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Pain in advertising: an analysis of the content and design of the advertisements in press after 11-M terrorist attacks

Abstract

On the anniversary of the attacks of 11 March 2004 which occurred in Madrid, we conducted a study which focused on the advertising published the days following the attacks. This study examines the message content and layout of ads across a sample of 178 advertisements published in the Spanish press. We created a table with 15 variables and 112 subvariables to find out which were the predominant messages in each advertisement and if the advertiser wanted to convey a message of sorrow to the sufferer or implicitly wanted their brand to predominate over the message of shared pain. Among the findings that we obtained was that messages of condolence and sober designs, without pictures or color, in which the advertiser expresses emotions and empathy with the victims are the most numerous. Emotional pain is the dominant feeling in the adverts published after the attacks March 2004 with messages of sorrow and strongly expressed exclamations, followed by messages of condolence and thanks. In the design, the text of the adverts is of great significance compared to the iconic features and the composition looks similar to that of obituaries. In addition, we provide a proposal for joint design of the message as a reference for advertisers in similar circumstances.

Keywords
Sorrow, pain, advertising, 11-M, message, press, design, symbol

1. Introduction and background

Rarely do events occur that are so serious that the media has the social function of consoling, helping and providing emotional support to an entire society (Li & Perkins, 2011). Going beyond information and persuasion, the media shares the pain of certain events, such as the case of the brutal attack which took place in Spain on 11 March 2004, known in Spain as 11-M. Emotion is used as a media tool to form messages linked to the suffering public and gain empathy. Advertising casts off its commercial apparel and dresses in mourning with emotional messages that have been included in the advertising narrative to share the sorrow of those who suffer. These, in their pain, sorrow or anger, interpret and

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evaluate the messages, which can trigger in them physiological, expressive and physical changes (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981) towards rage, sadness, melancholy, anxiety, impotence, compassion or hostility (Mower, 1960; Stein, Trabasso & Liwang, 1993; Berkowitz, 1993; Conner, Constantino & Scheuch, 1983; Domínguez Sánchez, 2010). Advertising, through negative emotions, creates a special bond between originator and recipient just as death announcements do (Hernando, 2001) with different aims: to console, to inform or to express gratitude. However, using negative emotions in advertising messages is a thorny issue; on one hand, there are authors who believe that such messages can trigger anxiety in the public with negative effects that work against the product or service (Henthome, LaTour & Nataraajan, 1993; Geeta, Kyung & Agrawal, 2009; Agrawal et al., 2007), while other authors such as Moore and Harris (1996) consider that negative emotions can even be agreeable for their audience, just as St Thomas Aquinas pointed out, when he stated that in pain there can be pleasure. These opinions show that there is no consensus on the use of negative emotions; this has led to authors covering this issue from an ethical point of view, such as Hyman and Tansey (1990).

More specifically, pain and information have been studied in the work of López (1998), who analysed the subjects and different ways of communicating pain; Aznar (1994) and Lobatón (1994) have investigated the ethical treatment of pain in journalism and in advertising, from the perspective of the subjects participating in the relevant communication, how the information was treated and how it was disseminated. In particular, other researchers have focused on how the emotional pain from the 11-M attack was treated in specific media such as television, or the press. The television study (Linde, 2005) analysed the image and the information and the press studies addressed different aspects such as the treatment by that medium (Blanco, 2006; Mercado, 2006), the information and photography in the newspapers (Torres, 2006; Muñoz, 2006) or the design of these (Castaños, 2004). Less extensive has been the research into treatment of the advertising linked to the emotional pain of the 11-M attack, such as the work of Miralles and Martínez (2006) and Martínez (2010).

Therefore, this paper will focus on analysing the construction and design of the messages of pain in the advertising published in the Spanish press in the days following the 11-M attack (2004). It should be noted that in this terrorist act on 11 March 2004 in Madrid, perpetrated by jihadists, 191 people died and 1,858 were injured. Our objective is to discover what messages predominate in that advertising and whether the advertisers wished to transmit a message of shared pain to those suffering or if there was an implicit desire to promote their brands in the message.

2. Objectives and hypothesis

Advertising which is associated with pain is being called into question due to its use of emotions that can be counterproductive for the advertised brand or product; therefore, the objectives of this study are the following:

Main objective:

Our main objective is to find out and analyse the types of advertising messages that were disseminated in the Spanish press in the wake of the events on 11 March 2004 and to analyse the design of those messages as regards text, image, colour, graphics and composition.

