

Non-Conventional Formats and the Transformation of the Television Advertising Business

Josep Fernández Cavia

On the basis of the research work carried out at the Rovira i Virgili University into non-conventional advertising formats on full-service television, I discovered a number of inferences that directly impacted the way that the agents involved in advertising are reinterpreting the TV advertising business. By agents, I am referring to television operators, audiovisual producers, media centres (which for some time now have been calling for the denomination 'media buying agencies'), advertising agencies, advertisers and, of course, viewers/consumers.

Before continuing with these reflections, however, I would like to refer to three phenomena that are directly impacting the trends and scope of this transformation. At the end of the article, I will discuss a particular case: the use of non-conventional advertising formats to address children.

1. Interaction, Integration and Hybridisation

There are three phenomena I wanted to take particularly into consideration in the research work, given the nature of non-conventional advertising on TV. They were:

- The possibility of interaction with the station that some non-conventional advertising formats offer viewers, by returning some type of message whether via website, mobile phone, text message or other devices
- Whether there was the integration of these forms of non-conventional advertising in programmes so that the separation between advertising and other content, as

defended by the law, is clear

- The phenomenon of mixing formats, i.e., hybridisation, to seek improved efficacy and to establish synergies between different communication channels

Interaction.

Interaction is already a feature of station promos, e.g., on K3/33, where the children's shows often include station-related websites such as *ClubSuper 3* or *3xl.net*. There was a significant presence of advertising messages on these internet sites. Although advertising pressure did not seem excessive on the K3/33 children's shows, the pressure was transferred to the website, where we found promotions for films and music, advertisements for technology products, site sponsorship, banners, games sponsored by commercial brands, etc. In other words, it appeared that the marketing intent was transferred from the station to the internet.

I also found examples of interactive game shows organised by a station or particular programme, such as *Gran Hermano* and *A tu lado* on Tele-5. The latter was an example in which the show's presenter changes position slightly (an internal moment) and begins to talk about a contest the programme will run (station promo), in which the public can take part by ringing a particular phone number (interactivity).

Passive sponsorship is not, in principle, a format that uses interactivity, due to the fact that it normally consists of a simple title superimposed on the transmission of a short version of the brand's spot. However, I found a unique case on Tele-5 in which, during the broadcast of the programme *Gran Hermano*, a fake sponsorship title suddenly appeared in the middle of the programme and a number of telephone numbers related to products on the programme were advertised, i.e., melodies for mobile phones.

Active sponsorship, on the other hand, frequently featured

Josep Fernández Cavia

Professor at the Communication Unit of the Rovira i Virgili University

elements of interactivity, i.e., in 14 of 23 possible cases. Some examples were the TV3 series *El talp*, where viewers had to send a text message to vote for contestants (participation sponsored by JVC); the game show sponsored by La Caixa on *ClubSuper 3*; the game show *NBA* sponsored by Champion, and a couple of the contests that form part of the TVE-1 infotainment show *Por la mañana*.

Another popular format of interactivity with viewers was the internal moment.

There were interactive elements in 10 out of the 37 internal moments on the Tele-5 programmes *Día a día* and *A tu lado* and TVE-1's *Saber vivir* and *Por la mañana*.

Onscreen messages were, as expected, commonly used to insert interactive elements. Interactive elements were included in 11 out of 58 onscreen messages and involved website addresses (Muchoviaje.com on *Gran Hermano*), mobile phone numbers (to download melodies) and text messages or regular telephone numbers (806 and 905 numbers).

I identified interactive elements in two short clusters, one broadcast during the Tele-5 morning news bulletin of 20

January 2004, and one broadcast by the same station within *La mirada crítica* the same day.

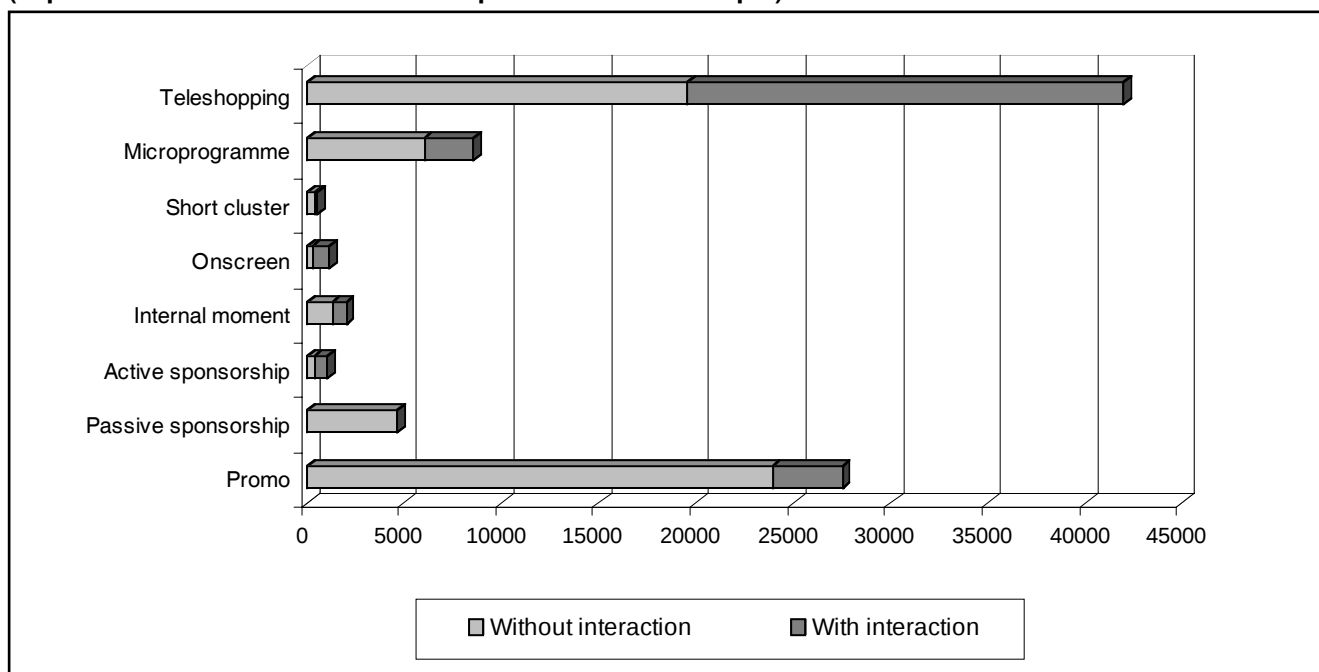
The microprogramme is another format that allows the inclusion of elements that promote viewer participation. I found five examples on the early-morning publicity programmes of Tele-5 and on K3/33's *ClubSuper 3*, which referred to the Webclip.tv website.

