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Multimodal analysis of advertising discourse during the lockdown due to COVID-19: Comparison of the communication strategies of financial services and automotive products in Spain

Abstract

The goal of the following text is to analyze the changes in television advertising in the banking and automobile sectors, according to the social context. The hypothesis is that communication is significantly influenced by the situational context, causing differences between the advertising of the two sectors. A multimodal discourse analysis is used, comparing twenty commercials from the banking and automobile sectors in 2019 and 2020, the period during which the lockdown due to COVID-19 took place. Based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis tables were developed with which to analyze general data such as the value proposition or target audience of the advert, or other special data like the text (verb tenses, rhetorical figures...), the image and the sound used. The fact that context is decisive in communication is made evident, and since this is different in every sector, the communication strategy is clearly different as well. However, the points that the two sectors have in common are remarkable: these range from talking about brands and products, to speaking for and about people.

Keywords

Discourse analysis, brand advertising, COVID-19, crisis communication, banking, automobile, emotional advertising.

1. Introduction

Addressing a topic such as discourse means entering the framework of social relations, identities and conflicts and trying to understand how different cultural groups express themselves in a historical moment, with certain sociocultural characteristics (Calsamiglia-Blancafort & Tusón, 2007).

The appearance of COVID-19 and the changes it has imposed means that all sectors have had to adapt to a new situation in which, for a time, people were unable to leave their homes and many services and products could not be consumed as before.

According to a 2004 WHO speech, “[...] in health, crisis and communication are related. All health crises are also communication crises” (Costa-Sánchez & López-García, 2020). This

is why, faced with this new situation, it was striking how companies adapted their brand and communication strategies, choosing to place more emphasis than ever on their values as a company, beyond quality, price or any other differential advantage that their products and services might have, and resorting to emotional aspects of communication.

This work studies the case of advertising messages on television put out by various brands during the period of total lockdown (March 14–May 9, 2020, in Spain) and analyzes whether they modified their discourse due to the pandemic, whether or not they used similar resources, and in what ways they did so.

Let us consider an advertisement as a message: it includes a sender (the brand), a receiver (the public) and the transmission channel (in this case television). And it is precisely because “advertising is also considered a message, that it is possible to apply a method of linguistic analysis to it” (López-Paredes, 2018). Advertising language is a narrative of the world: all advertising talks about its product, but it indirectly expresses something else, which is ascertained by means of a connotative analysis, through the meaning that the recipients give to the message (Barthes, 1985).

The objective of this research is to detect the transformations that the television advertisements of banks and car companies underwent during the period of lockdown due to COVID-19, comparing them with advertisements from the same companies a year earlier. The objective is to identify the changes that occur in advertising when the social context changes radically; to differentiate the resources considered in the multimodal analysis (text, image and sound) used in television advertisements before and during the lockdown caused by COVID-19; and to point out the differences in the advertising of two important and different sectors, namely banking and automobile companies, and what their communication strategies consisted of.

2. State of the question

The world of communication has changed, from marketing to advertising and crisis communication. The marketing sector has stopped focusing on the “make and sell” philosophy, and now focuses on the “feel and respond” philosophy (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). An understanding of the market and its needs helps us to analyze the social context from a more strategic point of view, and also to understand the background of advertising campaigns. What specifically stand out in this project are: emotional marketing, focused on the more human side of customers and on improving the image of brands through an unconscious affective bond; and social marketing, which focuses on the long-term well-being of the consumer. This type of marketing turns social needs into a shared value, and their solution helps in creating meaningful relationships. Following an ideology of civic responsibility, Corporate Social Responsibility departments are created that earn money by doing good. This is precisely one of the most salient concepts in this analysis of their discourse, because in such pronounced periods of crisis, such as a period of lockdown due to COVID-19, companies are committed more than ever to these shared values and to social involvement.

The pandemic has brought radical changes in consumer decision-making processes, and especially in advertising. O’Hagan (2020) observes that: “The spread of Covid-19 has changed the world we live in affecting all sectors of business and advertising is no different. Much of the industry is on pause due to social distancing. Some adverts are being pulled from the airwaves, either because the service is no longer available, or the message no longer reflects the world we live in.” In fact, we find ourselves in a time when irrelevant and opportunistic messages can have a highly negative effect on brands. Everything must adapt to the “new reality” and brands have adjusted their adverts to the new times in an attempt to make consumers remember the brand, while others have had to cancel some of their campaigns.

Within the advertising sector, we highlight the emotional aspect, which also plays an important role. The study “Marketing in the Age of Accountability” (Martínez-Rodrigo, 2015) analyzed some of the most effective advertising campaigns in order to discover the source of their success. It concluded that emotional communication strategies obtain better results than rational ones: they achieve a greater impact on market share, penetration and loyalty, among other achievements, which indicates that emotion helps to better connect with the public. In another *IPA DataBANK* study, 1,400 successful advertising campaigns were analyzed and it was shown that those with purely emotional content had twice the performance (31% vs. 16%) of those that had only rational content (Dooley, 2019), and were also more successful than mixed ones. As a general conclusion, we see that in the analysis of the Top Empathic Brands of 2018, the use of high doses of empathy towards customers in communication –something that brands did during the lockdown, as we will see– made them more memorable, durable and relevant.

When empathetic brands resort to emotional communication, they are able to control the emotions of their audience, communicating better and preventing people from forgetting them so quickly. Emotions are contagious, generate proximity and help us to make others pay more attention to what we say. In addition, they justify our actions and make us feel that it is the emotions that have moved us to act and that it is not a matter of mere chance (Gutiérrez & García, 2015).

