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Social campaigns to encourage responsible fashion consumption: qualitative study with university students

Abstract

A fruitful line of research on responsible consumption has recently emerged due to a concern for and interest in environmental issues and the growing resource depletion, providing an opportunity for communications to influence human behavior toward environmental protection. This paper shows the design, implementation, and impact assessment of two social campaigns aimed to inform the public of the effects of an overconsumption of clothing and encourage responsible consumption. We designed a non-experimental, descriptive, qualitative study based on 30 semi-structured interviews with university students in Bogotá, Colombia, from variables such as campaigns' message, behavioral intentions, and relationship with the social and environmental context. The results show the students' unawareness of overconsumption but suggest a positive impact on their intentions to increase responsible apparel consumption. This study contributes to empirical knowledge of better alternatives for effective messages that favor responsible consumption.

Keywords

Responsible consumption, apparel consumption, social campaigns, clothing, pro-environmental campaign.

1. Introduction

The last few years have marked a worldwide trend towards an interest in environmental issues and concern about the increasing resource depletion. Although various factors are known to influence their consequences, it is undeniable that overconsumption (Lipovetski, 2007) is a major attenuating factor.

In recent decades, the environmental impact of consumption has resulted in a broad interdisciplinary field of study. It has focused mainly on pro-environmental behavior; reduce, reuse, recycle (the 3 R's), and donation practices (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012; Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009); behaviors towards the purchase of eco-friendly products or specific resources (water, energy, among others); ecological consumer profiles (Agrawal & Gupta, 2018), and, more recently, the relationship between gender perspective and ecological/responsible consumption (Marroquín *et al.*, 2019; Piñeiro *et al.*, 2014). Thus, the interest in consumption and human behavior towards it becomes relevant as every consumer's purchase can directly or indirectly affect their social, environmental, economic, and other contexts.

Consumption is the action of satisfying one's needs and desires (Campbell, 1987). While there is no single reason for consumption, aspects such as needs, gratification, hedonism, and desire are the driving forces behind it. In societies such as today's, it has also become a symbol of prestige and social acceptance (Jain & Chamola, 2019). However, consumption, as developed and grown in the 20th and 21st centuries, has a bearing on the global environmental crisis, both in terms of resource exploitation and the social inequalities it engenders (Piñeiro *et al.*, 2014).

In this context, apparel consumption is a relevant area of study given its consequences for the environment and social impact, particularly all the supply chain's associated processes –from production to post-consumption– (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2015). The textile industry has been identified as one of the biggest polluters, together with the oil & gas industry (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020), mainly due to its production processes that require high water consumption, dyes and chemicals for garment manufacturing and produce increased CO₂ emissions. Besides, this industry employs over 54 million tons of natural fibers a year to manufacture various materials (Brañez *et al.*, 2018).

Some studies report that only 1% of the materials used to manufacture apparel are recycled, and approximately 342 million barrels of oil are used annually to produce synthetic fibers for textiles. Every year, this industry needs over 98 million tons of non-renewable resources (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2015), generates over 92 million tons of waste, and consumes around 79 trillion liters of water (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020). Likewise, in 2018, an estimated 0.5 million tons of waste from the textile and fashion industry ended up in landfills worldwide (Nayak *et al.*, 2020).

In this regard, the UK's Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), a circular economy initiative to help reduce waste and encourage sustainable products (WRAP, 2020), reported that about 140 million pounds of clothing wind up in landfills each year. It also found that in 2017 about 20% of polluted water from the fashion industry comes from textile dyeing processes (Guo *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, Japan produces around 1.97 million tons of textile waste each year, of which only 10% is recycled (Hall, 2018), showing that the consumption of garments is directly related to the waste it causes in higher-income economies.

Following the emergence of fast fashion, apparel consumption has increased and, consequently, its effects on the environment (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020). Fast fashion resulted from the need to quickly introduce new products to the market, partially driven by fashion style changes (Joy *et al.*, 2012). This global trend, in which most textile and fashion industries are involved, means that these products' life cycle has been ostensibly reduced. Thus, companies offer high-end, low-priced fashion products to consumers that are updated within a few weeks, rather than seasonally as in the past, giving rise to changing fashion trends, more volatile demand patterns, and fast fashion (Hall, 2018; Joy *et al.*, 2012).

In recent years, different fashion brands around the world have joined this trend, changing their business models to this continuous globalized consumption model characterized by 1) fashion styles; 2) low prices; and 3) low-quality materials (Diddi *et al.*, 2019), leading the whole fashion system towards planned obsolescence and making clothing another "disposable" product (Bly *et al.*, 2015). As the life cycle of garments becomes shorter, they are discarded more frequently (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Milstein *et al.*, 2017) and kept for a shorter time (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009), usually fetching up in landfills.

The fast fashion trend prevails in the fashion and tailoring industry, stimulating the overconsumption of these products (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Thus, the idea of "fashionable" and low-cost garments in increasingly shorter seasons (from 2 to 3 weeks) makes the consumer more interested and, therefore, more impulsive and willing to buy, maintaining the industry's pace (Choi *et al.*, 2014) and increasing the waste these products cause.

Additional data on the environmental consequences of the fashion industry were published by the UN (2019), pointing out that this industry is responsible for 20% of water waste worldwide, while clothing and footwear production causes 8% of greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, global apparel production doubled between the first two decades of this century (UN, 2019). The apparel sector consumes about 93 billion cubic meters of water per year, and more than half a million tons of microfibers are discharged into the oceans, affecting marine ecosystems (UN, 2019).