One area where interactivity was fundamental, because of the very nature of the programmes, were teleshopping spaces. As we can see on Chart 1, interactive elements were included in more than half (in terms of length) of teleshopping spaces.

However, there were also formats without interactivity (such as informational reports, promos, product placements, the animation of visual symbols of static advertising) even though there was no lack of technical possibilities, despite some formats such as product placement. We will have to see if they include interactivity in the future.

If we look at the use that the stations made of interactive elements, we see that Tele-5 was the leader, although its preponderance was mainly due to the important presence of teleshopping spaces on this station.

Chart 1. Non-conventional advertising formats that feature some form of interactivity (expressed in number of seconds of presence in the sample)



Source: author's own work

Integration.

Integration within programmes depended on the type of advertising format. Formats such as product placement, static advertising, informational reports and internal moments are by definition integrated in station programming in a more natural or more forced manner. On the other hand, formats like teleshopping, short clusters or microprogrammes are not mixed with the content of the programmes into which they are inserted.

Other formats are expressly designed to run just before a programme starts or immediately after it ends, such as promos and passive sponsorship. With regards passive sponsorship, however, we considered it an integrated format in the event that the title sequence announced or presented a particular section within a programme.

This was the case, for example, of the *ClubSuper 3* sections sponsored by companies such as La Caixa, Gas Natural, Smarties, the Generalitat of Catalonia (a space on energy) and Nesquik. It was also the case of news shows.

On the Tele-5 news, Movistar sponsored the sports section, while El Corte Inglés and Pantene Pro-V sponsored the weather. On the TV3 news, Línea Directa or La Caixa sponsored the sports news, Repsol YPF sponsored the weather and Iberdrola sponsored the finance section. At TVE-1, Viceroy sponsored the sports news, while Repsol YPF sponsored the weather.

There are also other sorts of programmes that used passive sponsorship within a particular section. Examples included the show *La columna* (with a section sponsored by Bimbo sin corteza), *Pecado original*, *Gente* (a section sponsored by Vitorio y Luchino), *Por la mañana* (where the cooking section with chef Karlos Arguiñano was sponsored by Gran Capitán), *Corazón de invierno* (which introduced a beauty section sponsored by Corporación Dermoestética) and TV3's *Una altra cosa* (which introduced sections sponsored by L'illa and Casio).

If we look at the results provided by the database, we can see that, following this criterion, the programmes that integrated the most advertising within their content were news and sports shows.

In the case of news shows, this integration took the shape of formats like the abovementioned passive sponsorship of particular sections, edutainment pieces on the products and services of commercial brands and the static advertising

that invariably appeared on top of many images in the sports section. We could thus conclude that the news shows on all the stations analysed included a good dose of communication with commercial purposes, even if in a somewhat surreptitious manner.

Another way of approaching the figures would be to look at the stations that most commonly tended to integrate advertising formats. There was a high percentage of integrated formats at K3/33, no doubt part of the station's advertising strategy. At K3/33 there were practically no clusters of conventional spots or programme sponsorship. Those that did use advertising were most commonly sports shows (which included integrated forms of advertising such as static advertising) and children's shows, which included active sponsorship and some passive sponsorship integrated in the programmes.

The time when the most integrated advertising appeared was 4 to 10 p.m., i.e., the afternoon, evening and early night.

Hybridisation.

One of the interesting phenomena I noticed throughout the study was how the different forms of advertising, either conventional or non-conventional, were often used in combination, one after the other, in the search for improved efficacy, seeking to shore up the commercial messages by different means. For example, we found programmes that were passively sponsored by a brand and also involved active sponsorship, static advertising and, during the advertising break, the corresponding spot.

I also saw that the formats studied sometimes blurred characteristics and were mixed, giving rise to diverse solutions whose limits were hard to establish.

I therefore decided to include in the database, after the first field that established the format involved, a second field to note down the related formats in the event that there was some type of mixture or combination. The result was that, of the 2,407 registrations, 124 showed a combination of formats.

I found, for example, a dynamic onscreen message (i.e., an object that moved) superimposed with a live mention on the programme about the product and brand by the presenter. Earlier on in this article I mentioned the case of a contest, combined with station promo, where viewers had to ring in or send text messages for the presenters to place the

figures they mentioned on a nativity scene, all with the sponsorship and presence of a brand of digital cameras.

We can thus see how these commercial interventions are not guided by subjection to a closed catalogue of advertising formats that is defined and rated, but were established with a high level of freedom and possibilities of experimentation, with the single goal of attracting viewers' attention and the interest of consumers, and the only limit on possibilities being a possible breach of law.

