Eliciting Emotions as Cultural Mediation: Advertising and the Non-rational Space between Culture and the Economy

Suscitar Emociones como Mediación Cultural: la Publicidad y el Espacio No Racional entre la Cultura y la Economía

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Abstract

This paper explores the connections between emotions, culture and economy within the framework of marketing practices, focusing on the case of advertising. In this way, grounded on the discourses of London-based advertising practitioners, this research analyzed the role of emotions in advertising communication in order to comprehend how advertisers organize the elicitation of emotions as a process of cultural mediation. It is argued that the elicitation of emotions in advertising constitutes what Moor (2012) denominates a work of 'culturalisation', a process that comprises the continuous interpretation and redefinition of culture through emotionally laden messages. In the case of British advertising, this is observable in the mobilization of consumers through humor and feelings associated with togetherness, which the interviewees identified as the most typical emotional resources to foster loyal relationships between brands and consumers. It is concluded that the advertising process of cultural mediation depends not only on the interpretation of cultural meanings but also on the identification of what Scribano (2019) calls social sensibilities, which constitutes an example of how emotions mediate the relationship between culture and economy in the marketing industry.
KeyWords: Emotions; Cultural mediation; Advertising; Social sensibilities; Culturalization.

Resumen

El presente artículo explora las intersecciones entre emociones, cultura y economía en el contexto de las prácticas de marketing, enfocándose en el caso de la publicidad. De este modo, basándose en los discursos de publicistas en Londres, este estudio analizó el rol de las emociones en la comunicación publicitaria, para así comprender cómo los publicistas organizan la provocación de emociones como un proceso de mediación cultural. Se plantea que la provocación de emociones en publicidad constituye lo que Moor (2012) denomina un proceso de 'culturalización', el que supone la continua interpretación y redefinición de la cultura a través de mensajes emocionales. En el caso de la publicidad británica, esto se aprecia en la movilización de los consumidores a través del humor y sentimientos asociados a la solidaridad o unidad social, siendo estos, de acuerdo con los entrevistados, los más típicos recursos emocionales para fortalecer relaciones de fidelidad entre marcas y consumidores. Se concluye que la mediación cultural de la publicidad depende no sólo de la interpretación de significados culturales sino también en la identificación de lo que Scribano (2019) denomina sensibilidades sociales, siendo un ejemplo de los modos por los cuales las emociones median la relación entre la cultura y la economía en la industria del marketing.
Palabras Claves: Emociones; Mediación cultural; Publicidad; Sensibilidades sociales; Culturalización

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Introduction[1]

Since the 1970s, the systematic circulation of emotionally laden messages started to be conceived as the best way to strengthen the relationship between brands and consumers, based on the precept that emotional-affective inputs have more influence on purchasing decisions than rationality (see Zajonc, 1980; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). From that time on, marketers, advertisers and branding consultants have contributed to the conception of consumers as emotional entities, "making consumption into an emotional act and legitimizing the identity of the consumer as driven by emotions." (Illouz, 2018: 12). In this context, the promotion of brands and their products relies heavily on the instrumentalization of people's feelings, positioning marketing practices as one of the best examples to excavate into how emotions increasingly intervene in the mediation between the cultural and the economic. Considering this, the present analysis seeks to reinforce the necessity of deepening the understanding of the mechanisms by which practitioners related to marketing activities commodify and embed emotions in consumer culture (Engdahl, 2020). To this purpose, it has been decided to focus on the case of the advertising industry, considering its pivotal role in organizing marketing communication and circulating meanings among the population.

This study was grounded on the necessity of analyzing marketing practices in terms of their ability to produce and circulate cultural forms (Moor, 2012; Ariztía, 2013) and not only around their economic implications. Accordingly, it starts from the premise that the characterization of advertising as a process of cultural mediation is the first step towards evaluating the relationship between emotions and culture within the framework of marketing practices. This idea relies on the categorization of advertisers as *cultural intermediaries* (Soar, 2002; Nixon, 2003; Cronin, 2004; McFall, 2004; Kelly, 2014; Kobayashi, Jackson & Sam, 2017; Cohen, 2019).), a concept coined by Bourdieu (1984) to refer to a broad range of professionals related to cultural production and creative work, such as journalists, designers, television producers, marketers and advertisers, among others. Cultural intermediaries are key agents for the reproduction of consumption culture, as they have the function of socializing and legitimizing certain material and symbolic goods that create lifestyles defined by their consumption (Moguillansky, 2008), based upon the dissipation of the distinctions between 'high' and 'low/popular' culture through a "deconstruction of symbolic hierarchies" (Featherstone, 2007). Moreover, following Bourdieu's understanding of these agents as 'taste-makers', these practitioners have been categorized as 'mediators' or 'arbiters' of taste (Entwistle, 2006), as they inculcate new consumerist dispositions through the shaping of consumers' preferences (Du Gay & Nixon, 2002; Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2010). Considering their role as taste-makers, Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012) state that the study of cultural intermediaries is situated in the analysis of the issues of agency and the practices of market agents that produce culture,