Although these environmental impacts entail transformations at different levels, for example, changes in business models, the slowdown in production (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020), the introduction of sustainable materials and processes, among others, the need to promote responsible consumption practices is unquestionable. Therefore, this article seeks to show how communications may drive behavioral changes that help address this issue through social campaigns aimed at the responsible consumption of clothing.

The analysis presented in this article includes an impact assessment to confirm that communications may promote a new informed consumer that cares about the protection of resources and the environment for future generations. For this purpose, we chose university students in Bogotá (Colombia), given the interest in observing and exploring younger generations' pro-environmental commitment and intentions. Various studies have detected concern and green behaviors in this population group. Bianchi *et al.* (2015) found that young people hold pro-environmental values and behaviors, partly due to their education. Likewise, it has been observed that young people, particularly women, are more inclined towards sustainable consumption and pro-environmental actions, for example, within their homes; they also display frugal behaviors and follow self-sufficiency and organic product use trends (Marroquín *et al.*, 2019).

Moreover, there is a need to strengthen programs that promote pro-environmental lifestyles and practices among young people, highlighting the importance of education to strengthen and adopt a culture that favors resource preservation, responsible consumption, and sustainable development (Cortés, 2016). This perspective is shared by other authors who assert the need for better public education and communication to increase awareness of environmental issues and responsible consumption (HO *et al.*, 2020), mainly in young people, given their willingness to take action for environmental protection (Saifullah *et al.*, 2017).

2. Responsible consumer

The last decades have been characterized by prominent research around environmental issues from the perspective of responsible consumption and variables that affect decision-making, pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors, among others (Marroquín & Palacios, 2018). So, it is possible to empower a generation of consumers with a higher level of responsibility for and awareness of the fulfillment of their needs through ecological and sustainable consumption, the purchase of eco-friendly goods and services and behaviors recycling and reuse practices, among others (Agrawal & Gupta, 2018; Hall, 2018). For this various ethical consumption strategies associated with lifestyles should be implemented (Papaioikonomou, 2013).

The shift in consumption patterns towards environmental commitment is related to more informed attitudes preceding a purchase decision (Marroquín *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, an informed consumer concerned about the conditions of the context, the market, and the planet exhibits different values, attitudes, and decisions, taking an interest in the product, its production and manufacturing processes and subsequent effects. This type of consumer is known as responsible consumer (Dueñas *et al.*, 2014).

Regarding clothing consumption, evidence suggests that consumers are interested in the composition of the garments they wear, the materials that were used in them, their origin, production, and even whether or not they have eco-labels (Brañez *et al.*, 2018). Consumers are

also attracted to more durable, timeless, original, and higher-quality designs in textiles (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Niinimäki, 2012). Responsible consumers demand ethics, transparency, and sustainability in production and marketing practices; they seek to ensure that the goods they buy are produced using methods that do not damage the environment or violate workers' rights. These circumstances have prompted multiple social movements around the world, such as the one against fast fashion –i.e., slow fashion. This movement advocates a sustainability philosophy for the fashion industry, with sustainability and social responsibility as key concepts to improve production and marketing practices and encourage consumers to be more aware of their purchase and consumption habits (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

At the same time, other initiatives seek to reduce the environmental impact caused by the clothing post-consumption stages. For example, several countries promote donation, reuse, and recycling. In the United Kingdom, recycling plants collect donated clothing or buy waste from the fashion industry to create new products. In other contexts, donations to charities are encouraged (Nayak *et al.*, 2020). Some studies have found that clothing maintenance and repair activities and laundry practices (saving water in washes) can achieve greater sustainability. Others suggest that more extraordinary efforts are required in education regarding these products' sustainable consumption (Norum, 2013).

In this regard, Kunchambo *et al.* (2017) argue that understanding nature as a possible human extension could encourage responsible consumption behavior and explain why responsible consumption attitudes and behaviors may change. The authors found that people need to perceive nature as part of themselves to motivate responsible consumption behavior. Therefore, they argue that inspiring individuals to adopt a responsible consumption behavior requires more than a functional attachment to nature; people must change their view of nature and stop considering it as a distant object (Kunchambo *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, Ajzen and Fishbein's (1975) theory of planned behavior indicates that people's behaviors can be influenced by appealing to their beliefs, attitudes, and social norms; therefore, the programs and communication efforts that act upon these aspects may help to achieve a higher level of effectiveness.

On the other hand, Stern (2000) offers a set of principles that link communication to pro-environmental behavior, particularly emphasizing identifying actors and actions; using multiple types of intervention for a more practical approach; and attracting actors' attention. These actions provides a framework for the creation of communication campaigns that enable a significant change in favor of the environment (Stern, 2000).

3. Campaigns to encourage responsible apparel consumption

Communication can be crucial to educating more responsible and conscious consumers of clothing. Supplying consumers with information that strengthens their attitude towards sustainable fashion, responsible consumption and decision-making is necessary (HO *et al.*, 2020). Social campaigns are often used to influence human behavior towards society and care for the environment. Their objective is to communicate a social problem to the public; they also aim to raise awareness and contribute to the solution. A social campaign defends a cause in its message, seeking connection and more significant impact; it must reach the target audience and propose a creative set of tactics to invite them to take up the cause (Ancin, 2018).

Regarding overconsumption of clothing, communication initiatives come from different levels and organizations. WRAP, for instance, has promoted various campaigns and programs for companies, consumers, and non-governmental organizations to work together on reducing the impacts of clothing by increasing their useful life, expanding the supply and demand of second-hand and reusable clothing, mitigating the effects of its maintenance and washing, keeping clothes out of landfills, among others (WRAP, 2012). This organization run the campaign "WRAP Love Your Clothes" which aimed at raising awareness of the value of

clothing and encourage people to make better use of the clothes they own (WRAP, 2020). There are also initiatives from private enterprises; a Spanish fashion brand launched several campaigns, including “*Ropa vieja*” (Old clothes), to highlight the value that old things can have and their durability over time, which was preceded by other initiatives to promote sustainable and responsible consumption (Cubaque, 2020).