Of all the stations studied, as might be guessed by the examples contributed, Tele-5 was the station that used the most types of advertising formats and which furthermore did not tend to use a particular format in an isolated manner but which responded to a strategy of systemisation in the use of each format. This means that in nearly all the infotainment programmes featured active sponsorship, onscreen messages and telepromotions; that nearly all the programmes were sponsored; that daily (at least on the days studied) microprogrammes were inserted into the station's broadcasts; that particular time periods were devoted to teleshopping broadcasts; that nearly all the station's inhouse productions had a considerable presence of product placement, etc.

Consequently, it was also the station that most used the resource of hybridisation. One of the peculiarities of Tele-5 with regard to the use of non-conventional advertising was the fact that it used microprogrammes, like *No sólo música* and *Mi cartera*, which featured clearly edutainment pieces and others that, without announcing any particular brand, spoke about particular social trends, etc., with the aim of influencing market behaviour. This was clear in a number of stories devoted to mobile telephones or particular types of companies, particularly service companies.

No brands were directly announced in some of these reports, but the products of a particular brand did appear onscreen, i.e., product placement. The reports also included other elements, such as passive sponsorship.

Another complex and interesting example of hybridisation was that used by K3/33 in its children's programming. In this case, passive sponsorship integrated within the programme was mixed with product promotion through a cartoon that slotted into the programme's regular cartoons, i.e., a subtle type of animation of visual symbols, or morphing. It also used superimposition and website mentions of the

programme (or a section of the programme) that allowed a television/website interaction which made it possible to give unity not only to the contents but also to the advertising – the main advertisers on the K3/33 children's shows were also the main advertisers on websites like 3xl.net.

This is a way of promoting viewer loyalty, offering them different vehicles with similar content, and of intensifying the qualitative impact of the ad. The viewer is made to feel like the member of a community.

However, I would not like to end this section without making a bolder reflection. If we looked at it from a certain distance, we would probably conclude that hybridisation occurs not only in advertising formats but also, more importantly, in television content and commercial communication. This separation, which should, according to the law, be clear, seems to be becoming increasingly diffused, or more confused.

In fact, a format like product placement mixes fiction with a commercial message. Active sponsorship mixes a competition, infotainment show or children's show with a commercial message. An internal moment does the same. Edutainment pieces fall midway between information and advertising, or public relations and corporate image. Screenwriting is a mixture of fiction with a persuasive purpose. And microprogrammes establish news and entertainment content with a sales purpose.

Hybridisation can therefore be understood as a more general phenomenon and one with a broader scope. In that regard, terms like 'advertainment' are becoming increasingly popular and more understandable. As has occurred at different times in other media, in television it seems that advertising is increasingly influential in directly deciding content.

2. The Transformation of the Advertising Industry

Advertisers' desire to be present on TV and the stations' need for income means that conventional clusters have reached or exceeded their legally prescribed maximum limits. At least this is the case with the stations that broadcast right across Spain. It is not so with the regional stations.

This saturation, which in principle only affects primetime

viewing, i.e., the time most commercial brands want because of the number and type of viewers, is now affecting almost all time periods, probably as an effect of the marketing practice Tele-5 imposed a few years ago with the purchase of 'packages'.

If saturation is a problem for the advertising industry, it is basically because it leads to a loss in the efficacy of the messages. Various calculations by media centres have established that today, with a lot more advertising pressure, brands obtain a much lower efficacy than in the past and, of course, at higher costs. Investing in TV advertising is therefore increasingly less profitable, even though the general feeling among advertisers continues to be "if you are not on TV you do not exist".

That is where the concept of non-conventional advertising becomes so important. Advertisers are very interested in testing new ways to reach consumers and in many cases these alternative routes are demonstrating their effectiveness.

However, we should not forget that one of the difficulties in following and assessing the profitability of these new techniques, besides the absence of accepted and shared criteria, is the opacity of the investments. The media do not provide real business figures, which are often disguised under the format of diverse exchanges.

Non-conventional advertising can also be a partial method or solution to some problems based on the implementation of new technologies and the maturing of viewers/consumers. In this regard, we could talk about a gradual change of concept from viewer to audience through to customer. In other words, we can consider individual customers, with their own characteristics, habits, tastes and preferences who are increasingly able to move from a concept of "seeing what's on TV" to self-programming.

In an environment where the viewer can decide what he or she wants to see and when, there only seems to be two ways forward for television advertising: integration within programmes (so that, upon viewing the desired content, the viewer must necessarily receive the corresponding commercial dose) or the establishment of stricter and more personalised forms of collaboration between brands and viewers, by which they accept a certain advertising presence in exchange for a pay off, whether it be interest in the advertising message or betting certain pay content for free.

Within this type of changing and uncertain panorama, advertisers' interest in the expansion of the non-conventional television market is important. For media buying agencies it constitutes a new source of income, although achieving better profit is made harder by the high costs of planning and realisation involved with these formats. For the advertising agencies, it means entering a field where they do not feel comfortable, as their expert knowledge focuses solely on the creation of conventional spots.

Secondly, as the importance of these alternative formats grows, advertising agencies are being displaced from some of the communication decisions made by advertisers, who are beginning to see media buying agencies as their true strategic partners.

I do not have to emphasise the threat this means for the survival of the big advertising agencies, even though we should also remember that they are usually part of large communication conglomerates that also include media centres.

However, it does indicate a slow but consistent evolution in the way of looking at the advertising business. The advertising agency, accustomed to being the organisation that advertisers trust with strategic decisions on brand marketing, is losing the exclusivity of this control as it passes to media buying agencies, producers or stations themselves, who take charge of designing and producing non-conventional advertising.

