

Femvertising: female empowering strategies in recent spanish commercials

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Abstract. Advertising is a particularly representative case of Popular Culture. Recently, the terms *Femvertising* and *Ad-her-tising* have been coined to refer to female-targeted advertising that exhibits qualities of empowering women, feminism, female activism, or women leadership and equality. This article argues that companies producing these female-empowering advertisements show different degrees of commitment to equality, but in certain cases, they intend to manipulate users for bigger profits with faux activism. However, feminist strategies in advertising have the potential to disrupt gender norms, and users have the capacity to express dissatisfaction with such tactics. The research on the Spanish market is very limited; therefore, this article will explore and compare two contemporary advertising campaigns by companies Kaiku and Desigual to reveal strategies that in certain cases show progress in terms or the advancement to gender equality, but in other instances they reinforce inequality by the reproduction of stereotypes. A detailed analysis of the Desigual advertisement “Tú decides” illustrates the power of users to reject a pseudo-feminist campaign.

Keywords: Popular Culture; advertising; gender; feminism; stereotypes.

[es] *Femvertising*: estrategias de empoderamiento femenino en la publicidad española

Resumen. La publicidad representa un caso particularmente relevante de cultura popular. Recientemente los términos *Femvertising* y *Ad-her-tising* se han acuñado para aludir a un tipo de campañas publicitarias caracterizadas por estrategias orientadas a dar más poder a las mujeres, ensalzar el feminismo o el activismo o a mostrar el liderazgo femenino y la igualdad. Las campañas publicitarias recientes exhiben diversos niveles de compromiso hacia la igualdad, y si bien en ciertos casos los progresos en la eliminación de estereotipos son notables, en otros se intenta manipular a la audiencia por medio de tácticas contrarias al activismo feminista. La investigación en el terreno de la publicidad española no ha centrado su análisis en esto. Este artículo analiza y compara dos anuncios de las campañas de Kaiku y Desigual para estudiar los diversos niveles de progreso hacia una representación publicitaria ligada a la igualdad. Finalmente, se incluye un análisis detallado del anuncio de Desigual “Tú decides”, para ilustrar el poder de la audiencia para rechazar una campaña pseudo-feminista.

Palabras clave: Cultura popular; publicidad; género; feminismo; estereotipos.

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1. Popular culture, gender, and advertising

This article explores the connections and interactions of popular culture, gender, and advertising in recent Spanish commercials. Popular culture defines a rigid definition but refers broadly to images, narratives, ideas, concepts and texts that are present in mainstream cultures. Ray Browne was one of the pioneers in the field, who provided this working definition in 1972 which still is valid for analysis in our contemporary societies:

“Popular Culture is all those elements of life which are not narrowly intellectual or creatively elitist and which are generally though not necessarily disseminated through the mass media. Popular Culture consists of the spoken and printed word, sounds, pictures, objects, and artifacts” (1972: 11).

John Storey has offered more recently six definitions of Popular Culture, which can be summarized in the following manner. The first definition refers to the culture that is wide spread and reaches mass populations. The second establishes a residual category in which all that is not high culture is located. The third definition points to a mass culture which inevitably has a commercial nature. The fourth defines it as originating in the people, while the fifth definition refers to a site of struggle between the resistances of subordinate groups and the forces of incorporation from the dominant groups. The sixth definition makes Popular Culture virtually indistinct from High Culture in the postmodern paradigm (2009: 5-12). Media culture has become in our days the predominant way in which Popular Culture is disseminated, and, as Patricia Leavy and Adrienne Trier-Bieniek note, media culture is one of the most significant agents of socialization through which we learn the norms and values of our society to the extent that our socially constructed ideas about gender often are created and reinforced by predominant narratives in the popular culture (2014: 13). Borrowing from these definitions, Popular Culture is to be understood henceforth as the verbal or printed works, sounds, pictures, objects and artifacts, generated by people, that are not excessively intellectual or elitist, and are instead widespread.