The alternatives that have emerged worldwide also stand out as part of the solution to this environmental issue. For example, there are strategies to motivate responsible consumption or oppose the continuous environmental deterioration through social mobilization. These strategies that seek to raise awareness and promote social, political, and economic commitment to the environment include those led by Greta Thunberg with students around the world or the NGO Greenpeace since the 1970s, such as the “Non-toxic Shopping Guide,” which proposed a list of products and brands containing toxic and dangerous substances for human beings and ecosystems (Greenpeace, 2004).

4. Materials and methods

This research is cross-sectional, qualitative, descriptive, and non-experimental. It reveals the characteristics of two pro-environmental social campaigns and their impact assessment in a group of university students. We analyze categories such as a) advertising message, b) behavioral intentions, and c) the campaign’s relationship with the social and environmental context. Three experts validated these categories and their consistency with this research’s objectives. The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire administered through semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected through non-probability convenience sampling and included 30 university students from five universities in Chapinero sector, Northern Bogotá, Colombia; the group comprised 63% women and 37% men from a middle socioeconomic level. The inclusion criteria adopted to select interviewees were a) active university students; b) being between 20 and 27 years old; c) having previous knowledge of the campaign; d) following fashion and clothing trends; e) being interconnected through technology and interacting in social media. The interviews were analyzed through axial coding using the software Atlas.ti 8.

4.1. Procedures performed

Stage 1. Design. The campaigns began with background research on the topic and a literature review on the textile and fashion industry. Then, we defined the communication objective, target audience, creative concept, type and tone of the messages, means of dissemination, execution times, among others. These aspects were structured in a creative brief, from which the two campaigns were designed with the following characteristics:

- Campaign 1- “Fashion:” Observe and Choose, Fashion or the Planet? This campaign’s central concept was “fashion,” and its creative objective was based on a clear, innovative, attractive, and disruptive message to invite students and young people to change their attitude toward and reflect on clothing consumption. The tone of the message was informative, direct, and testimonial. The campaign’s definition proposed a series of visual and audiovisual products to achieve greater involvement of and connection with the target audience. The campaign focused on digital media such as email and social media (Facebook and Instagram), including 360° images, memes, videos, mail pictures. The campaign included 17 Facebook and 15 Instagram posts.
- Campaign 2- “Super Errre:” This campaign was based on a comic. The problem of clothing overconsumption and its consequences for the planet is narrated through a story about the conflict between a young man with superpowers called Super Errre and the clothing monster. Super Errre has three powers: 1. Hypnosis to stop compulsive consumption, 2. Straitjacket to stop unnecessary consumption, and 3.

Telepathy to prevent cloth hoarding. This fictional character is based on famous superhero stories popular among the young population as a way to relate the characters, plot, and content to the problem of clothing consumption. The campaign used a fun, emotional, and informative tone, seeking to warn about the consequences of overconsumption and promote three principles associated with the 3R's in the character's name: *reciclar*, *reutilizar*, *regalar* (recycle, reuse, and give away).

Stage 2. Implementation. The campaigns were disseminated through digital media (Instagram, Facebook, and email). Campaign 1 was the first to be launched. The campaign went on for three months (from May 4 to July 30, 2020). In Facebook, Campaign 1 reached 3,924 people and 406 interactions, while Campaign 2 reached 12,050 users and 440 interactions. In Instagram, Campaign 1 reached 799 people and 901 reactions, while Campaign 2 reached 917 people and 1,068 views.

Stage 3. Impact assessment. After completing the dissemination process, we assessed the impact through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of people within the campaign's target group –university students–, exploring the categories related to the study's objectives.

4.2. Methodological considerations on the use of social media in the campaigns

The campaigns were disseminated through social media because these platforms and information and communication technologies have significantly impacted the adoption of new lifestyles around responsible consumption (Marroquín *et al.*, 2019). Social media present opportunities to devise ecological and environmental communication strategies which, through the synergy with government and educational policies, green marketing corporate policies (Muposhi, 2018), social initiatives, among others, may promote behavioral changes toward the protection of resources and the planet.

In this regard, these technological and media alternatives allow greater targeting of information and effectiveness in raising awareness in young people and motivating them to protect and respect the environment (Buil *et al.*, 2014). Meanwhile, we considered the growing use of social media and mobile devices' possibilities in evaluating the advertising message's effectiveness to meet the research objectives because they have broad coverage and penetration, making it easier to reach young population groups. According to Digital 2020 Global Digital Overview, there are around 3.8 active social media users globally, being the people between 18 and 34 years old the primary consumers of social media (Wearesocial & Hootsuite, 2020).