For their part, advertisers see non-conventional advertising as a chance to escape the problem of saturation. With regard to the effects of ad macroclusters, you only have to look at the corresponding ratings to see that viewers are beginning to reject them.

The advertising saturation of television is an important enemy of advertisers and they are still not sure how to alleviate the effects. Saturation provokes effects like channel hopping, lack of attention or lack of recall, which seriously prejudice the efficacy of the advertising messages. It can even provoke the impossibility, for advertisers of brands not addressed at mass targets, of getting their ads across to primetime viewers, even if they have programmed their insertions and paid the corresponding rates.

In that regard, and despite the fact that many advertisers continue to see it as a complement of advertising

investment in spots, non-conventional TV advertising makes it possible to seek alternative solutions to the fear of saturation and its effects, integrating advertising within programmes and thus preventing channel hopping, and ensuring that even if the viewer is watching the programme on a recorded tape, the ad reaches its target. Some of these alternative formats are also able to reach a level of fame that today's spots struggle to achieve, even if a broadcast is repeated many times.

Advertisers therefore see non-conventional advertising as an alternative that can offer high levels of fame and good adaptation to the brand's communicational goals (if planned with care, something which specialised departments in media buying agencies do very well) and which has a tempting cost/effectiveness relationship.

The relationship between advertisers and content appears to be subject to pendulum dynamics. When television first began in the United States, it was the big consumer-goods companies that controlled programme production (Kraft Television Theater, Colgate Comedy Hour, etc.). In other words, programme sponsorship was the main way to access the media and build the brand¹. Later on, and bearing increasing production costs in mind, the solution for a station's economic viability was found in the current system of clusters shared among advertisers. Now this system is facing a crisis and closer relationships between advertisers and programming are again one of the few possibilities for survival in an increasingly fragmented and complex media.

However, this system also has its down sides. One of the dangers that the use of some forms of non-conventional advertising could have for advertisers is loss of control over brand image, which, as I said before, is no longer exclusively in the hands of the advertising agency, and may not be so tightly controlled even by the advertiser itself.

I say that the advertiser's brand image is not in the hands of the advertising agency because the content of many of these formats (product placement, station promo, scriptwriting, edutainment pieces) is negotiated directly between the advertiser and the media, or between the advertiser, the media buying agency and the media.

I say that brand image may not be so well controlled by the advertiser because some of these formats, particularly if aired live, escape the exhaustive control that the advertiser

can exercise over a spot, a product that has been finished and closed before it goes to air. That is not the same with internal moments, for example, or, to a lesser extent, active sponsorship or edutainment pieces.

Finally, from the point of view of the advertiser, as I said before, another serious problem with these new advertising formats is that there are still no instruments for measuring their efficacy, or standard measures to guide their planning, i.e., a valid alternative to the GRPs of conventional advertising.

3. The Focus of Television Advertisers

The stations have taken up the marketing of non-conventional advertising and some new formats in particular with the idea of finding a complementary and less controlled form of income growth than conventional ad clusters – a resource that some channels have already exploited to the limits allowed under the law, or even surpassed. Non-conventional advertising is currently generating growing expectations among executives, who perceive it as a future field of commercial expansion.

In that regard, any new initiative or format is well received by the channels if it contributes to generating more income without reducing other funding sources. For example, they can use formats not included in the maximum limits allowed by the law and can combine them with formats that are controlled, e.g., spots, station promos, teleshopping, sponsorship, etc.

Attitudes towards this issue seem, at least from an outsider's point of view, to vary at different stations. From the practical examples found in the sample and the statements made by their executives, the private Spanish stations seems to be adopting a more aggressive position with regard to the commercial exploitation of spaces and the exploration of new forms of exploitation. However, Televisión Española is not far behind. For their part, TV3 and K3/33 are exercising a lighter commercial pressure on viewers, although, from the figures gathered, we do not know whether this responds to a specific decision or if it is due to lack of interest on the part of the advertisers.

Special-interest digital channels have established a funding model in recent years that is radically different from

the one the major stations were using until recently, which has probably impacted and continues to impact how the market evolves.

Pay-to-view special-interest channels cannot in principle compete in the battle for conventional advertising campaigns. Until recently, they focused mainly on establishing direct contact with advertisers who wanted to experiment with alternative, innovative, personalised routes and specific activities with a qualitative rather than quantitative value, i.e., the very opposite of the mass planning done by free-to-air stations.

Pay-to-view channels have made great inroads into getting a number of big advertisers used to being more active, in a treatment completely different from the usual one. We could say that they have helped 'educate' advertisers in these differences and expanded their expectations.

For their part, and moving on to one of the other agents involved, audiovisual producers have found in some of these formats an important source of funding for their projects.

Audiovisual producers work on programmes from the project phase (in which they collaborate with sales departments), where they study the most profitable way of integrating brands in the final product. The two most common methods are direct brand presence (through product placement or active sponsorship) and the use of interaction with viewers (through telephone numbers, text messages, internet competitions, etc).

In the opinion of a number of experts I consulted, it is partly because of producers that the commercialisation of television has become increasingly more intense. In turn, the producers argue that assuming the production risk (the continuity of which depends entirely on the station and the audience) justifies the attempt to find funding sources for projects from the very beginning, without waiting for the product to be a hit or a failure to begin to make a profit.

4. Viewers' Opinions

Adult audiences generally have a fairly negative view of television advertising². Interruptions to programming, the length of ad breaks and the omnipresence and aggressiveness of the persuasive appeals provoke rejection

among broad sectors of the public.

This negative view can be tackled through two opposing strategies.