impacting the formation of value for particular products and practices through the notion of "*what*, and thereby *who*, is legitimate, desirable and worthy, and thus by definition what and who is not" (p. 552). Consequently, the mobilization of meanings in terms of legitimacy is determined by both the cultural sphere and the space of economic exchanges, as the formation of value around consumption goods cannot be detached from either.

Following Illouz's assertions, the inseparability between culture and the economy will be addressed from the precept that "culture and economy produce each other only after a cultural process in which emotions are objectified, labeled, and integrated" (2018: 21). In this way, it is argued here that advertising cannot be regarded as a cultural mediation process without considering the role of emotions as social dispositions in advertising communication. The concept of cultural mediation is useful in understanding how practitioners shape culture and legitimize certain behaviors and meanings. Therefore, it is essential to examine the mechanisms through which consumers' feelings are utilized and classified in the everyday work of advertisers, as this constitutes an example of how emotions play a crucial role in mediating between culture and the economy in the context of marketing practices.

Considering the above, this paper analyses the discourses of advertising practitioners regarding their work and the role of emotions in advertising communication. Based on the analysis of seven in-depth interviews with London-based advertising practitioners, it is posited that the observation and interpretation of culture for marketing purposes involves rendering not only the prevailing practices and discourses in society but also consumers' emotional resonances. In so doing, advertisers aim to create loyal relationships between brands and customers, for which the elicitation of emotions comprise a crucial aspect of their work. Thus, it is argued that advertisers' work of *culturalization* (Moor, 2012) is inevitably intervened by the action of emotions in relation to consumption practices, as the production and interpretation of definitions of culture entail recognizing the prevailing *social sensibilities* (Scribano, 2019) that mediate between the cultural and the economic spheres.

The decision to investigate advertisers' practices responds to the fact that most of the critical studies on advertising up until the end of the twentieth century focused on the analysis of advertisements over the study of advertising practices (e.g. Leymore, 1975; Barthes, 1977; Williamson, 1978; Goldman,

1992). This has led to a prioritization of advertising's products instead of its mechanisms of production (McFall, 2004). For this reason, the fieldwork aimed to investigate how advertisers conceive the creative process and the design of communication strategies to conduct advertising campaigns and the role of emotions in these practices.

Advertising as performative? Defining advertising as a cultural mediation process

As Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) posited over seventy years ago, the culture industry depends on advertising to administer the needs of consumers and orient them in the market. In this process, advertisers perform different communication strategies based on the reification of objects around particular meanings and signs, influencing the everyday practices of consumers, which are now "permeated by the patterns of the culture industry" (p. 135). This is concordant with the discourses of British advertising practitioners, who state that communicating is as important as selling, making the design of communication strategies an essential part of their job. In this regard, when advertisers were asked if it is more important to sell or to communicate, most of them concurred that they are part of "*a communication business*" (I02) in which "*communication is just the tube of the commercial processes in place*" (I03). Nonetheless, even though all of them agreed with the importance of communicating and selling, it seems that there are further interests at stake in advertising communication:

> *It's a form of communication designed to help sell products and to build brands, and to build respect. But really, I think it's a tool to convince people of things. Advertising is a tool to convince people of... to think differently about something and to feel emotions about something they haven't felt emotions about. And we typically apply that to commercial problems, but we can equally apply that to social problems*. (I06, Strategist)

This quote accurately synthesizes the discourses of advertisers regarding advertising communication. In this sense, the main objective of advertising is to sell products and to help in the process of brand building, for which it is necessary to "convince people of things". This last assertion was sustained by most of interviewees, who claimed that companies need to shape people's mindsets and change their behaviors through creativity in order to make sales easier. Therefore, the selling of a product or service sometimes takes a back seat, as advertisers

are mainly "*selling a behavior (…) selling an action that people want to do*" (I01), relegating the objective of communicating beyond sales, to the reproduction and legitimization of certain practices and mindsets.