In this context, advertising presents a particularly relevant case of study regarding Popular Culture. Advertising, in very simple terms, is “the art of persuading people to buy a product” (Arend, 2014: 53). As Arend explains, it includes any method to achieve this goal, in any medium, such as film, television, radio, the Internet, billboards, magazines, and newspapers, among others (2014: 54). Advertising fits adequately the definitions of Popular Culture previously provided; it is disseminated through “spoken and printed word, sounds, pictures, objects, and artifacts” (Browne, 1972: 11) and, applying Storey’s contribution, the quantitative dimension implied in the first definition, the commercial nature alluded to in the third one, and the tensions and resistances between the interests of the dominant groups and certain individuals or groups mentioned in the fifth definition are particularly relevant. As

Sut Jahlly suggests, “Advertising is the most influential institution of socialization in modern society” (1990: 1). Among the characteristics given by the author to support the power of advertising as a socializing agent, the following are mentioned: it structures mass media content; it plays a fundamental role in the construction of gender identity; it acts as a mediator in families regarding the creation of needs; it conforms the strategy to be implemented in political campaigns; it controls cultural institutions such as popular music or sports, and, finally, it has become part of daily conversations (Jahlly, 1990: 1).

Gender roles have experienced a constant and progressive transformation in Western societies, and since the 1950s, such evolution has been reflected in the ways in which women and men have been represented in advertising. Advertising and portrayals of gender roles have received academic attention. Research proves that advertising tends to offer traditional and stereotyped images of men and women, relations and gender roles (McArthur & Resko, 1975; Goffman, 1979; Furnham and Mak, 1999; Cronin, 2000; Stern and Mastro, 2004). Erving Goffman is one of the first authors to detail the specific forms in which femininity and masculinity are displayed in advertising. Through the analysis of 500 different photo advertisements and a close look at nonverbal components such as positioning and appearance of the body, size and height, clothing, gaze and touch, he finds significant contrasts between how males and females are portrayed.

Gender stereotypes are repeatedly reproduced in a variety of ways: women are portrayed as soft, vulnerable, fragile, powerless, dreamy, child-like, and submissive. Conversely, men are generally depicted as confident, comfortable, powerful and dominating. Goffman coins the term “gender display” to insist on the socially learned and patterned depictions of masculinity and femininity; such stereotyped representations are fundamental to maintain an essential order in society, and they orient men and women to the idea of what their appropriate presence, behavior, and actions should be (Goffman, 1979).

The social construction of gender is agreed upon by the many and diverse ramifications of feminist studies. Judith Butler (1999) elaborates on this notion to create the concept of *gender performativity*. For Butler, gender is not something essential that constitutes the individual; rather, it is an activity that we do and perform; it is a verb. By performing gender, individuals reflect cultural norms and expectations of what culture considers appropriate for men and women at a specific historical time, and in that conformation of expected femininity, advertising plays a determining role.

2. Evolution in gender representation in advertising. Femvertising³ as a recent trend

As Eva Espinar-Ruiz and Cristina González-Díaz summarize, recent studies emphasize two processes that have taken place in the last decades; mainly a reduction in gender stereotypes which are, nevertheless, still pervasive, and the presence of more realistic portrayals of women in commercials. Women appear in a broader range of contexts and perform different tasks, although women continue to be shown in domestic contexts, as mothers, and thinness is the immutable criterion

³ Femvertising will be used without italics hereafter.

of beauty and femininity (Espinari-Ruiz & González-Díaz, 2012: 111). The changes in the stereotypical representation of women are connected to the fact that, in these past decades, in addition to their changing roles in the labor force and in the family, women have also increased their power as consumers. In the United States, for example, women account for 85% of all consumer purchases, either directly or by influencing the decision to buy a certain brand or product (She-conomy, 2016). In this context, the notion of *commodity feminism* is relevant to understand a new form of advertising which Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath and Sharon Smith define as the way in which feminist ideas and icons are appropriated for commercial purposes, emptied of their political significance and offered back to the public in a commodified form, principally in advertising (1991).