Secondary objective:

This is to prepare a graphic composition model based on the variables most employed in the advertisements we have analysed.

The initial hypotheses are:

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H1: the advertisements published after 11-M that refer to the attack are characterised by a message and a subdued design, making no use of images or colour; in these advertisements the pain of others predominates and the advertiser's brand is not emphasised.

H2: the predominant types of message are those of condolence and solidarity, and the predominant design is similar to that for death announcements, in accordance with the grieving and pain resulting from the terrorist attack.

H3: the messages of condolence and passionate exclamations are accompanied by the symbol of the Catholic cross, in comparison to messages of solidarity and gratitude which are represented without religious connotations as expressions of sorrow.

3. Methodology

A study was conducted to verify the aforementioned hypothesis, in accordance with the following phases:

3.1. *Identification and selection of the advertisements*

The study was conducted on the basis of the national consumer press newspapers in Spain; these are *El País* (582,931), *El Mundo* (412,465), *ABC* (359,985), *La Vanguardia* (249,726) and *La Razón* (196,718). It took into account the three days following the 11-M attack in 2004. The time period covered the days of 12, 13 and 14 March 2004. The total number of advertisements analysed was 178 adverts without duplicates and the number of messages identified in those was 348.

3.2. *Classification of the messages*

The advertising messages identified were classified into five categories: condolence, passionate exclamations, solidarity, gratitude and hybrids. Messages of condolence, according to Redonet (2001), are messages of empathy in which the people expressing themselves put themselves into the other person's shoes and adopt as their own the pain, the grief, of another. A passionate exclamation is a message where the feeling is imbued with so much passion that moderation and calm are forgotten. A message of solidarity is understood to be a personal commitment from each person in regard to a specific problem, cause or event and the need to act and be aware of it (Ortega, Mínguez & Gil, 1996; Martínez Guzmán, 1994). Solidarity expresses two things at the same time: on the one hand, the union or bond between people and, on the other, the reciprocal individual and personalised responsibility with respect to each individual and of everyone together (Martínez, 1998). Messages of gratitude have an informative air, given that they publicly acknowledge the help of others (Hernando, 2001) in advertisements. Hybrid messages are those combining more than one message of the types described above (Balasubramanian, 1994).

3.3 Design

The formal elements that make up the graphic design were defined through four categories – text, images, graphics and colour (Costa, 1992) – plus the composition of these elements.

To study the variables revealed and represented physically in the message (Igartua, 2006), we opted to use a descriptive methodology employed by authors such as Joly (1999) who deem it practical to define "the implicit messages transmitted in an advert" demarcating "the different types of signifiers that are co-present in the visual message" (Joly, 1999: 57), namely linguistic signs, icons, graphics and colour. For the linguistic signs, the visual structure of the different textual elements present in the message (slogan, text and brand) was recorded taking into account two variables: size and position. Among the

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many different categories defined by Gerstner (2003) to classify the various possibilities of graphic representation of textual elements, analysing the two variables of size and position would enable us to determine the graphic relevance of the advertiser's brand. As regards the icon sign, the type of image used (Villafañe & Mínguez, 2000) was included, with special attention being paid to whether the advertiser decided to insert any type of graphic representation that identifies it (whether a logo, emblem or similar), and to the location and size of that representation. The presence of the trademark is a reinforcing element for the advertiser because, as expressed by Costa (2004), the brand image is, at the current time, the main differentiating factor for numerous products. In the same manner, this study was interested in ascertaining whether the presence of certain symbols such as the cross or the ribbon was associated with certain types of message. In addition, a record was made of the graphics or typological resources used, taking as a basis the classification offered by Montes (2013), in order to determine their contribution to the graphic representation. Special attention was paid to ascertaining if there are certain similarities between the visual aspect of the advertisements covered by the study and the design of death announcements. The chromatic component (colour), an artistic element that allows the representation of the other, aforementioned parts making up the graphic system (text, images and graphics), was also recorded. The chromatic contribution was analysed taking by way of reference authors such as Berry and Martín (1991) and research such as that conducted by Holmqvist and Wartenberg (2005) or Heller (2004). In the colour spectrum, the achromatic variants such as black, grey and white (understanding as such the chroma of the base paper which has not been coloured by any ink) were included. Given that colour is a key element in transmitting emotions, it became, without doubt, one of the formal reference variables in our study. Finally, other variables were counted such as the type of composition and the size of the advertisement.