On the other hand, the quote above points out the necessity of convincing people to change what they *think* and *feel*. Although the second section addresses the role of emotions in advertising in-depth, it is worth noting that advertisers' perceptions regarding people's meanings and practices are linked to the sphere of feelings—which appears as a first clue to the inseparability of culture and emotions in advertising practice. Additionally, the strategist mentioned how conceptions around 'commercial problems' can be equally applied to 'social problems', which evinces two things: 1) his awareness of the sociocultural character of consumption and commercial practices, and 2) how the shaping of meanings and feelings is conceived as an activity that can be performed equally in both the social and the economic spheres, suggesting that advertising is a practice that mediates between culture and the economy (McFall, 2004).

Although the notion of cultural mediation is not defined entirely by practitioners' desire to shape culture, it constitutes a relevant aspect for characterizing advertisers as cultural intermediaries. Accordingly, in his definition of the concept, Bourdieu (1984) remarked on the role of cultural intermediaries in the divulgation and, therefore, the legitimization of culture around mass production. In this way, the intention of advertisers to change people's behaviors and mindsets illuminates how advertising entails legitimizing the practices and meanings that constitute culture. This phenomenon not only suggests an empirical correspondence between London-based advertisers and the concept of cultural intermediaries but also reveals that advertising practitioners conceive of their work as an activity that would enable them to change the social environment. In other terms, advertisers perceive their everyday work as an activity to *perform* the social world, as their enactments and actions allow them to construct and determine the reality they describe (Callon, 2006; Cochoy, Giraudeau & McFall, 2010):

I think that somehow the companies need to spread their message and shape the world that they believe in. And advertising and branding are a part of this process (…) So I would define as a commercial activity that uses creativity to shape mindsets and the world in the regards of what one company would like to build. (I04, Senior Strategist).

The practitioners' statements show that their behavior is never 'purely economic', as their motivation to 'shape the world' demonstrates that actors are also moved by "non-economic motivations" (McFall, 2004: 86). This reaffirms the importance of analyzing marketing practices not only around the production of economic entities and market devices but also in terms of their ability to produce and circulate cultural forms (Moor, 2012; Ariztía, 2013). In this sense, as mentioned above, advertising cannot be reduced to its commercial character, as it comprises the *performance* of material and cultural practices mediated by rational and non-rational elements beyond the economic realm. This notion of advertising reaffirms the inseparability of culture and economy in the context of marketing practices, as the relevance of shaping culture around commercial purposes demonstrates that "the cultural is not something that intervenes in economic processes; rather, it is constitutive of them" (McFall, 2004: 86). For this reason, a characterization of advertising as a process of cultural mediation should consider how culture is rendered as a fundamental element to trigger consumption through the legitimization of the practices and meanings that determine consumption dispositions.

Mobilizing consumers through cultural calculations

As mentioned before, the categorization of advertisers as cultural intermediaries entails defining them as 'taste-makers' (Du Gay &Nixon, 2002; Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2010) or 'arbiters' of taste (Enwistle, 2006). According to Bourdieu (1984), these intermediaries "propose a morality which boils down to an art of consuming, spending and enjoying" (p. 311), as cultural intermediaries mediate how goods are perceived and engaged with by others (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2014). For Bourdieu, this conception of intermediaries as taste-makers relies upon mobilizing representations and preferences about what constitutes legitimate culture within a social system based on class distinction. In this way, Bourdieu's (1984) conception of culture starts from the distinction between high culture and low culture, which is determined according to the correspondence of certain tastes to particular expressions of habitus related to a class or class fraction. Therefore, as Moor (2012) posits, the notion of 'culture' attached to the concept of cultural intermediaries is grounded on Bourdieu's conception of culture in its 'classical anthropological sense', defined in terms of "values, practices, habits and norms" (p. 574). Although this conception could be useful to analyze how advertisers

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associate people's practices or dispositions with a certain social class, it dismisses the notion that the legitimation of tastes depends on the conceptions of the intermediaries regarding what culture is, as the intermediaries produce and reproduce different conceptions of culture that define their 'intermediary work' (Moor, 2012). Considering this, the present section focuses on how advertising practitioners conceive of culture in their everyday work and its importance for the mobilization of consumers around particular meanings. It is argued that this process reproduces not only consumption practices but also different conceptions of what constitutes culture.