In the last two decades, a new stage in advertising concerned with feminist practices can be observed. The terms *ad-her-tising* and Femvertising have been coined to define advertising mainly addressed to women that exhibits qualities of empowering women and equality (Becker-Herby, 2016: 18). This new form of advertising is connected to the Third Wave of feminism; only its most representative characteristic will be mentioned to contextualize the defining characteristics of Femvertising. Third Wave authors have insisted on the notion of privilege and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) has developed the notion of *intersectionality*, which defends that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and even age all serve as vectors of oppression and privilege. Intersectionality proposes that all aspects of one's identity need to be examined as simultaneously interacting with each other; this framework is valid to observe how inequality develops in a multidimensional basis. In terms of advertising, this translates into the need to reflect the variety of races, ages, sizes, body types and appearances of the female body. In the United States, for example, there have been recent developments which show a deep preoccupation with portraying such diversity; in the case of Spanish commercials, there is still a deficit in this area, as will be shown in the analysis.

Alyssa Baxter and Elisa Becker-Herby have recently traced this phenomenon (Baxter, 2015; Becker-Herby, 2016). Baxter observes that historically, feminism in advertising has been utilized as a marketing ploy since the 1960s, when the Virginia Slims campaign was marketed to young professional women with the "You've Come a Long Way, Baby" slogan. Baxter similarly mentions the Dove Real Beauty campaign in 2004 as a predecessor of the current trend; she concludes that a decade later, *ad-her-tising* is more prominent than ever (Baxter, 2015). Both authors mention the fact that, although this new trend has received attention in editorial articles in newspapers and magazines, scholarly and academic research is still very limited. Defined as "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls", as Becker-Herby notes, "Femvertising casts aside the use of traditional gender stereotypes and ensures that women are the protagonists in the advertising and marketing narrative" (2016: 18). The author also reviews campaigns connected to this phenomenon, and concludes that they are built around these five pillars: 1) Utilization of diverse female talent in an intersectional manner. 2) Messaging that is inherently pro-female. 3) Pushing gender-norm boundaries/stereotypes. 4) Downplaying of sexuality. 5) Portraying women in an authentic manner. Authenticity refers to all aspects of the advertising— from the talent, the product, scenario and styling (Becker-Herby, 2016: 18-20).

In the United States, Femvertising campaigns have experienced an increasing development, and it is possible to find numerous examples of such commercials today. She-

Knows Media, a digital media company, has created the #Femvertising Awards, which in 2015 and 2016 have recognized brands “that are challenging gender norms by building stereotype-busting, pro-female messages and images into ads that target women” (SheKnows Media). The honors for the 2016 edition were awarded to brands in categories like Humor (Bud Light for “The Bud Light Party: Equal Pay”), Social Impact (Badger & Winters for “#Women Not Objects”), Inspiration (Under Armour for “Rule Yourself: Women’s Gymnastics”), People’s Choice (RedElephant), Wildfire (General Mills won for its agency diversity initiative), and Next Generation (Girls Who Code for “Why Girls Can’t Code”) (SheKnows Media). Some of the interesting facts that are mentioned in the #Femvertising Report, are the following: 94% of respondents believe that portraying women as sex symbols in advertisements is harmful; 64 percent of respondents believe ads have become more generally inclusive of gender, race, and sexuality in the past year; 59 percent of women have followed a brand in social media because they like what they stand for; 60 percent of women and 49 percent of men believe it is important that the people who create ads are diverse, and almost half (46 percent) of women have stopped buying a product because they did not like the way they were portrayed in that brand’s ad (SheKnows Media).

Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer analyze the relationship between gender and popular culture texts in terms of production, representation, and consumption. Questions such as the following become fundamental when exploring commercials as objects of consumption by users: Who produces popular culture texts? What representations of gender circulate? What about resistive or counter-dominant representations of gender? What is the relationship between gender and the consumption of pop culture texts? Milestone & Meyer, 2013). One of the most significant aspects of this new manner of understanding advertising as a representation of Popular Culture is to reject the passive nature of consumers as mere spectators, and to replace it with an active and interactive role. Individuals can reject or negotiate media messages, the flow of communication in advertising is no longer one-way, and individuals can leave comments, feedback and reviews on websites and social media, as will be explored in the last section of this article.