Regarding crisis communication, we focus on how brands have had to adapt their message due to being in a sensitive context with unpredictable consequences. For this point, we resorted above all to WHO reports related to the communication solutions carried out during the months of the pandemic, and to the analysis by Carmen Costa-Sánchez and Xosé López-García (2020), which helps us to understand how the COVID-19 crisis has been managed and how it has been communicated.

A study carried out by Seeger Reynolds (Costa-Sánchez & López-García, 2020) differentiates five stages through which communication passes in a state of crisis (see below: 4. Results), which have been followed in the vast majority of communications carried out by both public and private entities. We rely on this study to understand in greater depth the reason for the preparation of certain advertising messages.

In the two sectors that are analyzed in this investigation of the impact that COVID-19 has had on consumer habits and decision-making, we can see that these habits underwent a change compared to the year before as, according to the Deloitte report (2020), 48% of the Spanish admitted to opting for brands that were committed to social coherence and responded well to the crisis.

If we focus on decision-making, we see that the priorities of the life of the Spanish have changed. There is an increase in the importance of aspects such as health –which is in the first position– free and leisure time, work, contribution to the community or spirituality (Domingo, Farache & Urra, 2020). While these aspects increase in importance, all the others decrease and remain in the background, the two with the greatest decrease being the couple and politics. In addition to health, emotional ties (such as family and affection) are the factors with the highest scores, indicating greater attention to these day-to-day areas.

In the case of the relationship of the Spanish with banks, one of the first tasks of the financial sector in this period was to mitigate the effects of the crisis with various actions, such as cutting interest rates and reducing the cost of loans, offering extra time to pay debts or more flexible policies. However, banks are in a better situation now than when they had to deal with the situation in 2008, which is why they have been more optimistic thanks to their strong capitalization levels and liquidity buffers. Because they had to close their physical offices, they further boosted their online banking and tele-assistance services. In fact, in China there was a massive acceleration, with the traffic of digital financial services channels increasing by up to 900% (Gonzalo, 2020), which is why awareness campaigns are being

carried out on digital skills and their transition. As we will see later, a good example would be the case of *BBVA*, which doubled its number of digital clients in less than four years and reached 32.1 million (Luna & Molina, 2020) or the allusions to the use of digital platforms in campaigns such as those of *Santander*, which encourages the use of its website for all accounts management; *BBVA*, which is oriented to the use of its app and online procedures from home; or *Openbank*.

Regarding the automotive sector, in Spain an annual average of 24.27 cars is sold per 1,000 inhabitants and it is the 15th country with the highest number of vehicle registrations (Macro Data, 2020). However, according to DGT data from 2020 that we will also consider later, the decrease in circulation during the months of lockdown, from March to May, reached 70%. This caused a critical situation in the sector, with a 25.6% decrease in car sales compared to the previous year. To illustrate this decline with an example, of the 4,163 passenger cars registered during the month of April –which is the number of cars that were previously sold in one day, according to the communication director of Ganvam, Tania Puche (Cordero, 2020)–, only 823 were registered by individuals.

Undoubtedly, the automobile sector has been one of the sectors hardest hit by this crisis, both in terms of direct sales and car rentals (a service that also fell by 93.8%).

All the changes produced in this period are explained by the fact that “the particular characteristics of this crisis affect citizens and consumers in a unique way, so it is to be expected that, during the coming months, the evolution of consumer behavior will also change differently from other crises experienced previously” (Deloitte, 2020).

3. Methodology

For this research, a choice of advertisements was made taking into account the date of issue (the second half of 2019 and the months of March to May 2020, during the lockdown period), variety and the visibility of the brands –due to their having the capacity to invest in good advertising campaigns.

Due to the large number of adverts with messages related to COVID-19 and the number of companies that were affected by it, it was decided to make a comparison between two very different sectors: one that provided a service that remained active regardless of the quarantine, and another that sold a product that could not be bought due to the impossibility of going to pick it up, and also could not be used. The objective is to obtain a varied sample of adverts and to be able to draw more rewarding conclusions.

The reason why only television campaigns are analyzed is because it is the only format that includes all the elements of multimodal discourse analysis: oral and/or written discourse, image and sound.

Table 1. Selection of adverts.

| Sector | Mark | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Banking | Openbank | Impossible | #MásJuntosQueNunca (More together than ever) |
| | BBVA | Today a new BBVA is born | We are here to help you #QuédateEnCasa (Stay at home) |
| | Santander | Planning. Saving. Protection. | We want to get back together #QuédateEnCasa (Stay at home) |
| | Sabadell | Stories about money | #SomosSabadell (We are Sabadell) |
| | Caixabank | Family salary | We are #ContigoMásQueNunca (With you more than ever) |
| Car | Audi | Q3 2019 | Zero kilometers #FrenarLaCurva (Brake the curve) |
| | Mini | Mini wishes you a Merry Christmas | #MeQuedoEnCasa (I stay at home) |
| | Mitsubishi | Enjoy being with your family | #AparcadoEnCasa (Parked at home) |
| | SEAT | Seat Leon Edition 2019 | Stay at home. Keep in touch #SEATENCasa (SEAT at home) |
| | Volkswagen | Polo 2019 vs Lamborghini | #JuntosTambiénEnEsteViaje (Together on this trip too) |

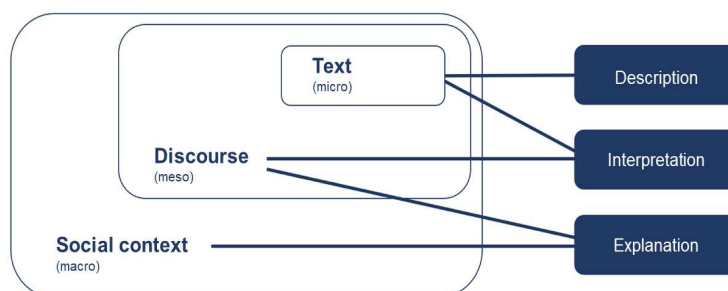
Source: Own elaboration.