Most interviewees agreed that culture is a fundamental element for advertising communication, as culture "fuels" advertisers' work according to people's perceptions about the world (I03). Similarly, a strategist claimed that culture provides "*many inputs*" (I04) to advertising, while another advertiser stated that it is "*the biggest ally*", as brands can "*tap into culture and the culture of that audience to understand them because culture makes up so much of who we are*" (I07). According to these interviewees, culture is not only important because of its characterization as a 'fuel' or 'ally', but also because it comprises a modifiable target for advertising communication. Advertisers can "*lead*" culture; they can "*tap into it*" in order to change it and "*start cultural trends*" (I01). In other words, for advertisers, culture is a source comprising both inputs and outputs, as it provides information regarding the social and, at the same time, it can be affected and shaped by the work of advertisers. In this fashion, the designing of communication strategies generally starts from the observation of culture as a source of insights regarding the social environment:

We should look at what are the tensions and the dynamics (…) one of the things we always lookout is the four C's. (…) So you look at culture, you look at the consumer, you look at the category. (…) And then you look at the company or the brand. And then you look at the tensions [that] connect all of these, right? And then you try and come up with a role for advertising or role for the brand, so that can sort of answer those tensions in the middle. (I03, Chief Strategy Officer)

As can be seen in the quote, the importance of culture in advertising rests on the information that it provides about the social world and its complexity, as it comprises the 'tensions' and 'dynamics' at stake in the interaction between market agents and the social world. In this way, the creation of communication strategies by strategists responds to the analysis of multiple interactions and conflicts, a process which comprises: what is happening in the sphere of *culture*, the behaviors of consumers that determine *consumption* dispositions, the *categorization* of products, and the goals established by the *company* or brand.

These conceptions around marketing strategies coincide with what Slater (2002a; 2002b) called *cultural calculations*. In his conceptualization, Slater describes how marketing strategies aim to produce definitions of objects that can be adapted to the context of consumption practices and to the possibility of competing in the marketplace from a profitable position. Thus, the definition of a product comprises the inseparability of the cultural elements that define the relations of consumption and the economic factors that determine its positioning in the market, illustrating how marketing practitioners conceive of culture and economy as "opposite sides of the same coin" (Slater, 2002a). In this way, Slater defines *cultural calculations* as the attempts by advertisers and marketers to "frame and stabilize objects as given individual items, which then compete with other objects in rationalizable ways" (2002a: 247). That is to say, marketers and advertisers need to evaluate the possibilities of their products competing in a market, for which they have to deploy a variety of cultural knowledges that enable them to understand the cultural correspondence of a product in a specific context of market competition (Slater, 2002b). However, this process is not reduced to the calculation of the potentialities for each product within a particular cultural and economic context, as the framing of markets and market relations implies the redefinition and conceptualization of the cultural ties that determine optimal market positions (Slater, 2002b).

Slater's claims reaffirm how culture constitutes a two-fold element in advertising and marketing. On the one hand, it provides the necessary knowledge to design and evaluate marketing strategies, while on the other, it is the object of advertising communication, as advertisers redefine the course of cultural relations and consumption practices through their work. In other words, culture is both apprehended and performed through advertising practice, showing that the process of cultural mediation in advertising entails the interpretation and production of cultural categories simultaneously.

What Slater describes as the 'redefinition and conceptualization' of cultural relations can easily be characterized as a 'work of *culturalization*' (Moor, 2012), from which advertisers produce different

notions of culture that define and influence their work. For example, the interviewees stated that some brands are trying to "*create new trends*" instead of "*jumping into the existing trends*". This decision depends on the guidelines proposed for the process of brand building for each product, showing that the construction of branding strategies constitutes a good example of the ways in which the process of culturalization is carried out in advertising work. Similarly, the generalized conception of culture as an 'ally' evinces how advertisers need to grasp culture—through cultural calculations—and produce their own notions of what it is to articulate communication strategies. Therefore, both cultural calculations and the work of culturalization are mutually dependent and necessary for the creation of communication strategies according to the prevailing cultural values and practices.

Connecting with the audience: pop culture, insights and emotions

The production of different conceptions of culture goes hand-in-hand with understanding what constitutes culture for the audience. For this purpose, advertisers rely on market research to account for the cultural trends that mobilize consumers at a specific time and place. However, although research provides relevant insights for comprehending the cultural context, most advertisers claim that creative work is sustained through their own conceptions of what constitutes culture and the main cultural trends in society. Regarding this, it is worth considering how advertising practitioners render cultural categories to conduct their work:

I think culture is a good way of saying as well what trends do exist or what people are liking, and what's popular, and what stuff is interesting way of saying it (…) What is interesting to watch in people's mindsets now. (…) Just knowing X number of people do this thing, like… that's meaningless unless you know why. Or I think you have to speak to them. So, it's a bit of a combination of all three of them. So, looking at what's popular in the culture, talking to people and stuff. (I06, Strategist).