The first consists of disguising advertising, i.e., integrating it within programming so that the viewer does not clearly see the commercial intent behind a particular content. This is the strategy that formats like product placement, edutainment pieces, internal moments and scriptwriting follow. It goes without saying that this strategy pursues evading the spirit of the current legislative framework, which wants to clearly mark the separation between advertising and other content.

To a large extent, disguise involves trying to confuse the viewer. For example, in the discussion group I organised with housewives, they talked about two edutainment pieces they watched (one on the videogame *Imperium II* and one on sparkling wine) and discussed whether or not they constituted advertisements. The conclusion they all more or less came to was that they were not advertisements but rather informational pieces on a particular topic. In the case of the videogame, they said it was a good way for children to learn about the historical facts the game was based on, i.e., at the end of the day, it was another way to learn.

The same group was asked to discuss the format I classified as 'internal moment'. The answer was:

"Very bad, because it confuses you. And because they put the word 'advertisement' in very small type. Sometimes you are busy doing something else and every now and then you look up or you hear it and you get the feeling they are saying it as...because they are doctors and so on...but the doctors never say it, it is the presenter who always says it. And then one day you watch it properly and go 'hey, this is propaganda'. (...) They shouldn't do that on a health show."

Statements like the above show that the concepts of identifying advertising and the separation between advertising and programming are quite debatable in television broadcasts in practice, and should be subject to in-depth research and regulatory reviews.

The second strategy tries to offer the viewer a type of gratification or compensation in exchange for accepting the commercial message. This is the strategy followed by formats like sponsorship (even though it is moving further away from its original philosophy), the short cluster, films without ad breaks and microprogrammes.

This second strategy, which we could call the 'pact strategy', is the most respectful towards viewers and can also be the most respectful with basic legislative principles. It is also the strategy most able to adapt to the new contexts of television reception and consumption being motivated by changes in technology³.

Furthermore, and no less importantly, the strategy of making a pact with the viewer can generate a more positive perception of commercial brands, as it does not just involve brand recall, but also making positive brand associations:

"Until now, the work was done in an environment where advertising focused on sending messages in order to make a brand or product well known and to stimulate the desire or intention to purchase. In the future, the technological advances made available to consumers and in particular the possibilities of interaction will mean that advertising will focus on establishing a dialogue with consumers in order to gain in-depth information about them and even spur them into action, i.e., provide personal details, discuss a particular product, accept a salesperson's visit, arrange a product purchase" (AA.VV.: 2001^b, p. 20)

Further on, the same report on the future of advertising repeats this idea and says:

"The same use dynamics of the new and different media means that the very concept of advertising is changing, without becoming 'obsolete'. What is basically changing in this concept of advertising is that it cannot be 'invasive' either of the privacy of consumers or of the media." (AA.VV.: 2001^b, p. 53)

5. Non-Conventional Advertising and Children

One of the aspects I tried to take into account in the research, although it was not a priority goal, was the relationship between non-conventional advertising and children's programmes.

The children's programmes monitored in the sample were as follows:

- None at TV3;
- *ClubSuper 3*, *3xl.net*, *Info K*, *Top Ten Tomàtic* and *Cinc minuts més* at K3/33

- *Pokemon*, *Max Clan*, *Archie's Weird Mysteries* and *Cosas de monstruos y desastres monstruosos* at Tele-5
- *The Warner Hour* and *Disney Zone* at TVE-1

If we look at the advertising formats that appear, we find conventional clusters in these programmes, along with station promos, passive sponsorship, active sponsorship, internal moments, edutainment pieces, onscreen messages and microprogrammes.

Chart 2 shows the importance the various formats of non-conventional advertising are acquiring in children's programming.

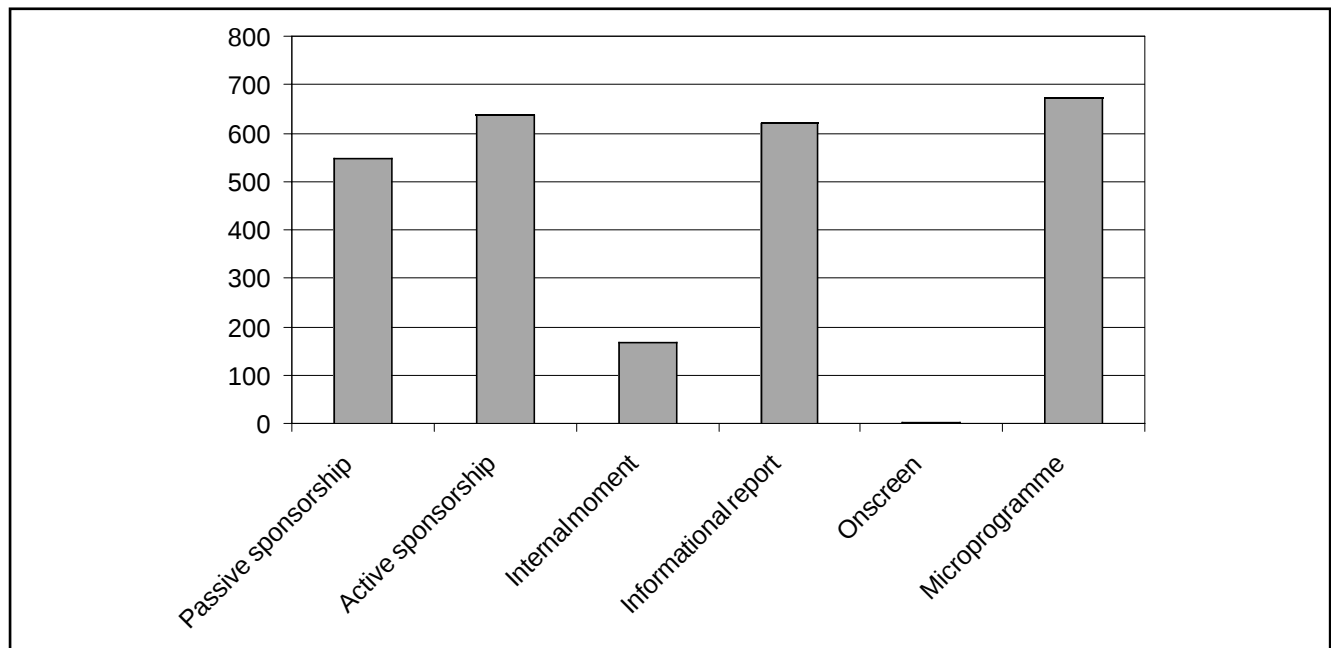
Even though it was not included in what was considered to be the goal of this study, i.e., non-conventional advertising, I would like to take a brief look at station promos. In terms of promo spaces within children's programmes, K3/33 stood out for its heavy use. In particular, of 87 promos found in the children's programmes, 74 were on this station, while only 13 were on TVE-1 and none on Tele-5. Also, K3/33 often related its audiovisual content with another medium, i.e., the internet. In the spaces I classified as promos, there were references to the websites *ritmes.net*, *3xl.net*, *super3.net*, the website for the programme *Cinc minuts més*, *k3tv.net* and the *ClubSuper 3* chat room. There were also *ClubSuper 3*-related products, such as the *Revista dels supers*, contests, the club CD and DVD and sponsorship by La Caixa, *La Vanguardia*, *Avui*, Beep, Amena, etc.