To carry out the multimodal discourse analysis, we structured this in three parts, ranging from the general to the particular: a macro, a meso and a micro analysis. Variables were established according to elements of the advertisements: more general concepts –related to intention– and others on the preparation and elements of the campaign (meso and micro analysis). To complement it, a PESTEL analysis (Political, Economic, Sociodemographic, Technological, Ecological and Legislative analysis) applied to the context (macro analysis) is used. Some of the conclusions of this analysis can be seen throughout the investigation in questions related to the consumption habits of the Spanish or changes at the business and communication level of the different sectors of analysis.

Once the data had been obtained, they were subjected to interpretation. Answers were sought to questions related to what the author's intention is believed to be; the effects that the message used causes in the public; what types of codes or shared knowledge there are between the receiver and the sender; what other elements could have been used and if they would have had the same effect or meaning; or what is included in the message and what is excluded. These data, combined with the analysis and interpretation of the different adverts, enable us to resolve our initial hypothesis and ascertain whether or not the context influences the elaboration of advertising messages.

In the figure below (Hussain–Fahmi, 2018), we can see the approach employed in a critical discourse analysis, whose structure is identical to a multimodal analysis. The only difference is that in the ADM (Analysis of the Multimodal Discourse) the analysis of images and sounds, which do not appear in the graph, also comes into play. Despite these differences, both “have in common the same object of study: discourse and its meaning” (Otaola, 1989).

Figure 1. ACD analytical scheme (Critical Discourse Analysis).



Source: Own elaboration.

The first level of analysis begins with the social semiotic analysis, focusing on the social, political and cultural context, called the macro level. It involves everything related to the historical and social context that surrounds the message. Diane Macdonell (1986) stated that discourse is social and the meaning of the words used in such discourse will depend on the context in which it is delivered. This level answers questions such as why this text was written at the time it was written or what the context is. In the words of marketing specialists, it helps us understand the market and customer needs and can also be called a macroenvironment, which implies those forces of society that influence the microenvironment (customers, company, suppliers...). Through a PESTEL analysis, 2019 and 2020 –during the most severe period of the lockdown– are analyzed.

The second level –the meso level– focuses on the object of analysis but resolves general and more superficial questions about it. “Dell Hymes identified the set of elements that intervene in any communicative event through the SPEAKING model: Situation, Participants, Ends, Act sequences, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms and Genre” (Calsamiglia-Blancafort & Tusón, 2007). It is precisely the acronym *SPEAKING* that the meso analysis emphasizes, as we can see in the table and the different elements that compose it, which seek to respond to each of the initials of the Hymes model. It also includes the analysis of the different roles of all those involved in the communicative action –those who act to achieve certain ends, respecting certain rules of interaction and interpretation. This is also known as what Stephen Levinson (Garrido-Martín, 2016) called “the mutual knowledge of communicative intention,” which considers aspects beyond the mere concrete space-time situation of a conversation or a specific communicative act. It involves the knowledge that one has of what has been said or has happened previously, as well as the conventions, beliefs or assumptions accepted by all those involved in the communication.

Table 2 shows the variables that have been taken into account when evaluating the interpretive aspects of the advertisement in relation to its intention (meso analysis).

Table 2. Meso analysis.

| Meso analysis | Variables | Justification of each variable |
|---|---|---|
| Public | When | The date of the advert to place it in the concrete context. |
| | Men | Since the automotive sector has always been considered more “masculine,” this category serves to see if certain roles are maintained in advertising. |
| | Women | |
| | Youths | Age range to which the product or service is directed. |
| | Adults | |
| | Seniors | |
| | Type of text | Lower class |
| Middle class | | |
| Upper class | | |
| Descriptive / Expository | | This describes a product or a brand and/or presents it, without judging or analysing it. |
| Argumentative | | The objective is to persuade and demonstrate something by showing the reasons and benefits why one or another action should be carried out. |
| Gender | Narrative / Literary | A story is created with a protagonist and some obstacles. |
| | Instructive | They teach us to do something; they are pedagogical and simple texts. |
| | Conversational | Exchange of messages between two or more people. |
| | Technical | Uses serious data that can be verified. Seeks to build trust. |
| Narrative | Advertising | Its objective is to persuade and convince by means of numerous resources. |
| | Literary | Artistic and creative texts, usually linked to entertainment. |
| Value proposition | Narrative | Brief and objective description of the events of the advert to make it easier to identify patterns. |
| | Product | In many cases the value proposition of the adverts is not so obvious. There are campaigns that seek to give visibility to the brand or some specific action rather than to its products/services. |
| | Service | |
| | Brand | |
| Other | | |
| Transcription of denotative elements | Oral text | The transcription of the different elements is crucial in order to carry out the micro analysis and to be able to detect particular structures and understand the message not only as a whole, but also broken down into its different parts. |
| | Written text | |
| | Image | |
| General issues | Sound | One thing is the value proposition and quite another how it is advertised. In this case, general issues of the adverts are analyzed that seek to provide a little more clarification of the difference between 2019 and 2020 with regard to the behavior of the brands. |
| | Do you mention the product? | |
| | The characteristics? | |
| | The price? | |
| | Are you talking about the brand? | |
| | Is it a case of sponsorship? | |
| Is there an offer? | | |

Source: Own elaboration.

