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Advertising and emotional design in the construction of the image of Mexican women in the first half of the 20th century

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Abstract

The article links the advertising strategy, what we know today as emotional design, which led Mexican women at the beginning of the 20th century to acquire appearance and hygiene products to identify themselves as modern women. This is a descriptive and analytical qualitative research based on newspaper and documentary elements from the newspaper "El Universal" in 1935. It aims to expose the way in which the success of a product does not depend solely on the functional objectives from which it was originally designed, but on the meaningful relationship it establishes with the user.

Keywords

Emotional experience, advertising strategy, image of modernity, personal care and hygiene products

Introduction

When reviewing early 20th century magazines, we are usually struck by the number of advertisements aimed at women promoting personal hygiene and household cleaning products. What facilitates

the proliferation of this type of advertising? Why was advertising design aimed at the female public? What characteristics did advertising design have to influence the image and way of life of the modern woman?¹

The text aims to show how advertising and product designs focused on the appearance of Mexican women contributed to the creation and consolidation of their image from the perspective of female subjectivity. This was possible thanks to advertising strategies² based on the principles of what we know today as emotional design, which led consumers to purchase products to identify with the woman who entered modernity.

Body of the article

To develop this, we must connect three events that happened in unison: the ideas of progress imported from abroad; the public policies that largely adopted these ideas (sports, hygiene and technology) (Magaña, 2021); and how this conjunction spilled over into advertising, opening up a consumer market for a large number of products focused on women's appearance.

First and foremost, the legal actions taken with regard to public health and education after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) were fundamental, because since the government of General Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911), both the economic stability of the country and the living conditions of the population had been neglected. Therefore, when José Vasconcelos coordinated the two major campaigns -

¹ *We refer to the modern woman as the one belonging to the interwar and post-war era who sought to radically break with the image of the submissive person, the self-sacrificing mother and in general with the dominant gender discourse of the time.*

² *It is an action plan that aims to persuade people to buy a product or service by communicating brand values and product information through messages using various media.*

hygiene and literacy in 1920 - he facilitated the teaching of hygienic habits, personal cleanliness, bathing, healthy eating and, through sport, a beautiful and healthy body according to the standards established at that time in Europe. As scientific and technological advances were developed, sanitation was integrated into the daily practices of Mexican families in all social classes with the so-called "hygiene with appearance".

To achieve this, the health authorities relied on the publication of pamphlets, magazines, lectures, cinema exhibitions and broadcast. In this way, various ways of preventing, and even eradicating, diseases were proposed through home remedies or medical information provided by hygienists. Edith Molina comments that the government's motto from the six-year terms of Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932) and Abelardo Rodríguez (1932-1934) was "hygiene, the basis of the national economy"; Arechiga refers to this as the period of "hygiene education and propaganda". Hygiene is recognized as a branch of scientific medicine which, if used well, would lead to "perfect health and happiness" (Molina, 2009). It was thanks to this impulse that advertising campaigns advertising medicines and objects for hygiene (cosmetics, perfumes, creams, personal hygiene and detergents) started to become socio-cultural and commercial objects that offered the possibility of a cure and health (Magaña, 2021, p. 11).

The ideas of progress that were emerging at that historical moment were aligned with those of modernity, which had to do mainly with technological and educational development. It is worth remembering that several of these ideas - of hygiene and personal appearance - were adopted from foreign ideals, mainly American and European, which began in manuals of civility and good manners

published from the mid-19th century; for example, Carreño's Manual (1853), which contains lessons and advice on how people should behave in public and private places in order to appear elegant.³

The last link is found in the role that advertising played in the dissemination and consolidation of these ideals. For example, the first advertising agency in Mexico was Maxim's (1911-1927), which was the pioneer in having an area of planning, development and creation of advertisements and having accounts of important companies such as the American branch of Palmolive, leader in the beauty and personal care products market. In its early years, the advertising that was carried out was an import of foreign advertisements that were translated, reinterpreted and adapted to the Mexican reality. Similarly, given this gender revolution that had an impact on the social and cultural spheres, women were considered a very important consumer niche in the economic sphere, which is why advertisers sought to develop new strategies for the promotion and sale of various design objects aimed at this new market. Such was the case of the American agency J. Walter Thompson (1889 to date) who, at their headquarters in New York, implemented a creative department focused on the female gender, whose main objective was to understand the needs and desires of women in order to persuade them to purchase new products and services differentiated by gender.