5. Analysis and results

5.1. Campaigns' advertising message

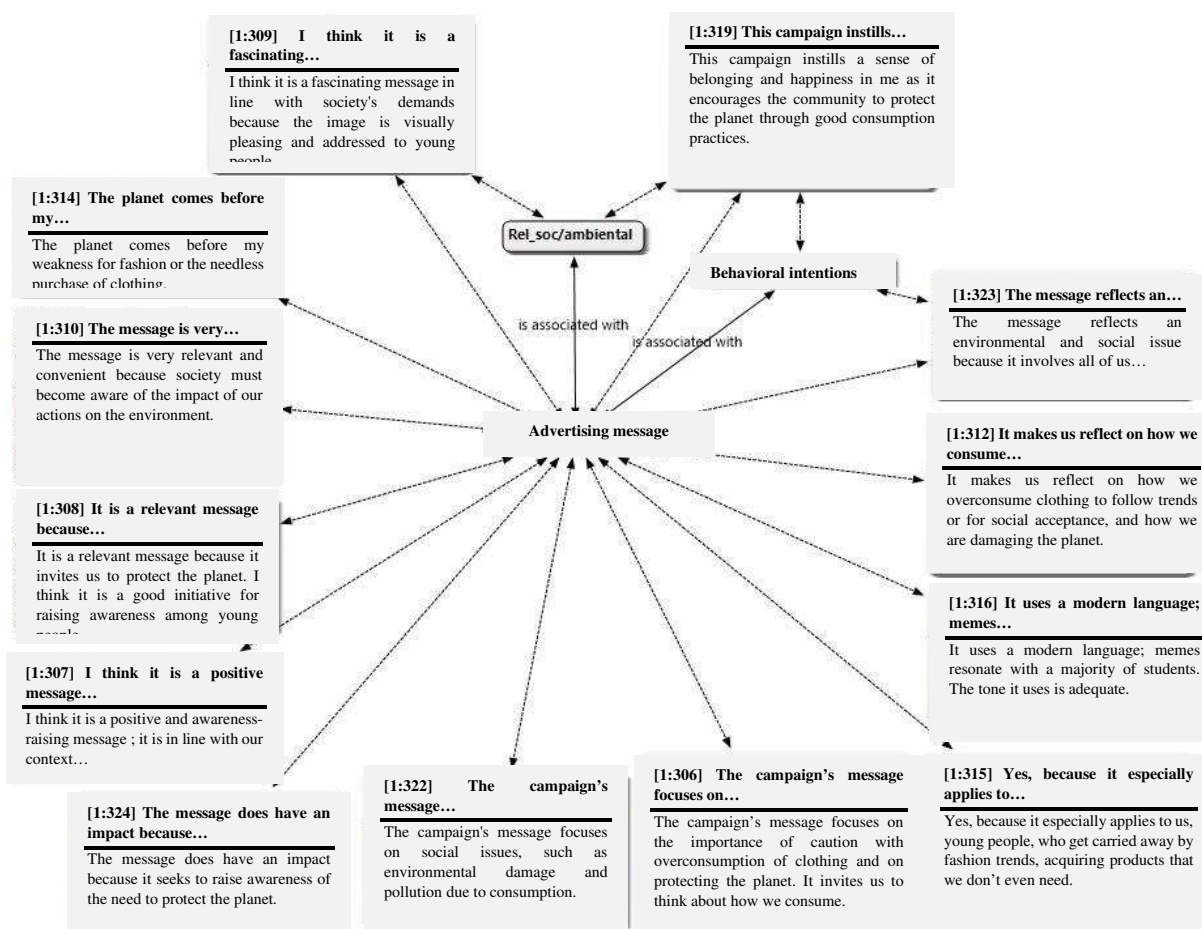
This category analyzed whether the perceived message coincides with the campaigns' communication objective and whether there is coherence between the intended message and what the target audience understood from the message. It also aimed to determine whether the message was perceived positively and what emotions it provoked. For the message of Campaign 1- "Fashion" (Figure 1), the results showed remarkable consistency between the communication objective and the interviewees' testimonies. We found that the message was perceived as an inspiration for a generation with greater "social awareness" about human actions for environmental protection, especially the use and consumption of clothing. During the interviews, the participants also mentioned that the message addresses a socially relevant problem in which young people play a central role as forces and agents for change.

On the other hand, the interviewees established a relationship between the message and the need for a balanced consumption of clothing; even a desire to reduce it became evident. This finding was noted in statements such as: "the message focuses on the importance of caution with overconsumption of clothing and on protecting the planet. It invites us to think

about how we consume,” “the message focuses on protecting the planet, specifically not overconsuming clothes.” They confirm that the message was received and in line with the campaign’s objective. Also, it was positively received as participants considered that the content is relevant and promotes change in favor of the environment and resources.

Regarding the emotions provoked by the message, the interviewees expressed multiple sensations ranging from joy, tranquility, reflection to feelings of guilt. Some of them were evident in comments such as: “It invites me to reflect. I thought about all the unnecessary purchases I have made that affected the planet,” “reflection and uncertainty for the consequences of this issue,” “guilt for not giving this issue the importance it deserves.”

Figure 1: Analysis of Campaign 1’s message.