Finally, we come to the micro level. In this part of the analysis, text, image and music come together to enrich the message and its meaning (see Table 3).

To analyze the text, Hyatt (Hussain-Fahmi, 2018) proposed a set of criteria (divided between grammar and vocabulary) that make it possible to identify the elements of the text from a micro-lexical-grammatical perspective with which to observe its impact on the recipient of the message.

Within the grammar we find questions such as the type of sentences used (whether they are active or passive), nominalizations, pronouns, structure –including reflection on questions such as “why is that structure used” or “what does it mean to use this structure and not another,” and form (whether they are questions, imperative, declarative...).

Regarding the vocabulary, the connotations of the message (and whether they are positive or negative), the use of synonyms and antonyms, paralinguistic characteristics and rhetoric are considered. According to Mounin (López-Paredes, 2018), there is no advertising message without rhetoric. In fact, metaphor and, by extension, rhetoric in general permeate not only language, but also thought and action (García-García, 2007).

Barthes (1985) argued that non-linguistic elements, such as images, add signifiers and meanings to the text. The objective of the elements of visual language and design “is to transmit information, but of an abstract nature” (Acaso, 2012), such as love or hate. For this reason, on the one hand, we analyze the paralinguistic characteristics, which provide a greater understanding of the message through its non-verbal communication; and, on the other, the significant graphic elements such as spaces, the use of colors and everything related to semiotics. As Santos Zunzunegui says, “learning how the image speaks serves to understand how this representation is produced” (Villagrán-Fernández, 2003).

Finally, we analyze the sounds and music. As Aristotle argued, this is where part of the oral discourse resides (Marín-Corbí, 2005). This interpretation is differentiated between temporal congruence (which refers to synchrony with the image) and semantic congruence (which focuses on the coherence of time, place, gender ...) (Linares-Bosch, 2013). Sound and music have been shown to affect us greatly. Tagg (Hernández, 2011) argued that music is not used solely for aesthetic purposes, but that its socially accepted meanings help to build the message. Not just any melody can be used for any type of message and meaning.

The following table shows the definition of the variables that have been taken into account when evaluating the micro analysis: text, image and sound.

Table 3. Micro analysis.

| Micro analysis | Variables | Justification of each variable | |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| Text | Verbal tense | To know whether it refers to the past, the future or is spoken in the present tense. | |
| | Gender | These help us to see the relationship of the brand with the public and whether it is more or less close and inclusive. | |
| | Number | | |
| | Active / passive | Whether the subject of the sentence is the one who carries out the action or is the one to whom it is applied. | |
| | Kind of prayers | Direct / indirect | Whether it refers to acts of understanding or speech, or not. |
| | | Simple / compound | Short sentences with a single verb form or more complex sentences, with several predicates. |
| | | Questions / exclamatory | Whether they are rhetorical questions or exclamations, they refer to any change in the intonation of the sentences that arouses interest. |
| Keywords | Those words that are used repeatedly in the advert or that stand out in a particular way. | | |

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| | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| | Rhetorical figures | Literary figures tell us what is to be extolled or hidden, as well as the different resources that brands use to hook the public. | |
| | Connotations | Indirect text messages. What is meant but not communicated textually. | |
| | Extra annotations | Any extra comments to be taken into account. | |
| Image | Persons | Number of characters | It is relevant to know whether or not people are the main focus of the advert, as well as whether what is sought is a collective or individual image. |
| | | Ages | This helps us to better understand the type of target, or if the brand considers it relevant whether or not its target audience is shown. |
| | | Attitude | Whether this is happy, sad, carefree ... What the characters convey. |
| | | Relevant data | Particularities that draw attention to people: whether or not they use technology, whether they wear corporate colors, etc. |
| | Actions | Any action that is predominant or stands out above the rest and is relevant to the analysis. | |
| | Objects | The same as with the action but paying attention to the objects that appear in the advert. | |
| | Place | Open / closed Natural / artificial | The type of space is closely related to the context of lockdown in 2020. That is why this was considered a relevant element for comparing and interpreting the data. |
| | Colors | Warm or cold Are they corporate? | Tone and lighting influence how we interpret the message, but the use of corporate colors also sends us a subliminal message that should not be ignored. |
| | Rhythm | Slow Fast Of little relevance | The speed of the succession of images is measured, as well as the change of shots. |
| | | Rhetorical figures | Ditto with literary figures. |
| | Connotations | Ditto with the textual connotations. | |
| | Extra annotations | Ditto with the annotations to the text. | |
| Sound | Voices | Storyteller | Whether or not there is a narrator, and whether he/she is an omniscient one (in the 3rd person, he/she tells the story from the outside) or a protagonist (who is inside the story). |
| | | Gender | Whether the voice is male or female is a relevant detail. |
| | | Tone and timbre | Whether this is neutral, serious or sharp. |
| | | Intention | Based on the tone and type of message, identify whether what is sought is to inform, warn, console, etc. |
| | Ambient sounds | Any sound or onomatopoeia that accompanies the music and image. | |
| | Music | Style | Identify the style of music. |
| | | Instrument | Those instruments that predominate in the melody. |
| Rhythm | | Ditto with the rhythm of the images. | |
| Intention | | Ditto with the intention of the voices but focusing on the music. | |
| | Rhetorical figures | Ditto with literary and visual figures. | |

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Results

Pragmatics, according to Austin's proposals (1962) in his theory of speech acts, considers speaking as doing and that each statement has a literal meaning, an intentional dimension and another that ultimately has an impact on the audience. He therefore makes a distinction between what is said, the intention with which it is said and the effect it causes (Calsamiglia-Blancafort & Tusón, 2007).