In this way, advertising advertised three major items: new technological and scientific advances applied to different utilities of

³ *It should be noted that the concept of cleanliness that was generally referred to revolved around appearance, as the important thing was to hide dirt and stench, which is why various cultural and scientific publications insisted on aromatizing and disinfect bodies and spaces.*

everyday life (such as lamps, steam irons, hoovers, blenders, refrigerators, phonographs, cameras, automobile), as well as minor and decorative appliances. The second was the new pharmaceutical industry with cosmetics and health care products. And finally, the promotion of new residential subdivisions and single-family housing. This triad meant that the new aesthetic canons were applied and directly represented the fashion of the moment, the contemporary and the good life (Ortíz Gaitán, p.67).

By 1922, the importance and relevance that advertising was acquiring for companies the development of advertising strategies to materialize in their own style and design, including packaging and brand design, becoming fundamental and differentiating elements that allowed consumers to identify with the products, and in turn, that the products competed for the attention of consumers. This contributed to the consolidation of many national and transnational companies that settled in Mexico, as mentioned by Luz del Carmen Vilchis (2010) .

"(...) this allowed these companies to reaffirm their image and identity in the eyes of consumers thanks to the use of various advertising strategies in which they sought to unify the elements that would capture the consumer's attention, retain their acceptance and gradually turn them into regular customers" (p. 187).

At the same time, health became something aspirational and refined, even a bargaining chip for going to public and private spaces such as squares, sports centers, and churches, to name a few. It was a value instilled in households, which also encouraged the opening of a market for cleaning and personal hygiene products aimed

primarily at women who had the purchasing power to buy the products, as well as household service staff to use them. In this way, advertisements for these products became popular in the press. The female image associated with these products was that of a modern, cosmopolitan and sophisticated woman known as a "flapper", who had an identifiable physical appearance and who undoubtedly followed the canons of how to behave and care for her family when using the products.

"(...)she was a beautiful woman, exaggeratedly produced, very pale, with very red lips and profusely painted eyes. Her dress was short, her skirt only an inch below the knee and she wore black stockings and her main feature was short hair" (Hershfield, in Sánchez, 2018, p. 62).



Image 1. Propaganda for "El jabón Rosa de Guadalupe" (Rosa de Guadalupe soap). Source: Revista de Revistas January 16, 1927. Hemeroteca Nacional de México (HNM)

women to seek to look like "the woman in the magazine". Images that constituted a visual language that apart from communicating and teaching, in some way proposed aesthetic canons of how a family should design their home according to the social status to which they belonged or wanted to belong (image 1). They were represented as tall, well-dressed, slim women, with complexions free of any imperfections and loved by their husbands and families for the way they conducted themselves in social circles and managed the household. It also implied a rethinking of their role in women's social life. She was now no longer confined to the domestic environment, but participated in the economic, political and cultural spheres. This image of the "flapper" arrived in Mexico through the influence of cinema, foreign fashion magazines and the radio, which spoke of a modern woman who showed her beauty and sought her own expression of freedom through a new relationship with her body and its care. In short, how a woman should smell, dress and be a woman who should show herself to society.