3.4. *Procedure*

Once the variables to be studied had been defined, a sheet with 78 variables was prepared in order to quantify the presence of messages and their relationship to the design. When grouping the messages into five categories (condolence, passionate exclamations, solidarity, gratitude and hybrids), which was undertaken before analysing the adverts, we had to regroup these after the analysis had been completed and eliminate the hybrid category, given that although the messages in this category contained several different messages, it did not offer clear differentiation between the other messages. Therefore, it was decided to eliminate the hybrid message category and regroup all the messages into just four categories, thereby obtaining 348 different messages from the 178 advertisements. The contingency tables showed the relationships between certain types of message and the manner in which these were represented, as well as the type of symbols associated, preferentially, with each manifestation of pain. This study process enabled us to prepare a representative proposal or model of this type of advertisements.

4. Results

The results obtained in our study have been classified in relation to the type of message and advertiser, iconic representation, use of colour and other variables of visual representation.
    The types of message most represented were those of condolence (49.7%; 173 cases), followed by passionate exclamations (26.1%; 91 cases), messages of solidarity (19.8%; 69 cases) and those expressing gratitude (4.3%; 15 cases), as shown in figure 1. The most repeated message was one of condolence (49.7%) and this makes evident that the advertisers empathise with the pain and grief of others, as stated by Redonet (2001), with messages such as *"... con todas las víctimas y familiares"* ("... with all the victims and their families"), *"...con*

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las víctimas del atentado terrorista" ("…. with the victims of the terrorist attack") or *"con las víctimas inocentes…"* ("with the innocent victims…"). As regards grief, it is remarkable that some advertisements included in their texts *"se ruega una oración"* ("we ask you to pray") or *"por sus almas"* ("for their souls") and that, in addition, no religion manifested itself vis-à-vis the reply of other advertisers. There were advertisers that, as proof of grief, ceased their commercial advertising, stating in the text *"…con las víctimas y familiares y se suspenden mensajes comerciales"* ("…with the victims and their families and suspending commercial messages") while others offered their help with permanent assistance to the victims and their families.

Figure 1: Typology of the messages. Own source.
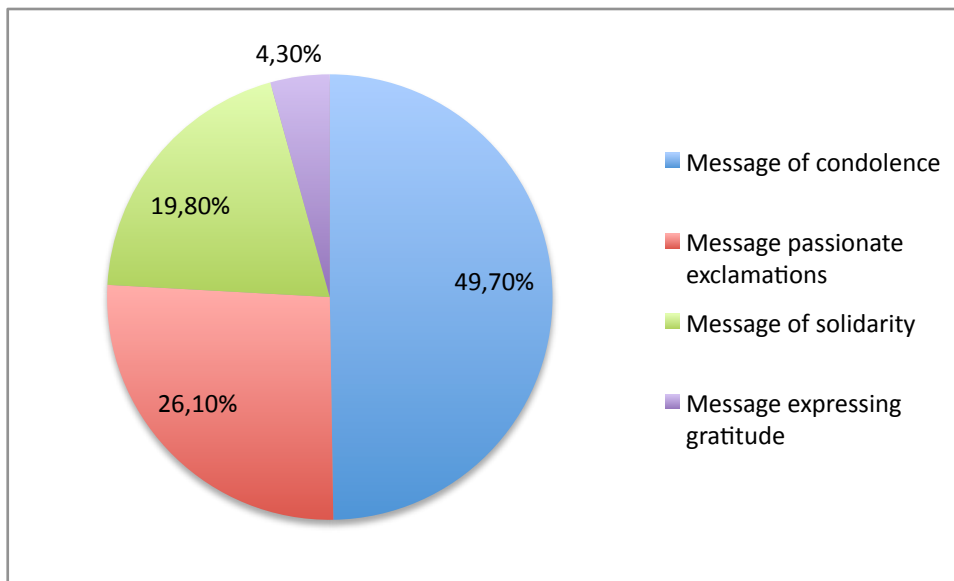
The second most significant messages in the advertisements were passionate exclamations (26.1%) that indicated the rage and impotence felt in reaction to the attack, showing a lack of restraint and calm with messages such as *"¡NO al horror!"* ("NO to horror!") or *"¡Libertad!"* ("Freedom!"), in addition to using adjectives, verbs and nouns that evoked a highly emotional state such as *"repulsa"* ("repulsion"), *"indignación"* ("indignation"), *"salvaje"* ("savage"), *"execrable"* ("abominable") or *"brutal"* ("brutal"). In their messages of solidarity (19.8%), the advertisers showed a responsible attitude towards the victims and society in general, as indicated by Martínez (1998), given that they praise democratic and constitutional principles and human values with phrases like *"A favor de la libertad, dignidad y vida. Nos manifestamos por la por la paz, libertad y concordancia"* ("For liberty, dignity and life. We stand for peace, freedom and concord"). There were however messages that could be criticised, perhaps for their lack of sensitivity, such as an advertisement encouraging people to vote in spite of the tragedy having occurred. Messages of gratitude were less numerous (4.3%); it is noteworthy that those which expressed gratitude were institutions addressing the citizens and professionals, and, unusually, the family of a woman killed in the attack which thanked all those who provided succour to the victims. It should be noted that the advertisers were from very varied sectors, from professional associations, chambers of commerce and general partnerships (16.9%), public administrations (13.5%) and banking (10.7%), to beverage and food enterprises (8.4%) and power utilities (5.1%), as is shown in figure 2. Particularly worth noting are the announcements placed by groups which are banned from advertising their services, such as notaries and doctors, whose professional associations expressed their sorrow through condolence announcements, and