Seeger Reynolds outlined five communication stages that are experienced in periods of health crises (Costa-Sánchez & López-García, 2020): 1) the pre-crisis, warning and preparatory stage; 2) the initial event, which consists of a general understanding of the circumstances of the crisis; 3) maintenance, where public understanding is sought; 4) resolution, which reports on recovery efforts; and 5) and evaluation, which documents and formalizes the lessons learned. Taking into account the context and the moment on which this text focuses, we find ourselves between the third and fourth stages, when the decisions taken were explained and reiterated (such as the fact of staying at home that is seen in the car ads above all) so that the public should understand the risks and benefits; information was also provided on how certain activities were being reconstructed and made easier (such as those adverts that speak about online facilities, such as online banking).

The information obtained following the analysis of the different levels (for the meso and micro levels, see Tables 2 and 3) offers relevant data on the behavior of each brand and sector that we will see below.

4.1. Banking sector

In the 2019 adverts, as we have seen in the meso analysis (Table 2), 60% try to sell a service, with the exception of two particular cases: the sponsorship of *Openbank* and the *BBVA* advert, which announced a change of identity. All still have an advertising style with which they speak directly to the public (upper-middle-class adults in a family context). Use is made of the present in the 1st and 2nd person singular and compound sentences, active and rhetorical questions; these are resources that are typical in adverts which want to share a lot of information and attract attention.

Despite their sales intention, they do not usually mention the characteristics of their services, but instead make calls to action, encouraging the viewer to go online and look for information. They address the audience with a tone implying accompaniment, using terms such as "put into your hands," "with you," "we help you," and so on. Due to the sector, it is very important that a high level of trust is transmitted to customers. According to Ángel Alloza, CEO of *Corporate Excellence*, "consumers distrust companies and especially the banking sector. This is why banks need to have values capable of generating pride of belonging to gain the trust of users" (Luna & Molina, 2020). This is achieved principally through 4 adverts with voice over narrators, 75% of them belonging to women. This "coincidence" can also be seen in numerous virtual assistants, such as Cortana, Siri... Female voices are perceived to be more sincere and provide a feeling of kindness and closeness, generating a greater bond and feeling of affection (Caballero, 2015), which helps brands achieve advertising that is more emotional. This narration is combined with varied fast-paced songs that seek to encourage the viewer.

It is also interesting to see how 60% of the adverts show family images. However, as we have seen in the study by *Mar de Fondo* (Domingo, Farache & Urra, 2020), the three most important pillars for the Spanish are health, family and romantic relationships, which explains why this is the advertising content that stands out the most. The absence of physical offices is also striking, probably due to the fact that, although in 2017 Spain was the country in Europe with the most bank offices per 10,000 inhabitants (Martínez-Bouza, 2019), in recent years this number has been decreasing by up to 40% compared to 2008. In fact, as could be

seen thanks to the PESTEL analysis, to compensate for this decrease in physical offices, in recent years the banks have invested numerous economic and technological resources in launching and utilizing ICT to improve the relationship with their users, leading to the launch of multichannel and online banking, which is increasingly present. This has resulted in the number of users of online banking representing 53% of total internet users (Domínguez, 2020).

In 2020 there was a change of strategy in the majority of adverts. Thanks to the quantitative data obtained in the meso analysis table (Table 2), we can see that only one brand continues to use the same type of textual, visual and musical resources, and does not resort to an emotional style: *BBVA*. It did not follow what its competitors were doing but did practically the opposite instead: it provided a technical discourse that provided information about a service and its characteristics.

The rest of the brands blur their target and the messages are directed to a global public. There is an increased use of the present tense in their discourses and of the 2nd person plural; the banks also include themselves as a brand in the message, but also maintain the 2nd person singular to speak directly to the public employing that confidential tone characteristic of banks. Rather than concentrating on sales these adverts have a much more conversational and emotional character, which reduces the number of calls to action. They use a descriptive style that seeks to reflect how we feel and what is happening, and a literary genre that embellishes the message. The sentences also become simpler: rhetorical questions disappear and there are more simple and short sentences. There is an increase in the use of written text, which was previously hardly present in advertising, and in the use of rhetorical figures of repetition (enumerations, parallels, repetitions and anaphora). Their objective is to reinforce the message and provide people with more and better information, since most brands make a point of advertising measures and changes in their banks aimed at helping the population. These types of messages are usually the ones that receive the best evaluation, since they show empathy.

The biggest change is seen in the music, which becomes more emotional with slow rhythms and classical melodies played on a piano. Regarding the image, two issues stand out: the use of warm tones increases and advertisements with images of technological devices are promoted, making visible the digitization of banks, increasingly present in recent years. According to a study prepared by *Mastercard*, 83% of the Spanish use electronic banking at least once a month, and 30% belong to a 100% digital bank (Anon, 2019) due to the convenience and time-saving of this service.

