Brands as New Forms of Religiosity: the Case of the World of Red Bull[1]

Les marques com a noves formes de religiositat: el cas de World of Red Bull

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Institutional religion's loss of influence runs parallel to the emergence of the sacred in the secular. The transformation of the religious and the re-enchantment of the profane are also present in consumption, which is acquiring a growing ontological function. This paper identifies and analyses brands as a new form of religiosity because of their essential role in the lives of individuals and society, beyond their commercial nature, positioning them as constructors of meaning, bringing world views together and making sense of reality. We also explore the advertising discourse of the World of Red Bull campaign (Spain, 2012) carried out by the international Red Bull brand. This analysis will confirm that advertising is no longer a mere instrument of capitalism, but rather a vehicle for spirituality, making increasing use of transcendental semiotics, tak-

La pèrdua d'influència de la religió institucional és paral·lela a l'emergència d'allò sagrat en l'àmbit secular. La transformació del fet religiós i el re-encantament d'allò profà també es fan presents al consum, que adquireix una creixent funció ontològica. Aquesta investigació identifica i analitza les marques com una nova forma de religiositat pel seu paper essencial en la vida de l'individu i la societat, més enllà del seu caràcter mercantil, situant-se com a constructores de significat, fent convergir visions del món i donant sentit a la realitat. Així mateix, explorem el discurs publicitari de la campanya World of Red Bull (Espanya, 2012) duta a terme per la marca internacional Red Bull. Aquesta anàlisi ens confirmarà que la publicitat ja no és simplement un instrument del capitalisme, sinó més aviat un vehicle d'espiritualitat que fa un ús cada ve-

ing elements from religious language and transforming them with the help of mesmerizing audiovisual techniques into a new form of communication, with a message that does nothing to hide its messianic nature.

Key words: *religion, consumption, brand, publicity, Red Bull.*

gada major d'una semiòtica transcendent, prenent elements del llenguatge religiós i transformant-los, amb l'ajuda de l'espectacularitat tècnica, en una comunicació nova que no amaga el seu caràcter messiànic.

Paraules clau: *religió, consum, marca, publicitat, Red Bull.*

SECULARISATION AND ITS MARK

Clearly, the process of *secularisation* (Vattimo, 1992) of the public space and the removal of religion from the centre of thought and civil practices is a consubstantial part of an enlightened project intended, among other things, to make humans masters (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2004), freeing them from their "self-caused immaturity" (Kant, 1989). The most extreme versions of this postulate, then, would be based on the thesis that secularisation is the next step in modern and industrial society, doing away with myth, magic, spirituality and religion. However, many studies indicate that, while in some European countries secularism is growing, in the United States, for example, religion is expanding. The "American religious hypermarket" is clearly an enormous competitive field full of spiritual offers from different institutions and groups. For Rinallo and other researchers, "clearly, the secularisation of Europe is the exception rather than the rule" (Rinallo *et al*., 2012: 2).

The sociologist Joan Estruch uncompromisingly labels secularisation a "myth", upholding the idea that the crisis of religion means metamorphosis, not abolition (Salazar *et al*., 1994: 266-280). In this way, as Peter L. Berger says, the religious crisis is characterised by the *pluralism* of new spiritual forms more than by *secularisation*.

We cannot, therefore, fall into the basic error of confusing *secularisation* with *dechristianisation*. Because of this, researchers and sociologists suggest that "perhaps what is happening has more to do with deinstitutionalisation than what we understand as secularisation" (Bericat, 2008: 285). The fact is that it is clear this secularisation process is leaving its mark on our culture. *Our thesis is going to be that advertising, among other practices, is taking over the mental, cultural and cognitive space which institutional religions are leaving empty.* In fact, according to Duch (2012: 21), part of the institutional crisis of the great religions is due to "their incapacity to establish polyphonic currents of communication and empathy among their believers and, ultimately, among all human beings with spiritual concerns".

The vacuum left by institutional religions has come to be occupied by different practices we could classify as *technologies of the self* (Foucault, 1990), stressing self-help and personal growth (Illouz, 2007). To all this *à la carte* religiosity is added the New Age concept, summarising the new contemporary spirituality. Based on holistic anthropology, this upholds pantheism and the awakening of the "internal Christ", enabling human beings to reach enlightenment. In a way, extreme post-modernism could be represented by a complex narcissistic landscape of self-centredness governed by an "anything goes" law promoting well-being.

What we see, therefore, is not only the survival of the religious but also the production of modern forms of religion and sacredness. Along these lines, we follow the thesis of the French sociologist Durkheim, who declares that religion is destined to be transformed rather than disappear. The need to believe (Vattimo, 1996) has in no way been removed.

