives that social tension in which the labor rhythm does not allow to reconcile with the vital one, obtaining as a result, among others, a loss of the family bond. At this point, IKEA manages to establish itself as that iconic brand that allows solving that anxiety through the experience of a myth. IKEA proposes to its public to resume those links through spending time at home. In this way, IKEA is shown as that brand that facilitates the life of consumers as it has a wide variety of furniture for the consumer to decorate their home, feel comfortable and, ultimately, in a home where strengthen family relationships.

The case of Campofrío is remarkably sensitive to cultural branding. In fact, it is observed that the brand has maintained the key to its strategy to taking into account the social context of its consumers. Something that has also been in constant evolution throughout their campaigns. The thematic of the announcements attends to two fundamental questions. One is dedicated to communicating a message of encouragement and hope to Spanish society in a global way. And another is aimed exclusively at women and their empowerment.

The first case is clearly seen in the "Cómicos" campaign (2011). In this piece, Campofrío brings together the brightest humorists in Spain in front of the tomb of Miguel Gila on the tenth anniversary of his death, under the slogan "Let nothing take away our way of enjoying life". The message of the campaign is clear, do not forget that Spain is a society that, despite the discouraging situations, is capable of surpassing itself and finding moments of joy and celebration. In the scene, some protagonists are shy and sad about the Spanish economic situation, expressing their discomfort and their opinion. The brand shows at first the feelings of hopelessness that flood society. It highlights a social tension that demands the need to get ahead through the Spanish myth of finding the positive side of things. The message proposes to live the moment without worries, to enjoy life and moments of happiness. Something similar happens in the campaign "El curriculum de todos", in which, starting from a description of a society that does not trust itself, the viewer is reminded that in Spain there are seven Nobel prizes, it is at the head of donation of organs, or that there are countless successful athletes. The intention is clear: Campofrío is presented as the brand capable of uplifting the mood of a society and accompanying it in both the positive and the most hopeless moments.

However, as we have been commenting, Campofrío's strategy has evolved with respect to the tensions of

society. Currently, we are at a time when there is an advance towards a paradigm shift in which women present themselves as a social leader that begins to empower themselves. This idea is picked up by Campofrío in campaigns such as "Deliciosa calma", which shows the daily life of independent women who carry comments, situations and social moments in which their role as women is negatively affected or questioned. Given this tension, Campofrío offers a restaurant that cooks "stress-free recipes" such as: "Today I do not get to pick up my children at school with a slice of turkey accompanied by his father can do it," says , or "No partner stable on the basis of avocado and blueberries" which provide some relief to consumers in the face of prevailing social chaos. The brand embodies that icon to go to vindicate the role of women and the need for social change. At a strategic level, it seems very interesting for the brand as it manages to link the product with a key issue for its fundamental target audience, women.

## 6. Conclusions

Commercial communication of an advertising nature has been suffering for some years a constant reinvention in its formats aimed at maintaining consumer interest. This revolution has materialized in the implementation of strategies that aim to communicate meaningful messages that attract the viewer. This communication has proven that among these strategies, the management of a campaign from a cultural approach is presented as a case of success in the Spanish market. The results indicate that, in effect, Campofrío and IKEA have managed to stay present in consumer purchasing decisions through the issuance of a message that starts from the cultural imaginary of Spanish society. The identification of those anxieties and tensions that characterize the population at a given time seems to be the key to the success of the advertising campaigns issued that materialize in a high volume of sales.

These brands have managed to implement an advanced strategic mechanism more typical of other types of product categories that do not usually base their communication efforts on the intangible through the application of a cultural strategy. Sectors such as automotive or fashion, come to employ this type of strategy to convince an audience that values issues such as social status or emotional reward in these products. In this case, a basic food product such as turkey in the case of Campofrío, manages to elevate its consideration through cultural branding to a higher category. Something that, in fact, supposes a competitive advantage with respect to other brands of the same industry. In this sense, it seems that the novelty that implies the use of this type of cultural strategies for this type of product categories, can be considered as one of the keys of success of both brands.

Appeals to contexts such as the crisis or feminism highlight that for both cases, Campofrío and IKEA have developed iconic brands that have managed to recognize the cultural value of commercial discourse and its power to offer identity links to consumers. The nature of the messages of the analyzed campaigns proposes a social scenario closely linked to the state of a society in real time that is directly aimed at a consumer who feels fully identified with the brand. Both cases illustrate the consumer's need to feel culturally linked and the effectiveness that this causes in terms of commercial success.

However, it is necessary to consider that the implementation of this type of strategy requires enormous sophistication on the part of advertising creatives. Something that in view of the results has been observed in the change and evolution that the analyzed campaigns have suffered.

Likewise, it is emphasized that the fact of analyzing the Spanish market is a restrictive condition that may limit the applicability of this study. However, this conditioning raises in turn possible future lines of research according to the applicability of these theories to other foreign markets, or of other natures. Also, another of the limitations that could open future lines of work, is the consideration of advertising professionals. The possibility of using other techniques, such as interviews with advertising creatives or brand managers, could enrich the research with respect to those communication actions that reinforce the brand strategy.

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© Editorial Universidad de Sevilla 2019

IROCAMM- International Review Of Communication And Marketing Mix | e-ISSN: 2605/0447

### IROCAMM

VOL. 2, N. 1 - Year 2019

Received: 03/05/2019 | Reviewed: 12/07/2019 Accepted: 14/07/2019 | Published: 31/07/2019

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2019.v02.i01.01>

Pp.: 7-13

e-ISSN: 2605/0447

**VOL 2**

**N. 1**