The notion of pop culture—or popular culture—appears as one of the main categories to conduct the work of culturalization in advertising. Knowing what is going on in people's mindsets and why they do what they do is a good source of cultural knowledge for most advertisers. In this way, pop culture constitutes a primary source for advertisers to grasp the meanings and behaviors that mobilize society, comprising what is trending in the entertainment industry—such as television, radio, social media, films, music, fashion, etc. Although most of the interviewees agreed on the importance of pop culture in advertising, the creatives emphasized the necessity of being aware of trends in the entertainment industry. For them, being updated regarding knowledge of popular streaming shows and films or the trending topics discussed on the Internet constitutes a way of "*absorbing culture*" (I02), which nourishes the creative process and provides relevant inputs. In this sense, one of the creatives stated that watching popular films comprises a particular expression of culture and a way of "*seeing what's happening in the world*" (I01). Nonetheless, both creatives referred at the same time to other expressions of culture that they categorized as 'high culture', such as going to art galleries and reading books, which for them constitute relevant inputs, alongside knowledge of entertainment industry trends:

Some people might be more: 'I need to go to the opera, and I need to go to art galleries, and it might be higher culture'. But I think it doesn't really matter what it is, as long as you're absorbing inputs. Other people might just be chatting to friends. And that might be enough. Other people's will be sitting on the Internet, other people's will be… you know. And there's nothing wrong with truly spending a day on Instagram, it's still absorbing culture. (I02, Chief Creative Officer)

According to the interviewee, when advertisers look for cultural inputs, there is no difference between talking to people and developing activities related to both popular and high culture; both comprise a way of 'absorbing' culture. Considering this, it is possible to appreciate a particular element that characterizes the work of cultural intermediaries: their ability to erase the distinctions and symbolic hierarchies that separate popular culture from higher culture (Featherstone, 2007). Accordingly, the creatives pointed out the equal importance of popular and high culture for their creative work, as both provide inputs and allow for apprehending the social world, blurring the margin between low/popular culture and high culture. This coincides with the definition of Bourdieu (1984) regarding cultural intermediaries as 'taste-makers' that reproduce a 'middle-brow culture', as their work entails the legitimization of diverse cultural repertoires (Smith Maguire, 2014). In this sense, advertisers invoke different cultural repertoires that are conceived as equally significant to conduct their campaigns, which allows for explaining the

process described by Featherstone (2007) regarding cultural intermediaries as agents that "transmit the intellectuals' lifestyle to a larger audience and collude with the intellectuals to legitimate new fields such as sport, fashion, popular music and popular culture as valid fields of intellectual analysis" (p. 44).

British advertisers thus conceive of culture as people's behaviors and mindsets, which are shaped by meanings regarding everyday life and provide fundamental inputs to carry out creative work from popular and distinguished tastes. Therefore, creative work in advertising never comes 'from nothing', as it is based on the apprehension of the social world through "cultural appropriation rather than outright innovation." (Nixon, 2003: 80). In this way, both the creative work and the design of communication strategies depend on advertisers' conceptions of culture as 'inputs', which shows that advertising practitioners "observe and interpret the social world and embed these insights and experiences within the commercial texts they create" (Kelly, 2014:71).

The search for *insights* is paramount for understanding how advertising practitioners render their cultural repertoires in their work. This notion refers to the understanding and selection of consumers' needs, interests, desires and feelings from the analysis of their purchase dispositions, lifestyles, and everyday activities (Vergara, 2003). In this sense, an insight is a finding regarding consumption dispositions, which comprises "making visible and concrete … a possible connection between a consumer and good qualities" (Ariztía, 2013: 144). Advertising practitioners continuously refer to the role of insights in their everyday work, as they are fundamental for conducting their campaigns in line with cultural contingency:

—*What is the importance of insights in the creative process?*

—*Essential. Because I think it's about engaging human emotion and if you're not engaging people on a level that they can understand or emote with, or relate to, or see themselves in, or seeing their family members in, or see someone they know that's like that. (...) In a way, you're looking at the consumer, you're looking at what happens, you're looking at behavior, and you're looking at how our work is going to convey that back to them. And then when you're writing the work, you've got to go: 'Is that true?', 'Do people think that?', 'Do people believe that?'.* (I02, Chief Creative Officer)

Insights are fundamental analytical tools for conducting advertising work, as they help advertisers

attempt to 'absorb' culture. As posited by Ariztía, an insight comprises a mediation process and a "very complex qualification process deployed by the agency, a process in which different actors, knowledge and devices are involved" (2013: 144). In this manner, advertisers conceive insights as a 'revelation' regarding the social world, as they relate the qualities of a product with the behaviors, mindsets and feelings of the audience. In other words, an insight can be defined as the result of cultural calculations, an idea resulting from the analytical process of observing the culture and looking for correspondences between the use of certain goods and the practices, representations and emotions of consumers. Following the response from the interviewee, an insight is mainly about "*engaging human emotion*", which suggests that cultural calculations comprise the evaluation of non-rational elements mediating the relationship between goods and consumers. In this sense, the process of looking for insights involves an analysis of the cultural milieu in order to find out what kind of emotions are more suitable to elicit in a campaign.