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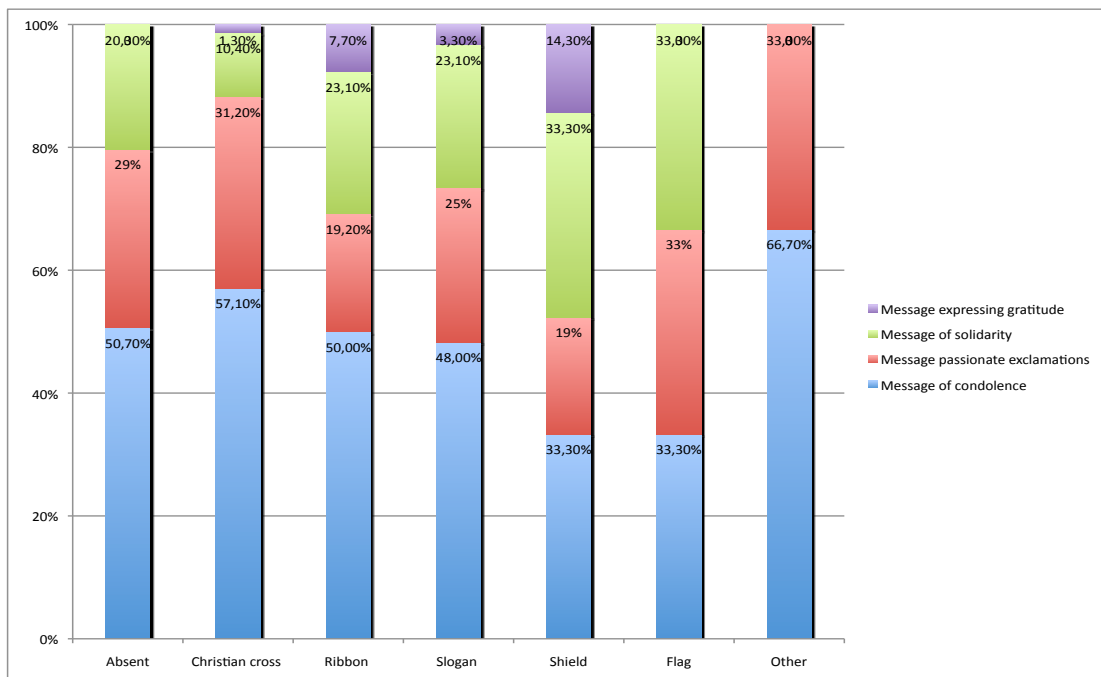of the advertisements in press after 11-M terrorists attacks**

even individuals who placed notices expressing gratitude, which is most extraordinary in advertising.

