Brand Storytelling in Christmas Commercials of Large Supermarket Chains:
El Corte Inglés as a Case of Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Advertising influences society's conception of Christmas. A proof of this is the creation, by brands, of characters that have become symbols, like Santa Claus. However, the shift in the role of the audience has promoted a change of trend: from push techniques, based in persuasive messages, to the pull ones, focused on storytelling. Thus, large supermarket chains such El Corte Inglés broadcast TV commercials characterized by plots that transmit the brand's identity through a message. This department stores started in 2018 to broadcast ads which don't promote products but magic experiences around the figure of the elf. Because of that, a case study is proposed based on the content analysis of El Corte Inglés ads in 2019, 2020, and 2021. A main conclusion can be highlighted: the song is the key strategy, and the company is trying to turn it into a Christmas symbol, recognised and loved by the public.

INTRODUCTION

Every country has its reference department stores. In the United States, Macy's stands out, the United Kingdom has Harrods and Printemps in France receives more visitors each year than the Eiffel Tower (Printemps, 2022). In this sense, Spain has had its own department store for decades: El Corte Inglés. This business adventure began in 1935, when the young Ramón Areces bought a small tailor shop located in the emblematic Preciados Street, in Madrid.

Four years later, Areces acquired a second building on that street, and in 1940, together with his uncle César Rodríguez, they founded the company El Corte Inglés. In 1946 the building underwent a significant

renovation and, as a result, the sales area acquired a dimension of 2,000 square meters distributed over five floors. Thus, the sale by sections arose, turning El Corte Inglés into a department store.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the chain stores began its expansion outside of Madrid, opening centers in other large Spanish cities, such as Barcelona, Seville or Bilbao. In addition, there was a diversification of the commercial activity, creating new companies that operate under the umbrella of the group. These include Viajes El Corte Inglés in 1969 and the Hipercor supermarket chain in 1979.

This stage is considered key for the configuration of the business policy and the identity of the brand, whose most identifying features are still in force today (De Velasco Oria, 2015):

a)   Gradual opening of centers.
b)   Homogeneity in all the centers, especially in what refers to their visual identity and their distribution of spaces.
c)   30,000 square meters as the average area of the centers.
d)   Location in large cities and in the areas with higher purchasing power.
e)   Great variety of products.
f)   Investment policy based on self-financing.
g)   Both horizontal and vertical business strategy.
h)   Human resources policy based on employee trust and safety.

Returning to the timeline, after the death of Areces in 1989, his pupil Isidoro Álvarez became the group's president. Under his leadership, the 1990s was a time of national and international growth. El Corte Inglés opened its first center in Portugal and the group acquired the emblematic Galerías Preciados, a strong competitor in Madrid until then.

In 2014, after Isidoro Álvarez passed away, other entrepreneurs held the presidency. Firstly Dimas Gimeno and secondly Jesús Nuño directed the group before Marta Álvarez was elected by the Management Board in 2019. In this regard, the current Board of Directors is made up, in addition to the figure of the President, by the CEO, six Directors and a Secretary Counselor.

The organizational chart takes account of the vertical structure of the company, with Álvarez at the head. Her election has meant the return of the group's management to the founding family, as she is Isidoro Álvarez's daughter, considered "the great architect" of the company's development (El Corte Inglés, 2022). Likewise, a distinction can be perceived if the hierarchies are compared. On the one hand, the president and the CEO stand out more for who they are than for the positions they hold. And, on the other hand, an opposite trend is found at lower levels, since in the case of the Directors and the Secretary Director, greater importance is given to the functions than to the people who perform them.

Currently, the aforementioned Management Board run the eight companies of the group: El Corte Inglés, Hipercor, Bricor, Supercor, Viajes El Corte Inglés, Sfera, Centros de Seguros and Seguros El Corte Inglés (Table 1).

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