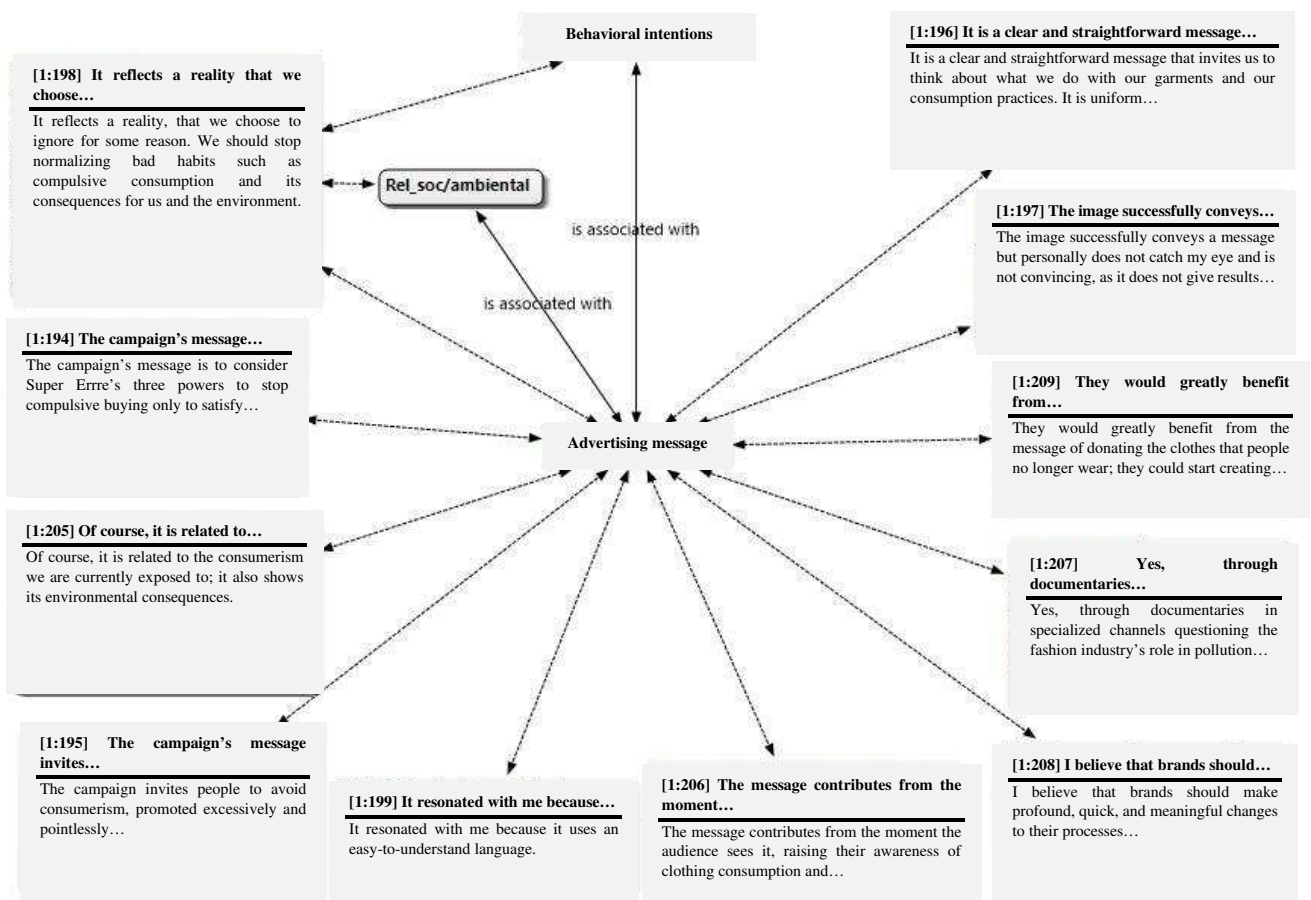
Source: Own elaboration.

For the perceived message of Campaign 2- “Super Errre” (Figure 2), the interviewees’ opinions were consistent with the campaign’s objectives. A common element found in the responses was that the message encourages us to diminish, reduce, or prevent clothing overconsumption, while the character and the story invite us to “recycle, reuse, and give away.” It was noted that all participants found the message positive and that it was received clearly and directly. However, the message was not appealing to all interviewees. Some of them expressed that the tone and form were not necessarily to their liking: “The proposal is good; however, the seriousness of the issue is not appreciated. Also, since it is a comic, the message may be considered fiction and, therefore, ignored by some people.” Some considered that because the message was conveyed through a comic, it could be deemed childish. Some

people mentioned that: “I am not a big fan of comics, so I think it is a bit childish,” “it has a childish tone, so I cannot relate, but the message is clear and easy to understand.”

Concerning the emotions provoked by the campaign’s message, although the interviewees expressed feelings of courage, sadness, amazement, or empathy, some stated that the content did not arouse any significant emotion in them: “It does not stir up any specific emotion in me but calls to action on how I consume clothing.” In any case, most of the comments pointed out that the campaign invites to take action on clothing consumption: “It makes me feel more aware, objective, and empowered to not fall for campaigns that encourage unnecessary consumption,” “it motivates me to reflect on the importance of not dumping clothes but donating them to avoid hoarding” and “courage, because we must overcome the desire for and pleasure in wearing new clothes.”

Figure 2: Analysis of Campaign 2’s message.