Figure 2: Typology of the advertisers. Own source.
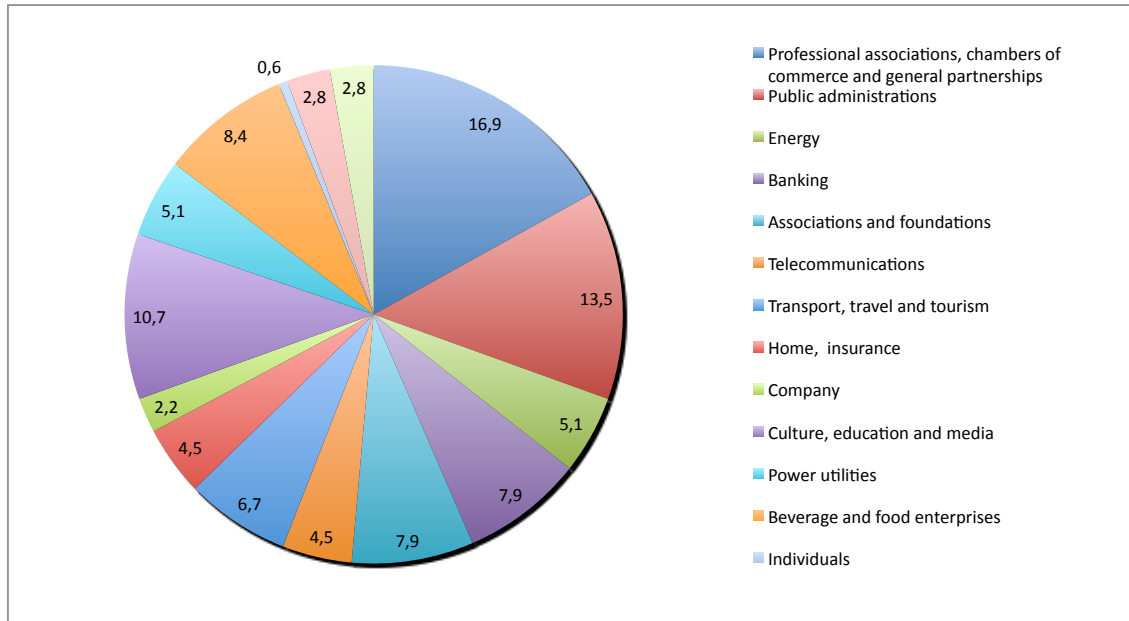
As regards iconic representation, we have identified images that are of low iconicity and the space they occupy in the design is somewhat smaller than usual, as is shown in figure 3. In bereavement announcements, there is no need to represent any products or services in images; the seriousness of the events and the turmoil generated encourages the use of words.

Figure 3: Images appearing in relation to the type of message. Own source.

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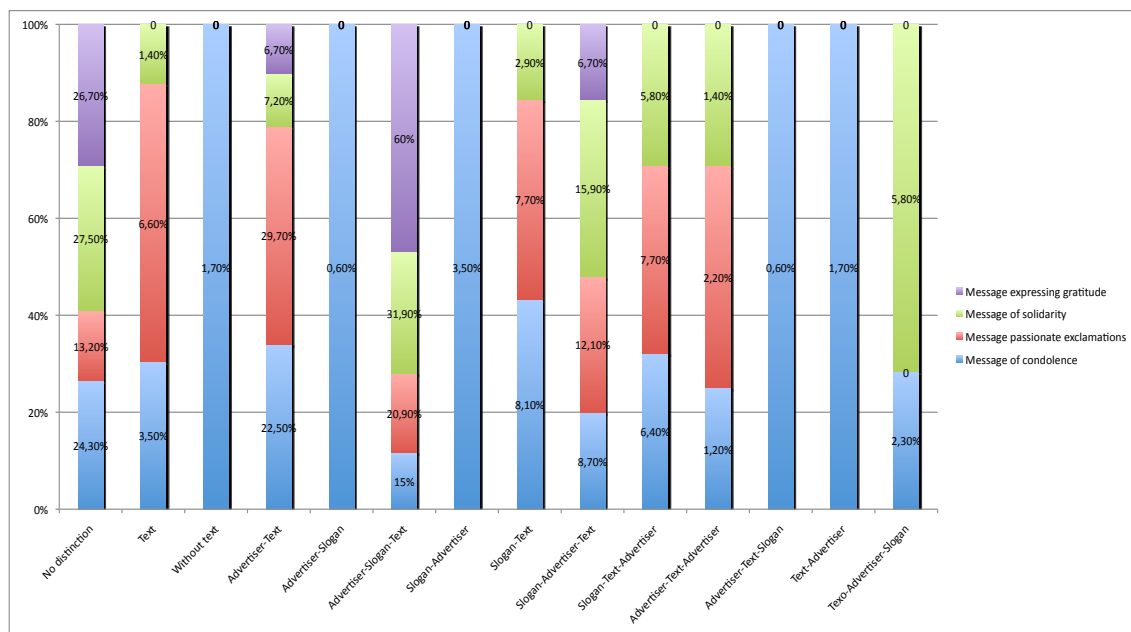of the advertisements in press after 11-M terrorists attacks**