The role of emotions in advertising: loyalty and long-term relationships with brands

The concepts of 'feelings' and 'human emotions' repeatedly appear in advertisers' discourses, which is one of the first clues that suggest that the process of interpreting and 'absorbing' culture in advertising entails—in most cases—the assessment of consumers' emotional responses to marketized products. This phenomenon seems to respond to what Miller and Rose (1997) problematized as the use of psychological expertise in advertising to engage and mobilize consumers "by forming connections between human passions, hopes, and anxieties, and very specific features of goods enmeshed in particular consumption practices" (p. 2). According to the authors, in the post-war period, marketing practice turned to "psychological and psychoanalytic devices" to comprehend consumer choices and motivations, leading to the manipulation of the feelings that consumers associate with certain commodities. This was observable in market research and advertising studies during the eighties, when emotions started to be understood as mediators of consumer responses and their perceptions towards an advertisement or brand (Holbrook & Batra, 1987), which led to a turn in marketing practices, concentrating on the affective-emotional factors that motivate purchasing decisions over rational-factual inputs (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). In this context, emotions assume a pivotal role in marketing

and particularly in advertising communication. Today, the role of emotions is still identified as a critical element for engaging with the audience, and that is why advertising practitioners repeatedly remark on their importance:

Going back to my earlier definition of advertising; changing behavior. Getting a response. An emotional response is the start. (I01, Creative Director).

The best way to communicate with an audience is probably to try and find an emotional connection between either a product or a category or a cultural phenomenon or trend, and then connect the thing that you're trying to sell to that. (I03, Chief Strategy Officer).

All the interviewees agreed with the importance of emotions in advertising, as eliciting an emotional response in the audience is conceived as the '*best way to engage people*' (I02), based on the belief that 'being too rational' or too 'informative' "*is not the best way to do what you want or what you believe that's right*" (I04). In this sense, the use of emotions is described in the same way as the recurrence to pop culture or insights to create a connection with the audience, as all of them are useful to accomplish the main objective of advertising: influencing people's behaviors and mindsets to sell their products and create loyal relationships between brands and customers.

The correspondence between the use of emotions and the importance of culture in advertising allows for empirically representing how the social and cultural nature of emotions is incarnated in advertising practice. As Ahmed (2004b) posits, emotions are a way of apprehending reality, as they shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies "aligning subjects with collectives by attributing 'others' as the 'source' or our feelings" (p. 1). That is to say, emotions are always oriented towards other people or objects, as they are conceived as a form of capital that circulates and are distributed along the social field, conveying signs and meanings as a result of their circulation (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b). Therefore, the connection between emotions and culture is forged around the 'signal function' of emotions (Hochschild, 2012), as emotions are both the cause and the result of the multiple meanings and practices that constitute the cultural. This idea is not strange to the notion of *sign value* coined by Baudrillard (2005) to describe the phenomenon whereby the valuation of objects in consumer society is no longer based upon the dichotomy between exchange value and use value; instead, they are valued and exchanged around a symbolic value that allows for classifying them as objects of social prestige. In this way, the signal function described by Hochschild shows that emotions are inevitably attached to signs that produce and reproduce cultural meanings through their circulation in the social world, which permits understanding culture as the space in which emotions and symbols are interchanged as forms of exchange value. That is perfectly expressed in advertising communication, where emotions are circulated as a form of capital that enables the exchange of signs and cultural meanings throughout the process of communication between brands and consumers:

But emotions are definitely important. What you're trying to do is to find a way to connect with your audience, to make them respond in the way that you want them to respond, to make them think what you want them to think, or to buy your product or consider your product, or go to your store tomorrow or whatever it is. So emotions are a big part of that (…) if you do advertising that's very literal, it's boring, and no one pays any attention to it. So you need some sort of… it's a value exchange. (…) And people, you know, there would be your favorite campaigns that you've watched, you'd be familiar with the songs, you'd follow stories over a number of years, so there was something that advertising gave you, creating these funny little jokes for you, creating these stories, you know, there was a very sort of equal value exchange. (I05, Business Director)

As mentioned before, emotions are perceived as a form of 'engaging' or 'connecting' with the audience and influencing their decision to buy a product. Consequently, emotions are represented as expressions of value for a 'value exchange' that circulates among people, who will follow and reproduce the songs, jokes and funny stories that advertising gave them as part of an emotional trade. However, these 'emotional gifts' are not the result of a disinterested gesture; they demand reciprocity, as they respond to the logic of economic exchange. In other words, advertising communication comprises the generation of an emotional relationship between brands and consumers, as the emotional gifts of advertising facilitate the creation of an *intimate relationship* between them.