3. Spanish Commercials: Kaiku and Desigual

The potential of Femvertising to subvert the patriarchal and stereotyped character of advertising has been highly debated and there is no agreement on its potentially disruptive nature. This section explores two Spanish commercials to analyze their commitment to gender equality and its inclusion in the Femvertising category. To determine that, both commercials are briefly analyzed using the five pillars of Femvertising as exposed by Becker-Herby. Apart from providing descriptions, the conclusions analyze how successful these first attempts to empower women in Spanish advertising campaigns are.

3.1. “Da el paso” by Kaiku

The first commercial is the one created in January 2015 by dairy product company Kaiku⁴; its title “Da el paso” (Take the step) is chosen to promote Kaiku’s variety of lactose-free dairy products.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XRcqwpkYek>



1) *Utilization of diverse female talent*

As Becker-Herby explains, Femvertising, much like third wave feminism, is intersectional. Women are much more likely to see themselves reflected in the advertisements by models of their same race, shape, body size and age; therefore, the ideal, model-like representation of femininity is avoided, instead opting for a variety of female appearances (Becker-Herby, 2016: 18). Several women are included in this commercial but, despite their apparent diversity in aspect, when examined closely, all of them are considerably young (in their 20s, 30s and 40s); they are all white; and their body type, size, and general appearance, without conforming to the normative model of female perfection as usually provided in stereotypical advertising, are nonetheless traditionally feminine (appropriately thin, long hair, smiling faces). Kim Sheenan notes that an important part of the beauty ideal today includes a thin body type. Women in advertisements tend to be young, thin, and white, and the ones who do not fit into this category, such as black and older women, are either invisible, presented as tokens, or are portrayed negatively. There is a cultural taboo against large female bodies and advertisements often present large women as negative examples (Sheenan, 2013: 106). The Kaiku commercial, despite its attempt to include a variety of women, is still very close to such ideal and does not deviate from it.

2) *Messaging that is inherently pro-female*

Key messages from Femvertising campaigns are “empowering, inspirational and inclusive. Messaging seeks to provide the consumer with feelings of affirmation, self-confidence and motivation, rather than inferring that she is not good enough and that the product at hand is the key to “fixing” her imperfections” (Becker-Herby, 2016: 19). The problem with the Kaiku commercial is that it is perhaps excessively pro-female, with no real reason behind the message. The different women that appear in the commercial sing together a song; these are the lyrics:

“No me gustan los clichés, no me gusta renunciar. No me gusta que me juzguen ni tampoco no llegar. Soy madre, amiga, currante y amante. Voy a comerme el

mundo en este mismo instante. No me complico, vivo mi vida; a mí lo que me importa es sentirme muy bien. Vive ligera, siéntete libre. Tú hazme caso, da el paso y cámbialo tú también. No me gusta cobrar menos ¿te sorprende mi actitud? No quiero esforzarme el doble para ser igual que tú⁵”.

The association of lactose-free products with the notion of feeling “light” has dangerous associations with dieting products, therefore reinforcing the idea of thinness previously exposed; feeling healthy or eliminating the symptoms associated with such intolerance would have been better options. Nonetheless, the different feminist slogans about equal pay and working opportunities seem strangely disconnected to the product and the characters, to the extent that the feminist message is trivialized and perceived as a gimmick to attract women (no men are portrayed in the commercial).

3) Pushing gender-norm boundaries/stereotypes; challenging perceptions of what a woman or girl “should” be

Femvertising campaigns portray women or girls in scenarios that are outside of the traditional stereotypes that are associated with the femininity, “Campaigns rarely feature women doing housework or other duties associated with marriage or motherhood. In Femvertising, women are often portrayed in an athletic or competitive environment, performing a leisure activity, in a profession or in a neutral scenario” (Becker-Herby, 2016: 19). The scenarios in the Kaiku commercial are varied and represent a variety of women’s actions. They also include locations traditionally considered “feminine” (home, supermarket, clothing stores), combined with others which portray a more professional (office) and athletic (swimming pool) image, or streets and spaces associated to leisure activities. Although the song defends a woman that is “a mother, a friend, a worker, and a lover”, motherhood is emphasized by the double presence of a mother in a domestic setting with two children and by a pregnant woman.