The iconic element that was used most assiduously was the advertiser's logo (42.69%; 76 cases), followed by the symbol of the Christian cross (25.28%; 45 cases) and of the ribbon (21.91%; 39 cases), whereas on 35 occasions (19.66%) the advertising lacked any iconic symbols. The insertion of the advertiser's logo is shown in similar percentages in all message types, ranging between 33% and 43%.

The absence of colour is, certainly, another of the most noteworthy variants of the advertising relating to mourning. Of the 178 advertisements, 172 (96.6%) used only achromatic shades (black, white and grey). The pairing of reference when combining these shades is the use of black on a white background. Although many variations to this pattern were observed (specifically, nine), they barely made up 14.6% of the total, whereas representations of black on white constituted 85.4% of the cases.

Other variables of the visual representation, such as typographical resources (or graphics) that are inserted into this type of message were boxes (66.85%) and elaborate edgings (35.39%) which, together with the cross, evoke the traditional representation of death announcements. However, the advertisements that, through bringing together these variables, remind us of the traditional composition of death announcements made up less than 25%. The categories recorded of composition types are very varied. However, if we group together the designs which opt for a centred strategy (although there may be the odd off-centre element, e.g. the symbol), a significant figure of 118 cases (66.29%) is obtained. Looking at the structure of the content, we recorded the way the advertiser, the slogan and the text of the advertisement were represented. In three unique cases, the advertisements had no text at all, while in 44 cases (24.71%) the text present in the advertisement did not have a hierarchical structure, that is, it was presented in the same style. Of the 131 cases (73.59%) in which there was a textual structure, in 74 (41.6%) of these the slogan was the prevailing element, in 44 (24.7%) the advertiser's name was the most prominent element and in 13 cases (7.3%) the message was presented in a larger size than the other elements, as is shown in figure 4. In the majority of cases, the advertiser's name was placed in the upper part of the advertisement (118 cases, 66.29%). The next most chosen variable, although there was a considerable gap between the two, was the opposite composition, that is, the advertiser appeared at the end of the text (46 cases, 25.84%).

Figure 4: Graphic structure of the textual component in relation to the type of message. Own source.

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The only images that, in some way, attempted to express or accompany pictorially the emotions or feelings expressed in the text are the symbols of the cross and the ribbon. Taking the two symbols jointly, we obtained 84 advertisements (47.19%) in which the text had a visual support.

Contingency tables were drawn up that allowed us to check whether the insertion of these symbols was related to the type of message. It was possible to ascertain a similar distribution in the condolence messages and those of passionate exclamations. However, the distribution showed significant variations in the messages of solidarity and gratitude in which the presence of the cross symbol was less (9% and 7%, respectively), where the starring role was passed, fundamentally, to the ribbon symbol (22% and 40%, respectively), as is shown in figure 5.