At TVE-1, this link between children's programming and the internet did not exist. On the other hand, there were products relating to the *Lunnis* and the station's evening shows aimed at the general public, such as the final of *Operación Triunfo*, *Cruz y raya.com* and *Ana y los siete*.

The three stations with children's programming in the sample, i.e., K3/33, Tele-5 and TVE-1, also featured passive sponsorship. I found a total of 46 examples of passive sponsorship on children's programmes, 27 on K3/33, 13 on Tele-5 and six on TVE-1. The sponsors at K3/33 were Gas Natural, Panini, La Caixa, Smarties, the Generalitat of Catalonia, Nesquik, Advanced and Fecsa Endesa; at Tele-5 they were Territorio Dinópolis and Smacks; and at TVE-1 they were Telepizza and Chocokrispis.

There were 16 examples of active sponsorship, all at K3/33 except one at Tele-5. They mostly involved contests,

Chart 2. Non-conventional advertising formats present in children's programming, expressed in seconds of duration (sample based on four transmission days for each of the four stations studied)



Source: author's own work.

such as *Súper què*. The examples had a duration that ranged from 10 to 76 seconds, and were linked to brands such as Borràs, Les 3 bessones, La Caixa, Pal Arinsal, Zoo de Barcelona, X-box, Nokia, Amena, Aquàrium and Imax.

With regard to internal moments, I found three cases, all at Tele-5 and promoting the games Supermag and Blokus, the film *El Cid* and the DVD of the *Megabots* series. The three internal moments were all found on the same day, 20 December 2003, on the programmes *Cosas de monstruos y desastres monstruosos* and *Max Clan*.

For some time now, K3/33 has been making use of an interesting initiative that involves broadcasting short informational programmes addressed at children but, in line with news for adults, the children's shows also included informational reports. I found three, all at K3/33, although, of course, given that TVE-1 and Tele-5 did not air children's news shows, it would be difficult for this format to be included. The reports discussed videogames and the latest part of *The Lord of the Rings*. This film (which on 17 December 2003 featured on the news shows of all four stations analysed) was shown in a 3.5-minute report aired at

midday on *3xl.net*, along with a report of more than 4 minutes on the afternoon show *Info K*.

I only found one example of an onscreen message, also on K3/33 on the programme *ClubSuper 3*. I found six microprogrammes, also all at K3/33: two on *L'hora de dormir* sponsored by Danone and Les Tres Bessones, three on *webclip.tv* and one on *Tira't de cap al cap de setmana* sponsored by the Generalitat de Catalunya.

By showing all that information on a single chart, i.e., **Chart 3**, we can see that, paradoxically, although K3/33 was the least active channel in terms of non-conventional advertising formats aimed at the adult public, when it came to children's programmes it was the station that made the most use of them.

There was only one format, the internal moment, found exclusively on the private station Tele-5. With the other formats (passive sponsorship, active sponsorship, informational reports, onscreen messages and microprogrammes), it was K3/33 that used the most by far.

In terms of hybridisation, K3/33 often mixed non-conventional formats and linked them to other media, such

as the internet, where they became another type of commercial pressure.

As we can see from the chart, the dominant advertising formats, in terms of duration, on the K3/33 children's programmes were active sponsorship, informational reports and microprogrammes. These three formats had the peculiarity of presenting a brand without the goal being explicitly advertising-driven. In the case of active sponsorship, it involved presenting the product as a prize in a contest that required active viewer participation. Informational reports and microprogrammes presented the brand through reports inserted in programmes aired by the station or microprogrammes created exclusively to advertise a particular type of product.

We can thus conclude that K3/33 not only has a strong specialisation with regard to children's programmes, but also with regard to associated advertising formats.

6. Conclusions

From the legal viewpoint, the research shows, to my understanding, the existence of two conflicting logics. On the one hand, the legislative framework attempts to limit the presence of advertising on TV. On the other hand, operators (in their search for income), producers (in their search for funding sources), advertisers (in their search for new, more effective and more profitable formats) and advertising companies (in trying to protect their business area) are pressuring for increased dynamism in the insertion of TV advertising, exploring possible loopholes or gaps in the law.