The discourse is filled with keywords, within which we also find coincidences between one advert and another, as we have been able to observe in the qualitative factors on the micro analysis table (Table 3), such as: now, opportunities, advance, future, change, commitment, saving and families. Their intention was to generate a feeling of improvement, motivation, modernity, fun and familiarity, as well as denote movement and activity.

4.2. Automotive sector

In 2019, 100% of commercials made sure that they stressed their objective of selling the product, as these adverts belonged to a clearly sales-oriented genre. They all mention and show the product and 3 of them even give its price and features. They do not address the public directly (with the exception of *SEAT*), nor do they provoke calls to action. 80% of the ads show different scenes with family or friends (young people and adults especially, the target of the brands), good times with the people you love, always accompanied by the car in question. That is why the use of the 2nd and 3rd person singular stands out, narrating a situation in an impersonal and distanced way. This advertising is festive and lively to encourage prospective buyers, fast-paced music and imagery form the greater part of the content, and there are hardly any narrators or written text. The text employed is oral: dialogues or monologues of the characters, making use of enumerations and parallels that

reaffirm the message. The idea of a “perfect” life is reinforced thanks to the purchase of the product, but the discourse is not inclusive since the car has not yet been acquired.

The songs are jovial, dynamic, denoting movement and seeking to convey joy and rapidity. Thus, jazz, rhythm and blues and electronic songs stand out. To make these melodies more lively and merge them with the image, in the vast majority of cases hypotyposis has been used, through numerous ambient noises that reinforce what is shown in the images. In these, we underscore the use of outdoor spaces, moving cars and the use of visual enumeration.

The objective sought through these adverts was to encourage the public, entertain, generate a sense of joy, speed and movement. The keywords that stand out to reinforce these messages are: travel, family, now and fast.

The only brand whose advertising keeps an almost identical similarity between the two years is *Mini*, which employs the same textual, visual and musical resources, making them into very characteristic elements of the brand. Some examples are the text in capitals and serif that covers almost the entire screen, the image of the car going from one side to the other and the music with a fast and lively rhythm (in one case jazz, in the other rock; this is the only advert in 2020 that he did not resort to the piano).

During the period of lockdown, the adverts shifted from an advertising genre with expository or narrative texts, to fully literary adverts employing a much more conversational style, in which the target audience was relegated to the background and the adverts began to speak directly to the public in general, with a tone of closeness and empathy hardly noticeable until then. Brands continued to reflect family and friendship values, as well as health and society, increasing their level of involvement and empathy.

What stands out are the calls to action at the end of the advertisements, impersonal texts using simple sentences, and metaphors and antitheses, with expressions such as “today and tomorrow,” “going out and coming in,” “parking and starting...,” contrasts that can be appreciated both visually and textually. Thus, they manage to speak of an uncomfortable and worrying situation –since absolutely all brands refer to COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions– in a way that inspires confidence and reflects hope.

The number of narrators used does not change from year to year, but the number of adverts using on-screen text does. These went from 2 adverts in 2019 to 5 adverts in 2020, thus becoming the resource used most homogeneously by all brands. The images seek to reflect the sensation that COVID-19 produced in us, so the use of cold tones stands out –in contrast to 2019. *Audi* even begins its adverts with several black and white scenes, representing the sadness that many people feel facing the soulless streets.

In a study carried out by the DGT in June 2020, we can see the evolution of traffic during the months when a state of alarm was in force. The greatest decrease occurred on 04/10, with up to 92% less circulation. This sharp decline explains why the adverts shift to using a slower rhythm, in which there are hardly any camera movements and the cars shown are completely stationary. The music is also slowed down, slower melodies on the piano stand out and ambient sounds are suppressed. The industry is very aware of the situation and shows its responsibility to the citizens. The messages of hope and the insistence on parking and not driving, to keep safe in the present time, was a great show of empathy on the part of the brands. Their intention was to give thanks, offer hope, have a positive impact, provide encouragement and calm, generating a pride of belonging.

4.3. General comparison

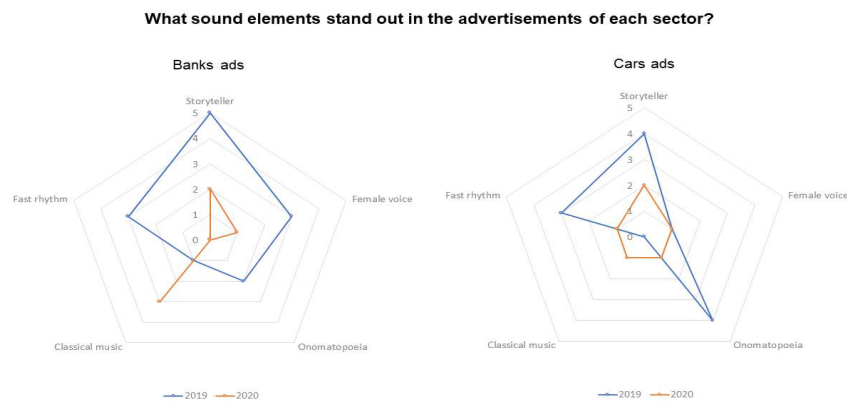
The objective of this text is to identify changes in advertising and determine whether these are provided by the context alone or are also influenced by the sector, for which purpose the meso and micro tables were developed and completed (Tables 2 and 3), both of which have qualitative as well as quantitative data, in order to obtain the largest and most representative sample possible. So far, we have seen how the context made the adverts adapt to an

exceptional situation, but we will now see how each sector and the way in which it was affected defined what to communicate and how.