Figure 5: Comparison of use of the cross and the ribbon according to the type of message. Own source.
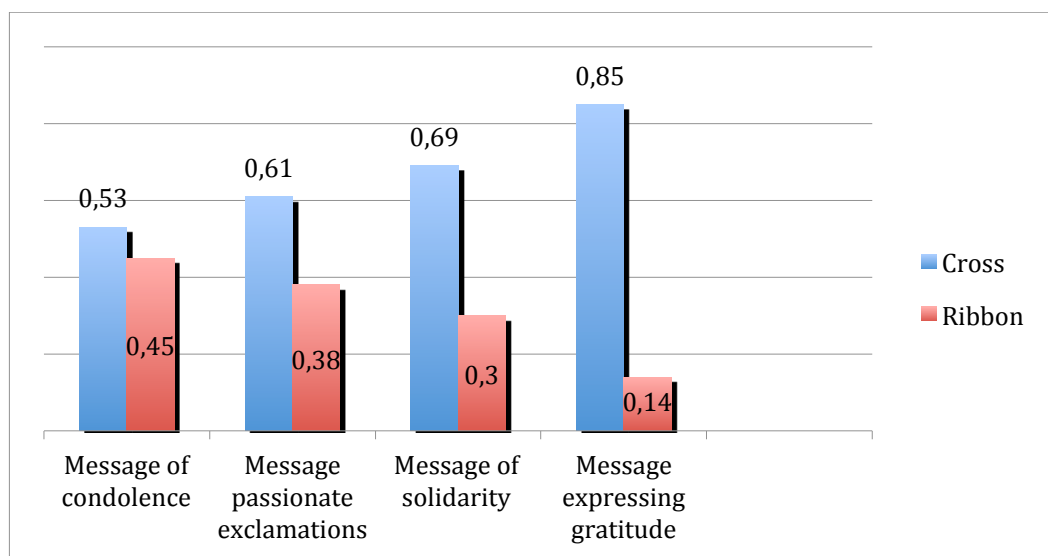
5. Discussion

H1: the advertisements published after 11-M that refer to the attack are characterised by a message and a subdued design, making no use of images or colour; in these advertisements the pain of others predominates and the advertiser's brand is not emphasised.

This hypothesis is confirmed because it has been shown that the negative emotions of pain and sorrow need to be expressed, as indicated by Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981). In this case, the advertisers, through their advertising messages, showed their rage, impotence and compassion towards others and their families, in accordance with the findings of Mower, 1960; Stein, Trabasso and Liwang, 1993; Berkowitz, 1993; Conner, Constantino and Scheuch, 1983; and Domínguez Sánchez, 2010. Through these negative emotions as expressed in the advertisements, they empathised with the reader directly, reminding them of the unjust attack and creating a special bond, just as occurs with death announcements, as asserted by Hernando (2001), as regards the rage, pain and helplessness felt by each and every one of us about the attack. The design continued the same line of connecting with pain. In bereavement advertising, photographs are avoided, using pictograms instead and these are allocated a testimonial area, while avoiding colour. The two elements of the greatest impact in the design (images and colour) are relegated to the background, as is held by García and Stark (1991) and Holmqvist and Wartenberg (2005), and therefore the starring

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role is given to the content as opposed to its pictorial representation. It must be borne in mind, in addition, that we are placed in a period in which printed newspapers showed themselves to be reluctant to introduce colour into the pages of information content as colour was still associated with sensationalism (Olmo, 2004), even though in the newspapers analysed cases of colour use can be found both in news articles and in advertisements. If in the analysed advertisements, there was no colour it was because it was decided not to use it, as including colour was possible. In bereavement announcements, an attempt is made to limit any chromatic connotation, and we say "limit" because neutral tones are also associated with certain meanings. That is the case of black which has connotations of mourning and the end (Heller, 2004), which make it suitable for this type of advertisements.

In addition, the diversity of the advertisers was due to the fact that the incident had a huge impact on Spanish society and this endeavoured to confirm, from all spheres, its support for the victims. This same circumstance can explain the predominance of advertisements measuring less than a quarter-page size (106 cases; 59.55%), although other sizes could be found. In relation to the structure of the content, insofar as the representation of the advertiser, the slogan and the text of the advertisement is concerned, the slogan took precedence over the advertiser's brand. The name of the company who was advertising was placed in the upper part of the design, so as to instil it with a certain importance without it standing out graphically, confirming the H1 on this point too.

H2: the predominant types of message are those of condolence and solidarity, and the predominant design is similar to that for death announcements, in accordance with the grieving and pain resulting from the terrorist attack.