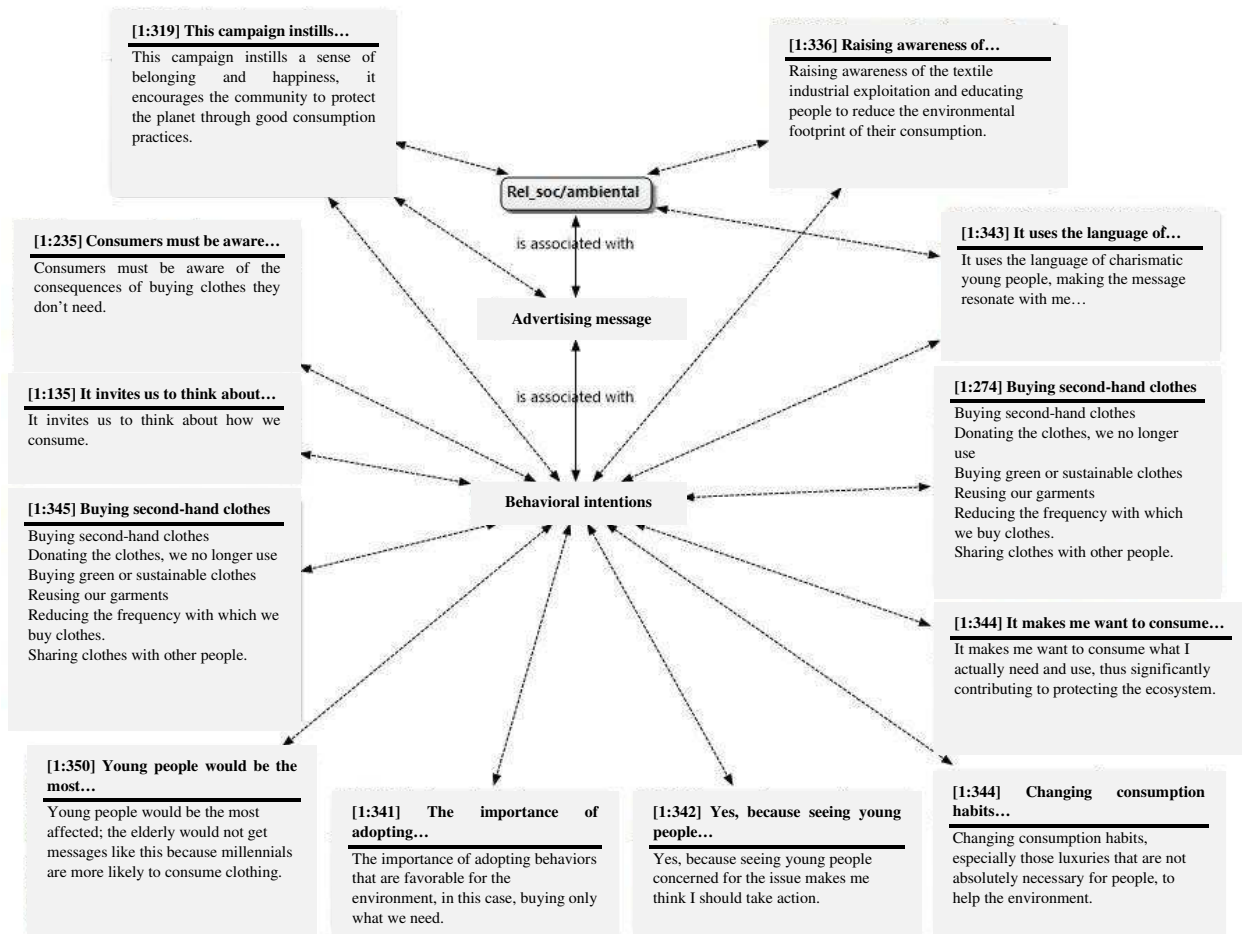


Source: Own elaboration.

5.2. Behavioral intentions

In this analysis category, we intended to determine what actions the campaigns promote and whether it is possible to entice other people to carry out activities such as buying second-hand clothing, donating clothes they no longer wear, buying ecological or sustainable apparel, reusing garments, reducing the frequency with which we buy clothes or sharing clothes with other people. The results of Campaign 1- “Fashion” (Figure 3) revealed that most of these activities are considered feasible to be carried out by the interviewees and recommended to other people. Most responses included statements related to the protection of the environment: “The campaign invites us to consume goods and services responsibly, regardless of variables such as price and quality”; “protect the environment”; “makes me want to consume what I actually need and use, thus significantly contributing to protecting the ecosystem”; “be more aware of my actions, which affect not only me but also the planet.” These comments are relevant because they show concern for clothing consumption and concern for and sensitivity to the environment, nature, resources, and the planet. Furthermore, although most interviewees stated that they were willing to buy second-hand clothes and donate the ones they no longer wear, they are also inclined to green clothes and pointed out the possibility of reusing and reducing purchases; none of them agreed with the alternative of sharing clothes with other people.

Figure 3: Campaign 1- “Fashion.” Analysis of behavioral intentions.