4) Downplaying of sexuality; sexuality that does not cater to the male gaze

Although Femvertising does not entirely suppress sexuality, it is used in ways much more nuanced than traditional advertising featuring women. “Exposed skin or female bodily attributes are showcased in a way that feels relevant and authentic (i.e. female athletes working out in sports bras). Femvertising is very rarely over-the-top with cleavage, make-up or unrealistic sexual poses” (Becker-Herby, 2016: 19). In that respect, the Kaiku commercial conforms very closely to the description provided by Becker-Herby; even if one woman wears a swimsuit, this is black, very elegant, and it covers her body in a non-sexually exposed manner. Women wear non-revealing clothes and their gestures and movements suggest a strong femininity which corresponds to the message being conveyed. The commercial is

⁵ The original is shown to keep the rhyme; the translation is provided here: “I do not like clichés; I do not like to resign. I do not like to be judged; neither not to get there. I am a mother, a friend, a worker and a lover. I am going to eat up the world in this very instant. I do not complicate myself; I live my life. What I want more than anything is to feel very well. Live light, feel free. Pay attention to me, take the step and change it. I do not like to make less money; does my attitude surprise you? I do not want to work twice as much to be equal to you”.

clearly not designed to cater to the male gaze and any open display of sexuality is carefully avoided.

5) *Portraying women in an authentic manner*

Authenticity refers to all aspects of the advertising— from the talent, the product, scenario and styling (Becker-Herby, 2016: 19). In this case, the lack of authenticity is perceived mainly because of the lack of real connection between the advertising of lactose-free dairy products and the feminist message displayed in the song. The allusion to a “light” lifestyle further complicates the claim to authenticity. Additionally, the image that is conveyed is one of perfection, in which attractive women have it all by happily combining all aspects of her life. Finally, in web pages by people with lactose intolerance, the commercial was not well received and received harsh criticism for not including men, for showing a female image in which users could not see themselves represented, and for the banality and absurdity of the feminist slogans (*Kaiku, ¿por qué no me representas?*).

3.2. “Tú decides” by Desigual



This commercial by the clothing brand Desigual was created to celebrate Mother’s Day in 2014, and is addressed to young Spanish women. The same methodological approach will be implemented through the analysis of the five pillars of Femvertising as elaborated by Becker-Herby.

1) *Utilization of diverse female talent*

If in Femvertising, the ideal, model-like representation of femininity is avoided, in the Desigual case, it is actively and resolutely reinforced. In this commercial spot, a young woman who is wearing a dress by Desigual, uses a pillow to simulate a pregnancy. She is the stereotypical representation of a young, very thin model, with long hair and a beautiful made-up face who wears a very short and sexy dress. After

sensually sucking a pin, she pierces several condoms with it, as the initial slogan of the campaign “You decide” is shown along the sign “Happy Mother’s Day”. She is placed in front of a mirror and she poses in a deliberately sexual manner. This strictly conforms to the model-like, stereotypically sexual portrayal of femininity.

2) *Messaging that is inherently pro-female*

The campaign attempts to create an original and fresh statement of a young, sexy, fun and flirtatious woman who controls the destiny of her life, of her body and of her actions: she is the one to decide if she wants to be a mother and maternity is given a cheerful, sexy, fun and sensual touch. The problem is that the traditional stereotypes associated with femininity are mixed and deliberately confused with feminist values connected to power of decision and liberation; in such blatant disregard for an authentic feminist approach, the commercial becomes openly sexist. The apparent defense of women’s freedom to decide about motherhood becomes an expression of irresponsibility for sexual practices. The advertisement reinforces the stereotype by which a woman should be, firstly, attractive and sexy, and, even worse, strengthens the connection of femininity with a deceptive and malicious nature to which men become defenseless victims. In its zeal to transgress and provoke, the advertisement not only does not offer a liberating image of the protagonist, but projects a further objectification by linking maternity to a mere “look” and freedom to a frivolous and deceptive wink to sexuality⁶.