Image 2. Advertisement for "Toalla sanitaria Modess" (Sanitary towel). Source: Journal "El Universal" June 11, 1930. Hemeroteca Nacional de México (HNM)

Between 1920 and 1950, advertisers encouraged the creation of habits, promoting the use of perfumes, creams, mouthwashes and hair tonics, thus evidencing the new conception of beauty and personal care⁴. This image caused a great upheaval in Mexican society, questioning its indigenous and cultural traditions, completely modifying the traditional image of Mexican women with their long braids falling over their shoulders. They were even called, pejoratively, "las pelonas" (hairless) (image 2). However, it influenced the construction of a new woman who was no longer just a wife or mother, but was now an active, healthy woman who sought to construct her own identity through her appearance.

This supports Sosenski's theory that "it was in this century that advertising was a powerful means of disseminating discourses about smell, as well as an educational agency that promoted everyday practices, taught the conception of hygienic and unhygienic and disseminated moral ideas" (Sosenski,2020, p. 259), i.e. a market of images was produced to construct appearance in the likeness of what was published.

Emotional design and design

Faced with the growing market for products, advertising began to look for other ways of communicating with consumers, thus

⁴ *During this period, Frohan's branded gum care, Listerine toothpaste, Kolynos toothpaste, Pebeco and Colgate toothpaste proliferated. Soaps Palmolive, Rose of Guadalupe, Mennen, Pompeia, Hinds, Nivea and Gillete shaving cream. Beauty powders to lighten brown skin - Flo, Estrellita, Conejos, Orkilia - as a symbol of a better status and of freshness and well-being o This era also saw the introduction of the feminine sanitary towel Kotex, or Kleenex tissues, as well as various brands of perfumes such as Chanel No 5, among others (Maga-a, 2021, p. 18 and 19).*

resorting to a new graphic style. There was a radical change in the use of the image - which was generally a drawing - since previously, what predominated was text, referring much more to the description and explanation of the functioning or tangible qualities of the product. This changed over time and the image began to play a determining factor in the composition of advertisements, being in charge of communicating the main idea. The aim was to make women see themselves reflected in the advertisement and want to buy the product.

These advertising strategies were the first precursor of what we know today as emotional design. We define it as a way of connecting the public with the product, as Caldas says below.



Image 3. Advertisement for "Estuche de polvo compacto con su retrato retocado en colores a mano" (Compact powder case with her portrait retouched in hand-colored colors). Source: Journal "Revista de Revistas" February 20, 1927. Hemeroteca Nacional de México (HNM)

"a way of designing that reflects the crucial role that emotions play in the human capacity to understand the world and, moreover, promises to improve the quality of life of its audience. An emotion-driven design that enhances the relationship between the audience and the product and creates deep emotional bonds between the former and the latter" (Caldas Sara, 2021, p. 38).

When we refer to emotional links, we start from the assumption that emotions are "the intense and temporary alteration of the mood, pleasant or painful, which is accompanied by a certain somatic commotion (RAE, 2022)". In other words, emotions are responses to stimuli that are connected to bodily reactions (image 3). For its part, emotional design tells us how emotions play a fundamental role and that they are the way to know, understand and connect with the world. For Antonio Damasio (1995), emotions and feelings work alongside reason, as he mentions:

"Emotions and feelings are responsible for our actions, at least partially, in conjunction with other mechanisms linked to reasoning. They help us to make predictions, to plan future actions according to these predictions and to participate in cognitive and communicative functions (Caldas Sara, 2021, p. 39)".

Therefore, emotions are important when making decisions. Damasio determines that emotion and reason are connected, i.e., that "pure reason does not exist: we think simultaneously with our brain and with our emotions" (Caldas Sara, 2021, p. 39). Although this knowledge was not available from the 1920s to the 1940s, it is true that advertisers and advertising designers (today called graphic designers) understood perfectly well that communication, packaging

design and branding were crucial aspects for consumers to identify with, desire and consume the product. Also, in the face of the rise of beauty and personal care products, it allowed them to differentiate themselves from their competitors. This made consumers 'connect' emotionally with the products.