On the other hand, I believe the conflicts these types of non-conventional advertising can generate (which feature regularly in the media, mainly in the form of complaints by viewer or consumer associations) arise not so much from the nature of the content but rather the following aspects:

- The identification of advertising as opposed to programming
- The insertion of advertising within programming

In practice, the only limits on some of these forms of non-conventional advertising are not legislative restrictions but rather simple acceptance on the part of viewers/consumers.

The legislative task is caught between the different

conflicting interests it tries to protect. On the one hand, there is the danger of the regulations being too ambiguous and allowing a string of exceptions, the borders of which would make it impossible to form a common, harmonised interpretation. In fact, the borders are becoming more diffuse and it may become necessary to conceptually clarify and review the purpose of each legislative prescription. If the regulations are too rigid, they could also threaten the dynamism of a sector in the process of adapting to a new reality, both in terms of technology and television consumption habits.

Finally, it is worth remarking that, with regard to advertising, regulatory control in the television sector is putting it at a disadvantage over other supports or media within the reach of commercial communication.

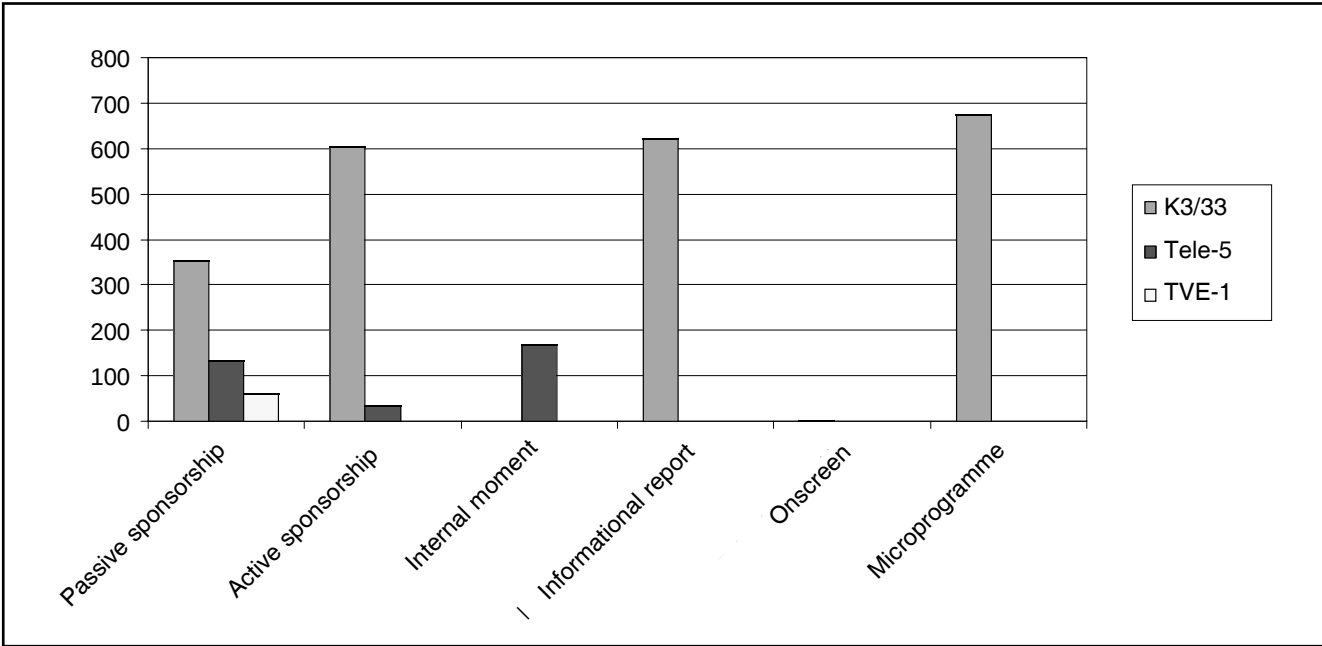
I would also like to point out a couple of things with regard to the methodology used in the research work. Firstly, I would like to stress the importance, for the whole of the work, of the first phase, i.e., the in-depth interviews with executives from all the areas of the non-conventional television advertising industry. The application of the technique of analysing content to study different forms of television advertising would not have been satisfactory without this previous analysis of the professional context. The contextual exploration, as well as having its own intrinsic value, was important in establishing and comparing the analysis categories and for properly interpreting the figures in an all-inclusive fashion.

Secondly, I want to confirm my suspicion that, in terms of studying the reception of non-conventional advertising, the technique of the group discussion would not be enough to establish some key aspects, e.g., the identification of advertising formats, without the combination of some type of more intensive experimental technique.

Also, I thought another thing the research work would confirm (and which had already been noted in other previous studies but which was here supported with empirical figures) was that hybridisation not only occurred among advertising formats, but also between advertising and programming – as occurred, for example, with informational reports and active sponsorships, internal moments, microprogrammes, etc.

In terms of the television advertising business, I found, through the study of non-conventional advertising, that it is

Chart 3. Formats of non-conventional advertising present in the children's programmes of the sample analysed (expressed in seconds of presence)



Source: author's own work.

currently undergoing a period of profound change: a redefinition of the model that is affecting all the agents involved. I am not talking just about new formats, but a new way of understanding television advertising, wherein the conventional spot, although still extremely important, is being complemented, opposed and even sometimes replaced by initiatives that make it possible to more effectively reach the viewer/consumer.