3) *Pushing gender-norm boundaries/stereotypes*

Female stereotypes connected to beauty and sexual attraction are blatantly exposed, but the capacity of deception as embedded in femininity is also conveyed in this commercial. Manipulation to trick a man to become a father without his consent is implicit, and lack of credibility for women’s actions may be extended to other related aspects, such as claims of having been subject to violence or rape.

4) *Downplaying of sexuality*

As has been sufficiently explained, sexuality in this case is hardly downplayed, but another relevant aspect linked to sexuality may be added. By piercing the condoms, she may attempt to become pregnant, but transmission of sexual diseases is absolutely ignored, and the irresponsibility of her action is therefore multiplied.

5) *Portraying women in an authentic manner*

The choice of a very slim, young and beautiful model, who does not represent the diversity of women, conveys a message of lack of authenticity. This commercial opposes the trend of Femvertising, which is oriented towards a portrayal which avoids the normative stereotypical representation of model images of bodies, since they do not reflect the real aspect of the majority of women.

To end this section, the power of the audience to reject sexism is studied. A major defining trait of Popular Culture is its dissemination in mass media, and the power of the users to interact and to even reject the messages that are perceived as oppressive. Sentiment analysis of Twitter messages is the method employed by the Media Reputation Intangibles (MRI) research centre, at the University of Navarra, to produce a

⁶ The authors wish to thank María J. Pando-Canteli for her ideas and help in this section.

study of the *Desigual* advertisement “Tú decides,” demonstrating the power of users to influence, and even put an end to, advertising campaigns⁷. The study concludes that none of the people who commented the campaign on Twitter associated the ad with any positive value; furthermore, the ad triggered a landslide of negative feelings (Pujol, 2014), which was the reason behind the discontinuation of the campaign.

Businesses around the world are utilizing the 500 million messages that are sent out every day on Twitter (Internet Live Stats, 2015)⁸. Several research groups have developed software to analyse the opinions and attitudes expressed in tweets to examine reputational issues and forecast social outcomes, such as election results, box-office revenues or stock market behaviour. Sentiment analysis (also known ‘opinion mining’) refers to the use of natural language processing, text analysis and computational linguistics to track the mood of the public, and identify subjective information in any digital content (Search Business Analytics, 2010). MRI Universidad de Navarra employs media impact measurement and analysis to gauge the perceived reputation of all kind of brands, based on newspapers and social media content, including Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and TripAdvisor (MRI Universidad de Navarra, 2016). “Brands are no longer satisfied with quantitative data, they want to know about the tone of the conversation beyond whether it is positive or negative, and the specific theme of the conversation” (MRI Universidad de Navarra, 2014).

Sentiment analysis allows for an interpretative analysis on how the different elements of brand reputation values are captured in the tone of the conversation in social networks⁹. This methodology captures content that can be grouped and visualized around three categories: feelings associated with the emotional reputation, two associated with the rational reputation (which can be divided into those groups: one related to admirable values and the other to quality), and those associated with a negative reputation. After the systematic analysis of the content, it is possible to estimate to what extent the tone of the conversation about a particular brand or issue is identified within each of the categories of values.

In the *Desigual* Report, Pujol, from MRI Universidad de Navarra, describes what happened on Twitter right after the ad was broadcasted on television on May 2, 2014, on Mother’s Day. “*Desigual*” quickly became the so called trending topic (TT) of the day¹⁰, most of the commentators showing anger and rejection (Pujol, 2014). The tweets that generated greater adherence (and higher numbers of retweets or RTs) were those that manifested indignation, and the two emotions most associated with the reaction generated by the ad were “deplorable” and “intolerable,” while sentiments associated with rejection and scorn were also activated (“repugnant” and “despicable”) (Pujol, 2014). What is a looked-for outcome? Pujol notes that *Desigual*’s campaigns have sought to be transgressive, and Mother’s Day was a perfect occasion for the brand that caters for urban, modern, young women (Pujol, 2014). Transgres-

⁷ <https://smreputationmetrics.wordpress.com/2014/05/05/el-polemico-anuncio-de-desigual-para-el-dia-de-la-madre-2014-analisis-de-sentimiento-twitter/>

⁸ The first tweet was sent on March 21, 2006 by Jack Dorsey, the creator of Twitter. It took only three years to reach the billionth tweet (Internet Live Stats, 2015).

