

# Chapter 12

## Changes in Advertising Campaigns in Times of COVID-19: Selected Cases From Spain

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 virus had a huge impact worldwide and its presence has also implied changes in some advertising campaigns. Given the mobility restrictions and new ways of socializing in times of lockdown, relevant advertisers modified their commercial messages in order to be coherent with the situation lived by most consumers. This research is aimed at understanding the most significant changes in advertising campaigns, mainly on TV, promoted by selected advertisers during COVID-19 lockdown and some months later on. The main hypothesis of this research is that there is a clear relationship between what companies communicate and the circumstances and living experiences of most consumers. Through the qualitative content analysis of selected cases, it can be understood how brands changed their messages to demonstrate their commitment to their consumers; support governmental indications related to health, safety, and mobility recommendations; and, if possible, motivate consumers.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 involved a lockdown in most countries of the world. In the case of Spain, there were several mobility restrictions from March 2020 which considerably altered the patterns of consumption and mobility of citizens (Gobierno de España, 2020) and also the media consumption (Blanco-Herrero, D.; Gallardo-Camacho, J.; Arcila-Calderón, C., 2021; Cadena Ser, 2020). Although this situation was unexpected by most people, society had to assume new restrictions and regulations related to mobility, consumption habits, lifestyle and social behavior. In that sense, advertising, which can be considered a partially reflection of society (Grau-Rebollo, J., 2021; Eguizábal, R., 2011), partially evolved and new

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messages related to this unusual situation emerged. This research analyses qualitatively seven cases of spots from different companies and sectors with the aim to understand which were the points in common between the commercial messages of these organizations and, independently of the product or service provided or sold, how companies linked their product or service with the situation of the lockdown in order to show empathy, amiability and respect for their consumers.

However, “prior to the coronavirus crisis, the advertising industry grew in all its aspects, both in the above the line and below the line media. Specifically, in 2018 the turnover in the Advertising and Market Research sector was above the annual average of the general index of the Services Sector and what represented an increase of 3.1% compared to the previous year according to data from the Observatory of Advertising in Spain” (de Castro Pérez, Irene, 2021: 15).

## **Spanish Advertising TV Campaigns in Times of COVID-19**

The aim of this research is to identify up to which extent the advertising campaigns promoted by companies from different sectors adapted their advertising campaigns during the months of lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, this research focuses on the main changes in advertising campaigns in times of COVID-19 targeted at Spanish consumers to understand how relevant advertisers, independently of their sector, origin, size or target market, changed their commercial messages in order to show empathy for their audiences, look updated, but at the same time, highlight the company’ selling proposition and its main features.

In that sense, the evolution of advertising messages during the lockdown periods and how companies adapted their messages in order to remain relevant, maintain their purpose and be coherent with governmental indications. At the same time, through this analysis, new insights, previously not used in advertising campaigns, have been spot.

In the context of the pandemic, consumption habits and trends changed massively due to the situation of confinements and restrictions decreed by the government, in such a way that television and digital media consumption skyrocketed during the months of lockdown. Digital newspapers received almost 50% more page views and increased their traffic by 100%. Moreover, digital audiences of online radio grew by 112% and live online television obtained up to 93% unique users. Television also became the main source of entertainment and information (Montaña Blasco, M.; Ollé Castellà, C. and Lavilla Raso, M, 2020).

This context allows the understanding of the role of the media in an emergency situation. In addition to this, considering the notable increases in audiences, it makes sense for companies to create advertising campaigns that include the situation related to lockdown. In the Spanish case, as pandemic advanced, the media consumption carried out to stay informed mainly consolidated 3 sources of information, which were television, official statements and online press (Montaña Blasco, M. ; Ollé Castellà, C. and Lavilla Raso, M, 2020).

Considering the types of products that were advertised on television during the time of confinement, the category Other goods and services stands out as the category with the greatest presence of advertisements (26.9%), Food (25.0%), Health (16. 1%) Leisure and culture (14.8%) (Blanco-Herrero, D., Arcila-Calderón, C. and Gallardo-Camacho, J., 2022).

As commented by Blanco-Herrero, D., Arcila-Calderón, C. and Gallardo-Camacho, J., (2022), health was one of the topics that had the most prominence during confinement, while aspects such as Leisure and culture, Transportation or Restaurants and hotels, categories especially affected by lockdown reduced their proportion of ads.

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