During the period of lockdown, with the aim of reaching a younger target through social networks, the widespread use of hashtags stood out. The Community of Madrid launched the hashtag #QuédateEnCasa (Stay at home) in March, when infections were beginning to increase. As a result of this, the #YoMeQuedoEnCasa (I stay at home) movement emerged, born from a similar movement started in Italy with the hashtag #iorestoacasa (I stay at home) (Anon., 2020). Many brands joined this trend, both by sharing the famous hashtag or creating new ones, championing a cause that affected us all. In this sense, we can see a coincidence not only in the two sectors analyzed in this project, but in most brands.

In all the 2020 adverts there are general trends, such as the high level of iconicity, which attempt to represent reality as it was at that time with real stories that seek to make us identify with them. The concept of *empathy* in the scene also stands out, that is, the congruence between the music and the image. The music marks the psychological character of the scene but is supported by the accompanying image. In addition, undifferentiated advertising takes place without a specific target, which focuses on the things that consumers have in common (in this case, the COVID-19 period to which numerous references are made) and where brands are diluted, leaving aside the self-prominence that characterized them. Nevertheless, banks and automobile companies employed a totally different focus in their communications.

Figure 4. Outstanding sound elements in the two sectors.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the case of banks, in 2019 the objective of the advertisements was to sell a service by means of calls to action made to the public. The use of the singular predominates, cold tones and long discourses by which to encourage and convince. People are at the center of these advertisements and an attempt on the part of the banks to stand alongside them can be appreciated.

In 2020, they go from seeking to sell a service to informing about forms of aid available due to the current situation. According to data collected by the *Corporate Excellence* report that we have seen previously, the reputation of banks is marked by the price of shares, financial results, commissions, profitability and technological innovation that improves and facilitates interaction with the user (Luna & Molina, 2020). Communications focusing on low or no commissions are the ones that tend to have the most interaction and reach on social media. We can see examples of these messages in the *BBVA* campaigns that talk about financing solutions for SMEs and the self-employed, *Bankinter* and its mention of the flexibility of many of its conditions, such as the payment of their mortgages or the disappearance of commissions, or *Openbank*.

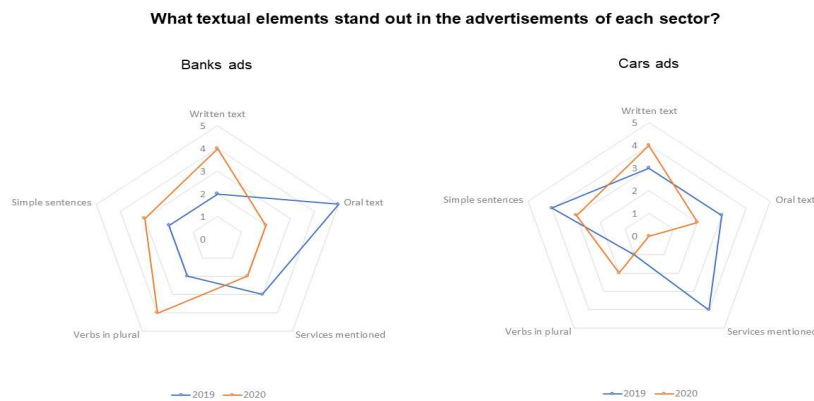
**Multimodal analysis of advertising discourse during the lockdown due to COVID-19:
Comparison of the communication strategies of financial services and automotive products in Spain**

Adverts are tinged with more emotional phrases, banks mix with their audience and begin to use expressions with “us,” increasing the level of involvement, support and trust. The presence of technological products also increases and, although the situation did not allow us to leave home, the protagonists are still shown doing many activities that denote movement.

Although the adverts are no longer humorous, they still have a cheerful, highly optimistic attitude of encouragement and closeness. For this purpose, they resort to many more warm tones and greater luminosity and also use shorter sentences, a slower rhythm and eliminate the use of a narrator and replace him/her with text. Although they allude to the situation of COVID-19, they do so in a rather subtle way, alluding to it indirectly and only referring to it with recommendations or help for the situation it has triggered, as well as with scenes of people at home: a way of indirectly mentioning the fact that we were in lockdown.

This sector has shown the idea of “we are in this together, as always. Don’t worry because everything will be fine and if not, we are here to help you more than ever’.” The hashtag campaign that the brands followed reaffirms this objective and the idea of “all together,” and we find hashtags like #MásJuntosQueNunca (Closer together than ever) (*Openbank*), #Quédateencasa (Stay at home) (*BBVA* and *Santander*), #SomosSabadell (We are Sabadell) and #ContigoMásQueNunca (With you more than ever) (*CaixaBank*).