As Skeggs (2010) states, the *gift* of love, care, attention and affection, in the context of intimate relationships, appears as a form of exchange that

always calls for reciprocity. Nonetheless, in the context of advertising, the generation of this kind of relationships demands a particular return: loyalty, or, to be precise, *brand loyalty*. It is in this fashion that advertising seeks to generate loyalty among consumers, as it is conceived as the best way to generate long-term relationships with them:

> *It's as much about creating that relationship as it is about loyalty. So you want them to feel connected to the brand. And in order to maintain that loyalty and then they keep coming back (...) having an emotion helps to create that connection and that loyalty to the brand.* (I07, Senior Account Manager)

According to marketing logic, companies can lose plenty of money in certain transactions but still benefit from the long-term relationship created with their customers, as "satisfied customers remain loyal ... [since] customer delight creates an emotional relationship with a brand, not just a rational preference" (Armstrong, Adam, Denize, Volkov & Kotler 2018: 18-19). For this reason, the generation of loyalty constitutes an essential process for branding because it is in the creation of strong bonds between brands and customers that markets guarantee their reproducibility. This aspect is paramount to understanding the importance of emotions for economic actions in contemporary capitalism. In this way, the building of a brand—and, therefore, of a company—comprises the creation of "an emotional and memorable connection with consumers" (Schmitt, quoted in Moor, 2008: 416), demonstrating that the notion of brand loyalty is a perfect example of how "the moral economy of social relations organizes economic exchange through emotions" (Illouz, 2018: 22). Hence, the case of advertising and brand building processes suggests that the link between culture and economy is inevitably mediated by the action of emotions in the context of advertising communication, as its cultural mediation process is organized through both rational and non-rational inputs that allow for reproducing exchange relationships based primarily on emotional connections.

Eliciting emotions: humor and togetherness as the main emotional resources in British advertising

When asked about the main emotional resources in British advertising, most interviewees agreed on humor and the 'feeling' of togetherness or connectedness. Regarding the first, a strategist stated that the predominance of humor in advertising communication responds to the nature of British culture, which he identified as a "*funny*" society and

"*quite cynical*" (I06). Moreover, two interviewees referred to British society's 'self-deprecating' character and how that element is observable in British comedy TV shows and local advertising. Humor was identified as the most frequent resource to conduct advertising communication in Britain, as it is effective in fostering the creation of brand loyalty:

> *I think people remember jokes, they remember things and stuff that makes the friends laugh in the pub. Stuff that they will tell their mom about things that stick in the mind. That's the whole trick, isn't it? Trying to get something sticking to stick in the mind.* (I01, Creative Director)

The two creatives interviewed agreed that campaigns that use humor are the easiest to remember, as humor triggers sociability and generates remembrance among consumers. In this respect, as seen in the quotation, the most crucial element for the advertiser is that humor allows for creating adverts that '*stick in the mind*'. Following Ahmed's (2004a) reflections, emotions work by "sticking figures together", creating the very effect of a collective coherence (p. 119). Therefore, the perception of humor as a resource to generate feelings that 'stick in the mind' responds to the social nature of emotions, as emotions not only *have* a cohesive effect, but also *give* coherence—in terms of meaning—to social interactions. That is to say, the effect of emotions on people is mediated by their correspondence to the prevailing behaviors and meanings shared by a group of individuals, establishing a necessary link between the social structure and social actors (Barbalet, 2004). This is why humor is so important to British advertisers and influential in communication; it is one of the most characteristic expressions of British culture, generating emotions that circulate meanings coherently according to the prevailing *ethos*. Humor is not only funny and entertaining; it is also a pure reflection of culture, as people compose jokes according to their culture and their understanding of the world (Eades & Alharthi, 2014). It is in that aspect that its effectiveness for fostering advertising messages lies, considering that signs are easily attached to humorous messages, enabling advertisers to attract people's attention and germinate a relationship of loyalty.