⁹ Online social networking services include Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. The analysis of data produced by social networking provides the means to study social entities, to identify local and global patterns, to locate influential social actors in the network, and to examine network dynamics and social interaction between actors.

¹⁰ A trending topic is a subject that experiences a rush in popularity on a social media platform for a limited period of time (Big Commerce, 2015).

sion generates confrontation by establishing two camps: “The confrontation causes noise and grievance on the part of the sector that feels hurt. The sector that feels flattered responds and defends the validity of the attack on the establishment. It is understood that Desigual is convinced that its target customers are more in the second group than in the first” (Pujol, 2014). Judging from Pujol’s article, Desigual was wrong. The campaign went over the boundaries of provocation (Aced, 2014) and its “attitude” devoured the brand (Díaz, 2014).

The MRI Universidad de Navarra study analyses all the tweets that were published in which the official account of the brand, @Desigual_ES, was mentioned, as well as those that commented on and shared the video of the ad during the first two days of the controversy. Although there are dissimilarities between the tone of the messages including the brand’s name and the tone of the messages including the video, these differences are minor; and the tone in both is overwhelmingly negative (Pujol, 2014). Pujol then compares the reaction to the Desigual ad to a few cases of negative response on Twitter in which the tone of indignation prevailed, including the publication of a book addressed to women and entitled *Marry and be meek* (Pujol, 2014). The comparative analysis shows that the degree of anger and outrage generated by the Desigual ad is equal to or greater than all the cases. The study concludes that it was a full-scale reputational crisis.

In order to support his findings, Pujol also compares these initial results with corroborating metrics from Twitter and other social platforms (2014). For example, before the controversy, the mentions of @Desigual_ES never exceeded 70 per day, while they “exploded” to 2,470 the day the ad was launched and fluctuated between 500 and 1,500 during the following days (Pujol, 2014). Quantitative analysis tells the same story of a reputational crisis. The controversy spread and triggered a chain reaction on other platforms. The author notes that, during the first five days of the campaign, the video of the ad exceeded the barrier of 2.5 million views on YouTube, enthused by the emergence of parody videos (in comparison, the 122 videos that Desigual has on its official YouTube channel totaled 15 million views).

The study focuses then on YouTube, whose metrics offer more indications about the nature and extent of the reputational crisis. On YouTube, the dynamic was not the same as on Twitter, since the comments do not have to fit in 140 characters, which forces Twitter messages to convey a single idea and helps to identify what concept is being transmitted. Instead, the structure of the messages in a YouTube comment can be longer and more complex, and therefore it becomes more difficult to extract clear feelings from them (*ibid.*). In spite of this constraint, by looking at 1,200 comments posted by users, the comparison confirms the results of the analysis of Twitter messages and shows parallel outcomes. Besides, up to May 7, 2014, the video had received 8,600 votes, 79% of them negative, which is “a really high rejection quota for content created by a brand” (Pujol, 2014).

The parodies of the ad that emerged on YouTube clearly show that the sexist and irresponsible elements of the campaign were immediately perceived by the audience. Three of them stand out. “Anuncio desigual PARODIA #tudecides #dia del padre 2014¹¹” shows actor Bruce Willis fussing in front of a mirror, followed by the words: “How to change contraceptives with placebos. Happy Father’s Day.” It gathered 10,510 views, 14 likes, 4 dislikes and 4 comments (negative) by the time of

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQcpNaXg0sI>

writing. The second, “Desigual #Dia del padre (PARODIA anuncio dia de la madre) #tudecides 2014¹²,” with 67,735 views, 239 likes, 49 dislikes and 99 comments, displays a man who gets two women unconscious with the apparent intention to rape them and the captions: “#tudecides” (your choice) and “Happy Father’s Day.” The third¹³, with only 737 views, 2 dislikes and no comments, is more complex and shows parts of the original ad with a background voice that, while the actress punctures the condoms, sarcastically remarks: “Maybe he will marry me, and if not I can ask for alimony. Maybe I catch gonorrhea, hepatitis, herpes, or the big price, AIDS!” The reversal of the model’s actions by a male counterpart is immediately perceived as acts of violence against women, and the lack of awareness concerning the transmission of sexual diseases is equally addressed.