The results of our work do not totally confirm the H2 hypothesis to the extent that the predominant messages in the advertising published in the wake of the 11-M attacks were those of condolence and passionate exclamations. Pain and anger were the messages and the emotions that were most prevalent in the sample, compared to solidarity which represented 19.8%. The graphic resource most employed was the box, and this occurred in similar percentages of cases regardless of the type of messages; however, the so-called mourning box (with an elaborate edging of at least six points' thickness) was only included in messages where expressions of condolence were present, even when these were hybrid messages. In the visual representation of the advertisements, certain guidelines for traditional composition of death announcements predominated, for example, the use of boxes and elaborate edging (in 80.89%, one at least of these graphic resources was present), the centred layout of the texts or the presence of the Christian cross, which are a clear reminder of this advertisement format. However, the advertisements that combined all these variables in their designs made up less than 25%, although it is significant that in all these cases, there was an expression of condolence.

H3: the messages of condolence and passionate exclamations are accompanied by the symbol of the Catholic cross, in comparison to messages of solidarity and gratitude which are represented without religious connotations as expressions of sorrow.

Our study confirms the hypothesis, as it is in the messages of condolence and passionate exclamations in which the presence of the cross predominated. Condolence is linked to mourning and passionate exclamations to passion; by historic tradition, Spain is considered to be a catholic country and perhaps due to this reason of religious feeling, the pain of loss and the emotion of the passion associated with the cross remain linked to the semantics of the advertisement. Furthermore, the messages of solidarity and gratitude tended to break away from the religious connotations of the Christian cross and opted for the symbol of the ribbon (22% and 40%, respectively). Even though the black ribbon or black cloth is a symbol of pain and mourning, the ribbon has become the image of solidarity and

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the fight against a multitude of causes, depending on the colour of the ribbon (for example, pink ribbons represent the fight against breast cancer, and red represents the battle against AIDS). Given that the victims of the attacks were people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, it can be supposed that among them there would be individuals with different religious beliefs, and atheists as well. It is noteworthy that the advertisement placed by Madrid's Jewish community did not use symbols such as the star of David but chose rather not to include any image, in order to send a message where all the victims might feel themselves to be represented.

6. Conclusions

Sorrow is the dominant feeling in the advertisements published in the wake of the 11-M attacks in which a message of mourning and of passionate exclamations go hand in hand, and the design of the advertising messages is also in line with this feeling. In the design, colour is avoided and any chromatic connotations are limited. In the visual structure of the content, the slogan takes precedence over the brand belonging to the advertiser, which is relegated to the upper part of the design and does not stand out in a graphic manner. Therefore, in the sample studied, it does not appear that there was an implicit desire on the advertisers' behalf to give precedence to their brands in these messages of mourning. In keeping with this, the visual depiction of the adverts predominantly followed the traditional layout of death announcements, using centred text and the Christian cross, which harks back to this advertising format. As regards symbols, the use of the cross was associated with the messages of condolence and passionate exclamations, whereas the ribbon symbol was linked to messages of solidarity and gratitude.

After analysing the results obtained, we additionally offer here by way of conclusion a textual and visual representative model of the advertising associated with pain, which we have extracted from this study.

The messages that must be used in announcements expressing pain are those of condolence for grief, of passionate exclamations of anger and of solidarity towards those who are suffering, and this includes the use of these three messages together.

It is desirable that the textual element of the slogan employed be the most important element in order to capture the attention of the audience that the message is addressed to and so that it is the first thing they read. In second place would be the rest of the message, including the name of the advertiser. To give more emphasis to the placer of the advertisement, the size or thickness of the letters could be increased slightly or the advertiser's name could be presented in capital letters. The name of the advertiser should be located at the beginning or end of the text. Suppressing any iconic elements is an option, although the text can be accompanied by some kind of graphic element. In these cases, it would be advisable to use a symbol that reflects the message that the advertiser wishes to transmit and which the intended audience may identify more with. Black draping or a black ribbon is an image associated with mourning, with the added feeling of solidarity, which lacks any religious connotations, unlike the Christian cross. If the advert includes an image representing the brand (logo, emblem or similar), it would be most appropriate to located it in the upper or lower part of the advert and not to reinforce the advertiser's name pictorially, so as not to place too much emphasis on it.

The use of colour must be limited to neutral shades; the two-tone use of black text on a white background is recommended. The layout should be centred and symmetrical.

As for the graphic qualities, a box that frames the advertising must be utilized to give it a touch of austerity, which allows us to efficiently isolate the rest of the elements on the page (if the advertisement is not a full-page ad). If mourning for the victims is the aspect to

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be highlighted, it would be advisable to use a mourning-style format (elaborate edging of at least six points in width) in the lower part of the design.

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