On the other hand, half of the interviewees identified the notion of togetherness or connectedness as the other most powerful "emotion" to elicit in advertising. Unlike humor, the 'feeling of togetherness' appears more related to social contingency rather than to the prevailing *ethos* in British advertising:

> *On trend emotion that people are using, like in the*

past couple of years, is feeling connectedness and togetherness. So sense of community. Collectivism versus individualism. Inclusion versus exclusion. (…) I think given the political climate that we currently have it's become even more... even more amplified. (…) Nothing operates in isolation. You've got politics, you've got economy, you've got like what's happening socially, and I think the sense of connectedness and togetherness is answering a lot of the anxieties that we have as a society today. Whether it's Brexit, whether it's Trump, whether it's climate change, whether it's LGBTQ rights. Whatever it might be, connectedness and togetherness seems to be an antidote to a lot of those things. (I03, Chief Strategy Officer)

The interviewee pointed out how the influence of politics and social issues has become relevant when conducting advertising communication. In this sense, promoting messages that push people to gather despite their differences constitutes an important element of contemporary British advertising. The influence of political phenomena like Brexit, the advance of far-right movements in Western societies, and minority social movements, among others, are conceived as a trigger of social anxiety, and that is why advertisers consider it necessary to instrumentalize these aspects of social contingency to strengthen their campaigns. The importance of these phenomena for advertising evinces how emotions respond to their social function through the structuration and equalization of collective feelings, from which it is possible to articulate certain social geometries in a specific historical context (Sánchez Aguirre, 2013). The notion of togetherness helps bond people together, showing once again how advertising practitioners observe and interpret culture to create marketing strategies according to the desires and social expectations that structure social sensibilities.

The identification by British advertisers of humor and togetherness as fundamental emotional resources unveils how the work of culturalization in advertising is mediated by the inevitable sociocultural character of emotions. As Illouz (2007) posits, emotions confer on individuals the capacity to energize—or mobilize—action. According to the author, emotions carry this 'energy' because they are always concerned with the self and its relationship with culturally situated others, which allows for intervening different aspects that mobilize social action such as motivation, cognition, evaluation and affect (Illouz, 2007). In this way, the use of emotions in advertising communication entails the deployment

of cultural calculations to frame and stabilize objects according to the prevailing social sensibilities and their effects on consumption dispositions. This emotionalization of advertising practice responds to what Slater (2011) describes as the phenomenon by which "market processes themselves have shifted toward sociocultural rather than rational economic logics" (p. 32). That is to say; emotions are integrated into advertising communication from a sociocultural logic, through which social sensibilities are grasped and rendered from the rationalization of the non-rational in relation to culture.

However, even though some interviewees stated that advertising campaigns are supported by empirical research, the analysis of the interviews demonstrates that cultural calculations are mainly conducted around the intuition of creatives and their shared conceptions of what constitutes culture. In this way, contrary to what Miller and Rose (1997) stated, when advertisers integrate emotions into their cultural calculations this does not necessarily involve the adoption of 'psychological techniques' or turning towards a scientific understanding of consumers' unconscious desires. Instead, it implies the rationalization of the cultural and emotional factors that determine consumption practices, which are based mainly on advertisers' own conceptions regarding the social environment and, as Nixon (2003) posited, their subjective dispositions. Through these processes, advertising practitioners conceive of culture as inseparable from emotions, leading them to perform their work as one of culturalization in which culture is defined and produced in close connection to consumers' emotionality.

Conclusions

From the descriptions given by the advertising practitioners regarding their everyday work, it is noticeable how organizing advertising communication around emotional-laden messages is conceived as a practice aimed at producing cultural meanings from social sensibilities. In this way, advertisers observe and interpret culture in order to shape it, as they are conscious of their influence over society at the time of legitimizing and reproducing certain behaviors and mindsets. This process entails identifying the prevailing practices, discourses and emotional resonances in society, which are rendered through the deployment of analytical techniques such as *insights* and the blurring of representations around what constitutes low and high culture. Consequently, advertising can be adequately conceptualized as a form of cultural

mediation, not only because it mediates the space between production and consumption, but also because it entails a work of *culturalization* in which culture is continuously redefined according to the meanings and sensibilities that advertisers conceive as legitimate and valuable. Accordingly, the use of humor and togetherness in British advertising responds to the acknowledgement of the local culture, in which these emotional resources appear as the best way to circulate meanings that 'stick in mind' and generate strong bonds with consumers. In this way, advertisers organize the elicitation of emotions through the identification of the prevailing social sensibilities and their relation to consumption dispositions, as advertising cultural mediation depends on the conception of emotions as relational phenomena, which provide information regarding the relationships individuals have with other people and things (Burkitt, 2019). Therefore, advertising work not only involves understanding how consumer dispositions are organized in the space of markets but also how people apprehend and know the world in their everyday lives in emotional terms. Throughout this process, advertising practitioners articulate powerful emotionally laden messages to seduce people but, above all, to ensure the reproduction of a political-economic order based on intimate relationships of loyalty between people and brands.

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