In relation to this, products unleash cognitive activities in the consumer such as interpretation, thought, and memory, generating experiences that are connected to sensations and emotions, which are called emotional experiences. In this regard, Csikszentmihalyi (1981), identifies that there are emotional powers that products emit and categorizes them into three temporal phases: The first refers to products that function as stimuli to generate new emotional experiences; the second as products that function to extend a current emotional experience; and the third, as products that function to remember an emotional experience already lived.

Today, we know that "the designer has to find a way to empathize with the user's values, aspirations and culture" (Lupton, 2018. p. 60) and that he or she is the facilitator of such experiences. In this sense, the main function of advertising during this period was to generate sensations in the consumer, whether out of fear of socially embarrassing situations - such as bad breath or not dressing appropriately - or because of the need for acceptance by a social group or for personal wellbeing. It is therefore not surprising that the most popular products were breath fresheners, skin care products and beauty powders to lighten skin tone, as mentioned.

"(...) so that by 1950 there were already 30 brands of toothpaste, mouthwash and toothbrush on the market. Kolynos

Cream with the advertisement: "Girls, if you want to have white and attractive teeth instantly use Kolynos cream", or "I love your teeth so nice and so white" (Maga-a, 2021, p. 17).

The advertising of women's personal care products sought to stimulate the desire to beautify the appearance of women of the time, either in an aspirational or transactional way, i.e. that a woman who was "well-groomed, pretty, slim" would encourage women to seek a relationship and get married.

All of this contributed to the fact that advertisements no longer focused only on extolling the goodness of the product but on how the product could help them to have meaningful social relationships, so that advertising could include tips on fashion, good dressing or how to have a healthy, sporty and attractive body.

Therefore, the products of the time and the way they were advertised promoted an emotional connection directly to the prevailing ideals of the modern woman and used the image of the ideal, sensual, independent woman.

Taking up what Csikszentmihalyi mentions about the stage at which products that work to extend an actual emotional experience, it can be alluded that, in for the marketing of beauty and personal care products, five types of advertising strategies were mainly used to connect with women consumers: "Modern testimonial, advertorial, 'friend' advice, 'celebrity' endorsement and the photonovel (Sivulka in Sanchez, 2018. p. 47)". All these strategies aimed to arouse emotional responses in the consumer; to identify

with the experiences of others; to connect "amicably" with another consumer; to receive expert advice, always using empathy and the aspiration to look like the one advertising a product to you. Advertising was based on the principle of "honesty" where what we know today as storytelling served as an emotional anchor to connect with consumers. One of the most widely used strategies in advertising in the 1920s and later in Mexico was the photonovel "a story was told through three vignettes; the first indicated the problem, the second revealed the promoted product and, finally, it solves the problem in the last vignette (Sivulka in Sánchez, 2018. p. 57)".

All these strategies helped to construct the narrative of what a modern woman had to be like, how she should dress, behave and what products she should consume; they helped to generate sensations such as social belonging, aspiration to have a love relationship or to look like the star of the moment. For its part, the design object - be it toothpaste, perfume, beautifying powder - had to be looked at, touched and used, as a degree of trust is placed in it through an emotion. Santoyo comments that "a well-designed object will be one that is so firmly established in our lives that we cannot imagine the hard everyday life without it" (Santoyo Bahamon, 2015, p. 33). In this way, a bond of need and desire is created to satisfy hygienic demands, but also social and belonging demands.

In other words, the object is a bridge between the person and the function, but in the end, it feeds the desire to resemble another through the consumption of the object.

Conclusions

We can conclude that the construction of the idea of the "modern" woman, generated during the first half of the 20th century, was the detonator of an opportunity for the commercialization of hygiene products focused on women, in such a way that advertising had a prolific field of action in the commercialization of these products. Advertising design realized that the success of a product did not depend solely on the utility for which it was originally designed, but on the meaningful relationship it established with the user. This was reflected in the way it was sympathetic to the aspirational and cultural values of the women of the time. And finally, advertising was the catalyst for the culture of the period, it was a testament to the way of life and constructed the ideal of what a modern woman's hygiene and appearance should look like.

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