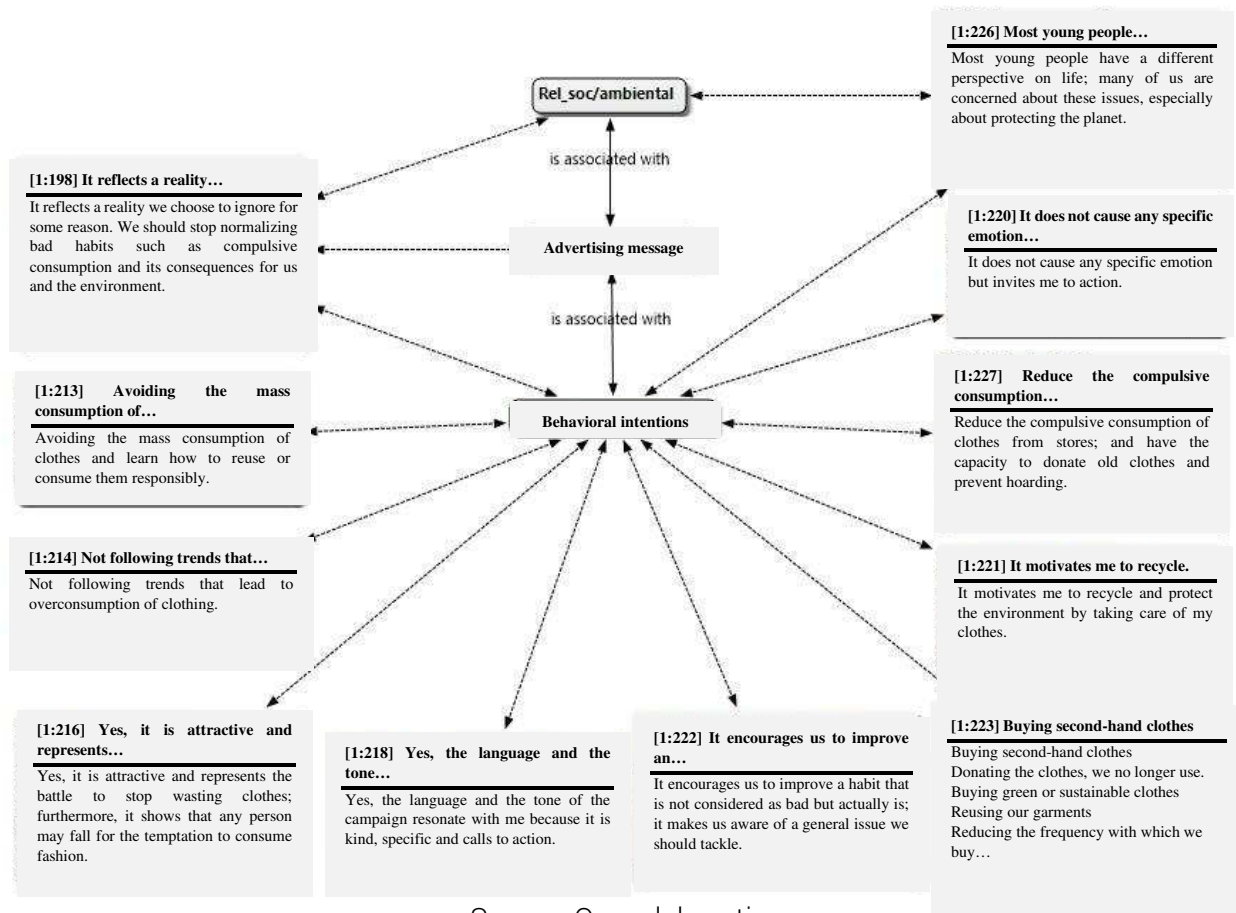


Source: Own elaboration.

Campaign 2- “Super Erre” (Figure 4) aimed at promoting recycling, donation, reduced consumption, and awareness of purchasing decisions. These objectives were reflected in the powers that the superhero declares to have in the comic book. Interestingly, this campaign’s message elicited different reactions compared to the “Fashion” campaign, in which the message and call to action caused similar reactions.

Thus, the reactions to Campaign 2 were diverse, as shown in responses such as: “The campaign invites me to take a conscious look at my wardrobe, garment by garment, and make an adequate use of what is in there,” “it motivates me to be a heroine to prevent garment hoarding,” “the campaign encourages me to consume the products of the textile industry responsibly.” Nonetheless, it can be argued that by generating several possible behavioral intentions, the campaign calls for taking care of resources and the environment and avoiding compulsive consumption of clothing.

Figure 4: Campaign 2- “Super Erre.” Analysis of behavioral intentions.



Source: Own elaboration.

5.3. Relationship between the campaigns and the social and environmental context

The final category analyzed the relationship between the campaigns' message and the world's and society's issues. It also aimed to identify an opinion on reducing the impact of consumption on the environment through this communication strategy; it also explored the interviewees' knowledge of this problem. Finally, we inquired about the role of fashion brands concerning responsible consumption and what type of public should be targeted by campaigns such as those analyzed.

The results of the interviews regarding Campaign 1- "Fashion" suggested a direct relationship between the message and the global problem of pollution and industrial overproduction. The interviewees associated the campaign with two approaches, environmental and social, with statements such as: "I believe that it is something that society is currently experiencing. We only think about consuming, but not about what we really need to buy," "the message shows not only an environmental but also a social issue because it involves us all, our responsibility for consumption; we are called to cause change through actions as simple as making more balanced purchasing, use, and consumption decisions on our clothing."

Interviewees understand human responsibility for the deterioration of the environment due to consumption and overconsumption; therefore, the responses showed a degree of accountability for the problem and an interest in changing this reality.

Similarly, the campaign elicited several reactions from the interviewees, showing arguments and elements to transform their consumption practices. It was emphasized that this communication strategy could contribute to such changes because it offers relevant information to improve the mentality toward overconsumption and provides elements of reflection to stop the unrestrained consumption of clothing: "It promotes new ideas around clothing, potentially changing people's mindset," "it invites us to reflect on and look into the environmental impact of products we buy needlessly."

Regarding the level of knowledge of the subject, most interviewees were unaware of the consequences and social and environmental impacts of overconsumption of clothing before the campaign; they stated that the information provided in various pieces presented valuable points to raise greater awareness and understand the consequences of this type of consumption.

Generally speaking, the interviewees felt that brands should participate in these initiatives, get more involved, and educate their consumers: "It is an excellent option for industries to support this initiative so that their garments add to greater environmental sustainability and advise their customers." Finally, most students stated that young people and compulsive clothing consumers are the primary targets for pro-environmental campaigns.

On the other hand, this category's results regarding Campaign 2- "Super Erre" showed consistency between the campaign's message and the issues derived from the overconsumption of clothing and its effects on the environment. The interviewees agreed that the campaign's theme addresses a current socially and environmentally relevant issue: "Pollution from environmentally unfriendly products and excessive waste generation is a major problem. Little is known about the impact of clothing on the environment; I think it deserves the same attention as the consumption of plastics"; "the comic relates to the impact that clothing has on the ecosystem since each garment takes several years to degrade, harming the environment." These statements confirm that the campaign's message raised more significant concerns than the mere act of buying; interviewees found different relationships between the campaign's content and the world's current social and environmental problems.