However, I would like to emphasise that the lack of transparency in transactions between the different agents involved, i.e., operators, producers, advertisers, centres and agencies, makes it hard to study any phenomenon related to television advertising.

In terms of the balance of forces between advertising companies, i.e., advertising agencies and media centres or buying agencies, I found that to a large extent, big advertisers are getting used to negotiating directly with stations and producers, without the strategic communication support of the advertising agency. The creative work (both researching new formats and the content decisions of these formats) is moving towards media centres or buying

agencies, producers and particular stations, especially specialist stations.

Discussing the influence that advertising exercises on much media content is nothing new. Based on the information gathered in the study, we could conclude that marketing is increasingly impacting the conception and development of new television programmes. Audiovisual products are already being conceived on the basis of the logics of advertising communication from the initial project phase.

In that sense, ideas for new programmes could even be established on the grounds of the needs of commercial brands, which would make it impossible to establish the separation recommended under the law, i.e., that advertising and teleshopping must be easily identifiable and clearly differentiated from programming.

Finally, from the observation of non-conventional formats we can see the existence of two different strategies of presenting commercial message to viewers. The general public perceives advertising as intrusive and aggressive and so it can be unsubtle and unwanted. As a result of this, two

alternative solutions arise:

The first involves subtlety, trying to hide the commercial intent, i.e., what we call surreptitious strategies.

The second tries to negotiate with the viewer, offering some type of compensation, i.e., what I called the 'pact strategy'.

7. Final Reflections

I would like to end this work with a series of reflections on the ideas that arose from the analysis of the data and the preparation of the conclusions, and to propose a number of actions that I believe would be suitable to understand, rationalise and optimise non-conventional advertising on full-service television.

Firstly, as I said before, European legislation and its adaptation into Spanish law emphasises, in dealing with the regulation of television advertising, the necessary and clear separation between programming and advertising. What the figures analysed in this work showed was that very often this separation has become practically impossible. Current sector trends suggest growing confusion between programming and advertising. In fact, there were cases in which the advertising purpose guided the production of programmes or where audiovisual products were conceived from the beginning with the principal aim of commercial exploitation.

In that sense, I believe that the concept of separation between programming and advertising, which is so important in the advertising regulations in force, is no longer very effective given what is happening and should be reformulated. Either that, or complementary or alternative criteria should be sought.

Also with regard to legislation, another basic concept often used with different purposes involves the integrity of audiovisual works. This concept, in my opinion, makes sense when applied to particular creative audiovisual products. However, in the field of television production, the commercialising logic is much more important than purely artistic criteria. This legislative concept should therefore be adapted to the defining reality of the television medium.

As a final reflection that directly involves legislative aspects, I would like to remind readers that one of the main

legislative criteria for determining the advertising nature of a piece of communication, whether on TV or any other medium, is the existence of compensation on the part of the advertiser. In many of the non-conventional advertising formats studied, this should be the only criterion for defining them without discussing them as a commercial communication. Examples include product placements, informational reports and static advertising.

In practice, however, and given the opacity of the investments I mentioned before, this criterion is often impossible to apply. It seems necessary to study the possibility of applying others. To my way of thinking, the principal criterion for defining the advertising nature of a message should be the nature of the influence it could have on viewers, even though the applicability of this assessment measure would be quite complicated.

With regard to the relationship that non-conventional television advertising establishes between advertisers and viewers/consumers, I found that advertisers can choose two strategies when it comes to non-conventional forms of advertising: disguising messages within programming or formats that promote an explicit pact with the viewer. From this perspective, the administrative authorities should study ways of working with advertisers that support the second option, with the intention of combining commercial efficacy with respect for the spirit of the laws in force.

On the basis of the study into integration and hybridisation between programming and advertising, the figures suggest that news is the genre where this phenomenon is most clearly produced. However, paradoxically, news is the program type most heavily protected in terms of integration and the appearance of advertising, given its social interest. There was a time when the news was broadcast in full without interruptions or ad breaks. Today, it includes clusters, passive sponsorship, static advertising and informational reports on commercial brands. It is effectively being colonised by commercial communication strategies.

On the basis of this observation, I think it is necessary to exercise stricter control over news shows, not only in terms of easily identifiable advertising but also the commercial logics involved in the selection, organisation and presentation of news discourses.

This process of integration and hybridisation between advertising and programming was particularly apparent in

the children's shows of K3/33, where I found informational reports, active sponsorship, promotions crossed with other media like the internet, station promos mixed with the offer of consumer goods and microprogrammes. The special protection of children makes it hard to understand the proliferation of these formats.

In that sense, I believe that children's programming should use explicit ad formats that are not hidden amongst the rules of children's shows, but which also permit the funding of the station and its inhouse productions.

Notes

- 1 Eguizábal says in *Historia de la publicidad* (1998) that, for example, the cigarette brand Camel had sponsored the news on the NBC network and banned the appearance of any fortuitous image of no-smoking signs.
- 2 The same is not true with children and teenage audiences. For them, advertising still has an important educational task and is perceived positively. See FERNÁNDEZ CAVIA, J. *El consumidor adolescente. Televisió, marques i publicitat*. Barcelona: Pompeu Fabra University, 2002 (Col·lecció Aldea Global; 12), pp.184-186.
- 3 Moore and Chaldecott (2003) also establish a dichotomy to refer to the new ways of approaching consumers. However, they talk about advertising in general, not television advertising specifically, and use the concepts of *interruption marketing*, characteristic to conventional advertising, and *engagement marketing*, representative of a new interpretation of the customer relationship where the fundamental issue for brands is to provide them with relevant experiences.

Bibliography

See the bibliography of the article "Non-Conventional Advertising on Full-Service Television", into this monographic.