Facebook tells a different story, since it is an excellent platform for communities formed around brand names, but allows for limited real social conversations. “Facebook does not get you out of your comfort zone because it surrounds you with those who are most interested in your brand, among which are your fans. Therefore, the interaction of brands on Facebook can show an idyllic image of the company” (Pujol, 2014). With no real tools to receive criticism, the risk is that companies end up believing that it reflects reality. Desigual had 2.7 million “likes” in its official page on Facebook when the study was published, but the Desigual posts on this particular ad received only 112 comments (Pujol, 2014). “Instead, ads on YouTube received 8,600 comments, and on Twitter, they were mentioned in 4,500 tweets. The information that Facebook generates blinds the brands in the face of crises” (Pujol, 2014). In any case, the information extracted from Facebook from March to early May 2014 indicates that the brand received a very low level of likes, that the rate of sharing was very low, and that the reaction rate was high and negative, corroborating what was detected on Twitter and YouTube before.

Faced with a reputational crisis, Desigual took some crisis management measures. The first was to limit the direct impact by restricting access to the video. “They used a rather crude method of making the video accessible only for adults... This self-censorship is a somewhat primitive but clear way of indicating that you have a problem with the content that you generate yourself.” (Pujol, 2014). It is likely that this action mitigated the crisis, but it did not avert it since both the parodies of the ad and the original ad started spreading on other YouTube channels (Pujol, 2014). On May 4, the company released a statement in a Twitter message that linked the ad to the idea of “maternity” and “freedom of expression”¹⁴.

Despite the fact that social networks are seen by many brands as a risk, Pujol concludes that they are not the problem; they are a new and invaluable ally and a source of opportunities to test waters and make corrections. Companies just need to listen to people, and social networks analysis allows for an easier and cheaper way to do so (Pujol, 2014). However, another conclusion can be drawn: social networks can allow people to find other like-minded people, get organized and channel their accrued opinions, and ultimately influence processes. Social influencers are not only professionals for hire; they can be normal people in sufficient quantities, armed with the strength of the “better argument” (Habermas, 1984: 25), and outraged about

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdNjVHL8DKw>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATuCzibmqTg>.

¹⁴ The statement is no longer available on the official site.

something such as the blatant sexism of the Desigual ad. This case can be regarded as an example of a technology-based empowerment case that was disruptive in that it challenged the power dynamics. Desigual's image was damaged by this commercial and will never be the same after this.

4. Conclusions

This article explores the initiatives and the limitations of Femvertising in Spain. It focuses on two commercials which represent two clear tendencies. The first one, embodied by the Kaiku commercial, is closer to the Femvertising intention to empower women and to provide a visual and discursive representation which opposes traditional stereotypes in advertising. Spanish commercials tend to get closer to this trend, and in the coming years more efforts will be made; to name just one such example, the 2016 campaign by Pavo Frío, under the name "Deliciosa calma" (Delicious calm), achieves an even greater heterogeneity in its portrayal of the characters included by expanding their age range and body images. It also rejects the ideal of the superwoman and the social construction of motherhood by providing an environment free of stress in which women can get together and confess their aspirations. Once again, the association of the brand with a type of "light" food associated with to dieting has been criticized. The second tendency represents a manipulative and tendentious approach which apparently gives voice to feminist aspirations and contributes to female empowerment but in fact reinforces sexism and the reproduction of stereotypes. In both cases, the power of users to interact, modify, and alter advertising campaigns outcomes is suggested in the article as a potent strategy connected to Popular Culture, and the passive nature as mere spectators is clearly rejected. There is no doubt that in future years, Spanish users will be confronted with new examples from both tendencies. In terms of research, Femvertising is a fertile area of investigation which has not been implemented in Spain yet. It adequately connects interdisciplinary perspectives from feminist theory, marketing and advertising studies and Popular Culture, thus providing innovative perspectives into new social and visual configurations of femininity.

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