Furthermore, all the interviewees agreed on the fact that these communicative actions can have a broad impact on the behavior and mentality toward the use of resources, contributing to solving the problem derived from the overconsumption of clothing. For example, they mentioned that: “The campaign has social and environmental contents –crucial these days– because despite the lockdown due to the pandemic, people have continued buying online and brands have not stopped sending advertising and promotional messages encouraging apparel consumption”; “it does help reduce the environmental impact of clothing consumption because its message resonates with every person who reads the comic; it makes people weigh up whether or not they need something before buying it.”

Regarding the level of knowledge of this environmental issue, only a few stated that they knew about it thanks to other people’s media or information. Nevertheless, the majority reported having little knowledge of the problem. When asked about the role of fashion brands in responsible consumption, the interviewees agreed that brands and, in general, the textile and fashion industry should become more involved in pro-environmental and consumer education campaigns. This position implies taking on a more significant social commitment, resulting in reputational benefits and greater customer loyalty. They also mentioned that the brands: “would benefit a lot if they conveyed the message of donating clothes that are no longer worn to create an environment of solidarity with people who cannot buy”; “they win to the extent that they make a difference by bringing products to the market and messages that show their contribution to reducing pollution. This approach would bring greater benefits in terms of recognition and trust among customers and consumers.”

6. Discussion and conclusions

The literature review confirmed that, although several studies report the impact of the fashion and clothing industry on the environment, most efforts focus on improving processes and products that ultimately exacerbate the environmental problem. For instance, fast fashion emerged as an opportunity to improve the efficiency of production by using fewer natural fibers in raw materials for garment manufacturing. At the same time, this trend gave rise to overproduction, overconsumption, impulse buying, increased waste, greater pollution, impact on ecosystems, among other adverse effects.

Nevertheless, we could identify responsible consumption initiatives that seek, on the one hand, to promote purchasing that is much more consistent with the protection of the environment and resources, and on the other, to ensure the involvement of sustainability, transparency, and ethics throughout the fashion industry’s production chain. Concern for these circumstances has led to relevant social movements, such as those that oppose the fast fashion trend (slow fashion). They propose a new concept and outlook that involves more respect for the environment, natural balance, human rights, and above all, the perspective of sustainability for the planet and the human species (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

This paper showed misinformation and unawareness, as confirmed by most interviewees, who learned about the problem thanks to the campaigns, creating the need to increase communication efforts. Following our objective, we identified the importance and creative and transforming potential of communications to convey messages that change consumer mentality and behavior toward one of the world’s most used resources: clothing. Likewise, the impact assessment of the campaigns launched through social media suggested that creative and informative content disseminated through digital media might reach the student population more effectively than other media. This position validates previous works’ call for public education and pro-environmental communication programs that increase ecological awareness and resource protection (HO *et al.*, 2020), particularly in the young population (Saifullah *et al.*, 2017).

The social campaigns in this article are an example of the range of possibilities that communications can offer from a strategic perspective based on how the public currently

consumes and interacts with information. The findings suggest that friendly and fun messages, images that enable an emotional connection with the target group, and informative content that allows interaction and audience participation are essential for greater effectiveness.

The results also proved that both campaigns' message was perceived and understood by the interviewees; the contents established a direct connection with their purpose, validating what Ancin (2018) proposed when pointing out the importance of creating a "cause" in the message of a social campaign. In this sense, the campaigns' objectives were achieved since they provided information about the consequences of overconsumption of clothing and prompted reflections among the interviewees on the subject, confirming Kunchambo *et al.*'s (2017) and Cortés's (2016) statements. Furthermore, most interviewees demonstrated an intention to change their behavior toward reuse, recycling, and purchase reduction practices, which have been the main practical approaches to waste management by clothing consumption, including the 3R's, and an inclination towards donating garments to charity (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012; Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Similarly, we confirmed intentions associated with responsible consumption, as mentioned in Marroquín *et al.*'s (2019) and Dueñas *et al.*'s (2014); we even confirmed approaches to behaviors associated with ethical consumption (Papaoikonomou, 2013).

As mentioned in the introduction, since consumption is necessary for human existence, it is impossible to avoid it. We can influence how people consume to make this activity less excessive and more responsible and balanced. Therefore, the efforts must be considerable, constant, and collaborative. Launching recycling or reusing campaigns is not enough if there is no real awareness of the planet, its resources, and our connection with it all. As Kunchambo *et al.* (2017) asserted, if there is no understanding that we as humans have a dependent and balanced relationship with nature, it will be challenging to encourage a responsible consumption behavior. This proposes a change for the consumer, the industry, and the whole fashion system in its unsustainable logic (Bly *et al.*, 2015). Alternatives such as eco-fashion, sustainable fashion, slow fashion, collaborative consumption, and more pro-environmental behaviors, driven by communication, can reduce the environmental impact and promote the preservation and protection of resources.

Finally, we analyzed university students' perceptions of the effect of two pro-environmental campaigns on clothing. While these results can increase the knowledge of the effectiveness of advertising messages and the design of future communication strategies for the consumption of fashion products, this work has some limitations that could be considered in further studies. In the first place, future research should broaden the scope of the research using other methods and sample sizes with greater representativeness and psychographic diversity so that results are based on differences in perception concerning other demographic variables (gender, socioeconomic conditions, educational level, among others). It is also important that new projects complement these findings with quantitative approaches that analyze causal relationships. Additionally, future works should observe and study concepts related to attitudes and persuasion, pro-environmental behavior, and practices that reflect other consumer trends in relation to the potential impact of fashion products' advertising messages.

Since the campaigns were disseminated through social media, other impacts related to user interactions in these media could be measured. Future research could carry out comparative analyses with other media or new content formats, considering the information and communication needs of different audiences regarding environmental issues. It is worth noting that communication initiatives for the environment must be supported by other sectors of society (government, business, media) to strengthen scientific research on environmental issues.

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