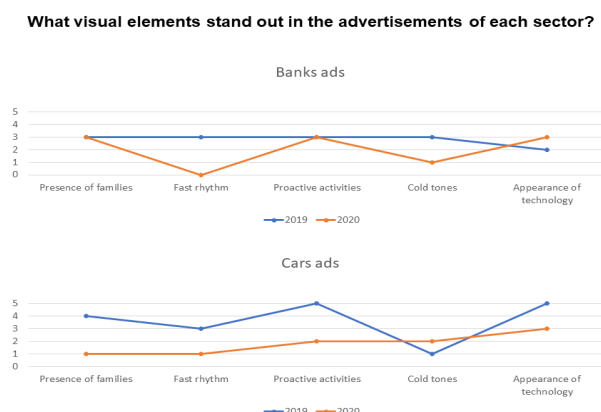
Figure 5. Textual elements featured in the two sectors.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the case of the automobile sector, the approach and the changes occurring from one year to the next are totally different. While in banks we have seen an increase in the number of adverts with warm tones, the use of the plural and the intention to generate closeness and optimism through adverts that reflect the life we had before, those of cars are the opposite. This sector shifts to the use of cold tones, impersonal verbs in the infinitive and a slowing down of the rhythm, the presence of families, activities that denote movement, and the appearance of the product. It is a situation that neither pleases nor benefit the brands and they make a point of showing this. While in the case of banks, there were indirect allusions to COVID-19, cars ensure that it is present at all times, resorting to images of empty cities, closed shops and stationary cars, and showing it in their selection of hashtags, where we find #FrenarLaCurva (Brake the curve) (*Audi*), #MeQuedoEnCasa (I stay at home) (*Mini*), #AparcadoEnCasa (Parked at home) (*Mitsubishi*), #SEATENCasa (SEAT at home) and #JuntosTambiénEnEsteViaje (Together on this trip too) (*Volkswagen*). All of them, except *Volkswagen*, allude to the fact of being in lockdown and at home.

Figure 6. Visuals featured in the two sectors.



Source: Own elaboration.

In 2019 the adverts are very dynamic, with rhythm, cars moving rapidly through the most diverse landscapes and using animated tones, but in 2020 they shift from putting cars (the product) in the center, to placing people there. However, they only appear indirectly, without a physical presence in the adverts. To achieve this, they resort to both visual and textual metaphors and allusions. An example is the case of *Audi* and its closing phrase: “on this trip there is also good news. And it is not measured in kilometers.”

The automotive sector begins to talk about the future for the first time (as do 80% of the adverts of 2020 –and none from 2019) with a hopeful attitude. The concept of these adverts alludes to the idea that “the most important thing now is people. When everything is over, which will happen thanks to our way of taking care of each other, we will continue to be there for new adventures.”

The difference between selling a service that is still consumed in a period of lockdown or a product that cannot even be used, has resulted in some –banks– maintaining an optimistic attitude, focusing on the present time, while others –automobiles– have had to approach the situation with hope, looking to the future and hoping that soon everything can return to normal.

Even so, a common element in all the adverts of this period was that they made significant and motivating statements that emphasized the strengths of the brands and their involvement with society. They humanized the brands with messages that they were going to take care of their customers and be by their side (Guardiola, 2016).

5. Conclusions

The different elements used in communication and their interpretation depend on the society in which they are framed and on the imagination of the people who comprise it. This analysis shows that although the level of iconicity of the adverts was high, the two sectors did not represent the situation in the same way. A priori, it is possible to think that everyone’s intention would be to portray an optimistic world in the face of an unprecedented health crisis, but this study contradicts the hypothesis that in the face of a pandemic and lockdown, such as the one experienced, the different brands launch a homogeneous message. The context produces a change and significantly influences the elaboration and interpretation of the message, but it is the relationship between the receiver and the sender that defines it.

The pandemic has led to changes in consumer habits. According to the *Monitor Deloitte* report (2020), 48% of the Spanish admitted that they opted for brands that were committed to social coherence and responded well to the crisis. This fostered a vision that was more concerned with society than before, which marked a clear change in communication

strategies in times of crisis, since we stopped talking about brands and products, to talk about and for people.

In the case of the automobile sector, it was so hard hit that it had no choice but to focus on the future, get involved in making things improve quickly, and show its awareness of, and be honest about, the serious situation that existed. In the case of the banking sector, however, this situation provided an opportunity to reflect how certain brands can engage with social issues and proactively help people at any given time. Even so, although the type of message and the resources used are very different, the objective is the same: to be very empathetic and generate emotional discourses.

Although the aforementioned changes occur every time there is a crisis, what is relevant is to identify both the differences in advertising strategies and the different resources used to transmit certain information. Thus, while in 2019 one sector used adverts with cold tones and the other warm ones, in 2020 they changed roles, shifting from cold to warm tones and from warm to cold tones, reflecting the situation and intention of the sector through chromaticism and lighting. In the case of the banking sector, the warm colors of 2020 were used to convey closeness and optimism, while the cold tones of the cars sought to reflect the harshness of the current situation and show the reason why the sector had “come to a stop.” Brands employed a much more conversational style with which they addressed the public and resorted to emotional advertising with which to build trust. They took advantage of the situation to advertise their values as a brand, instead of a service or a product.

The COVID pandemic has not been something short-lived. Its disappearance is unlikely, although there are buffer mechanisms, such as vaccines, masks, social distancing, etc. The direct impact of this situation is that it affects our social and individual behavior. For brands, it is a situation that must be considered because people’s incomes and behavior vary (with respect to vacations, business trips...) and it provides an occasion for reinforcing the brand values that define them. Further studies will show the impact of the changes on advertising in the different sectors. It is very likely that advertising will become more emotional, and it is possible that contextual elements involving situations of sociability, outdoor space, tranquility, liveliness of colors will be installed, at least for a while. We will have to wait for further research, similar to what has been proposed here, but wider in scope, both vertically (greater time and space) and horizontally (more sectors), to provide knowledge in that respect.

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