The sacred in human behaviour

Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) were the pioneers in talking about *the sacralisation of the secular*. For them, the two processes coincide, so that the loss of power by the traditional religious institutions has coincided with the emergence of the sacred in secular contexts. By identifying a series of properties shared by the sacred and by consumption, and their processes, they conclude that the culture of consumption can easily express the sacred and reproduce it by itself. We can therefore speak of a religious transformation of advertising and, by extension, of consumption, as operated by advertising, as a simulated religion (León, 2001: 60). León examines ten properties of sacred phenomena adduced by Belk *et al.* (1989) in the aforementioned study. Based on the writings of Durkheim and Eliade, he confirms the transfer between religion and commercialism, concluding that the religious universe has not been abolished, merely transformed.

This is why we believe we are justified in maintaining that brands are a new manifestation of religious phenomena, as they fulfil both functions of *religion:* in the sense of *religare* because human beings project on to them a link with the supernatural aspect of the product —"commercial animism" (Kottak, 1997; León, 2001: 59), and *relegere* (Marsal *et al.*, 1980: 467)— because they give a meaning to the future of human beings and things, offering the individual an orderly internal organisation.

Our approach

What we propose to do in this article is to survey the mental and symbolic structure of contemporary consumption moving from the classical conception of the consumption of material goods to the so-called consumption of *intangibles*, of which the greatest exponent is the concept of the *brand*. This change, then, brings consumer advertising activity close to the space for transcendental spirituality left vacant by traditional institutionalised religions but never eradicated root and branch from the mental structure of contemporary humanity. We attempt to confirm this hypothesis with a heuristic and analytical approach based

on methodologies forged in semiotic and film analysis but in this sense applied to a paradigmatic campaign: *World of Red Bull*. The aim is that our approach should be a magnificent complement to any possible algorithmic and quantitative method of looking at the phenomenon.

CONSUMPTION AND ITS CONTEMPORARY CONFIGURATION: FROM CONSUMPTION TO CONSUMERISM

We are not interested here in analysing *consumption* as such, in its initial conception, but rather what it has become: the form of consumption that distinguishes us, and *consumerism* as "attribute of society" (Bauman, 2007: 47). For Lipovetsky, "the consumerist spirit tends to reorganise the set of behaviours" (2007: 10), so even the non-commercial comes under the consumerist impulse. Lipovetsky calls this "consumption-world"; consumption without borders; a commercialisation of life. This transformation transforms the human being into *Homo consumens* (Cortina, 2002: 21) or *consumericus* (Lipovetsky, 2007: 10). It is not work that brings dignity to humankind, it is consumption.

To the above it can be added that one of the most outstanding features of modern society is fragmentation, or the loss of the great references. This has resulted in the abandonment of common notions that used to provide humankind with cohesion (Rey, 2006: 68-69) and a new emerging common denominator or unifying element: consumerism. Within this, we are with Lipovetsky in referring to what he calls the "hyperconsumption society" dominated by "intangible benefits" (Lipovetsky, 2007: 70), thereby defining a "new Gospel: 'buy, enjoy, this is the great truth' " (Lipovetsky, 2007: 94).

"Instant" consumption, the "now" culture and "pointillist" time

The consumer society has a precise conception of time and its value. A cyclical or linear vision is being abandoned in order to renegotiate its meaning. The current perception of time is not continuous; it is made up of a series of successive points of sufficient intensity for each of them to take on its own entity. Following Michel Maffesoli's metaphor (2001), we would say that it is "pointillist time", pulverised into a multitude of *eternal instants*. This pointillist perception is backed by online immediacy, because this is the maximum expression of "now" and real time, as well as by instant consumption. Vodafone understood this dimension of time, charging each moment with transcendental value in its campaign "Es tu momento, es Vodafone" (It's your moment, it's Vodafone) in 2007. The first advert broadcast, "Pum, pum", said: "It's the moment when you've decided the path you want to take. It's your moment. It's Vodafone). The second, entitled "Piano", stated: "It's a fascinating moment. You've got no ties. It's the moment when you want to live. It's your moment. It's Vodafone". Product and time are equalised and fused. Of course, this discourse of time not only sells goods; it also sells the time —the opportunity, the instant— elaborated by the language of these goods. This is the origin of the importance of *experience marketing* as a way to

reach the consumer. This new time condition of humankind "is characterised by the sacralisation of the present, by an absolute present" (Lipovetsky, 2007: 104).

Promise of happiness and messianism

"The consumer society is perhaps the only one in human history that promises happiness during life on earth; happiness here and now and in all the "nows" to come. That is, instant and perpetual happiness" (Bauman, 2007: 73). In fact, according to Jesús Ibáñez (1987), the discourse of advertising recreates the world and this imaginary simulation is presented to us so we can recreate ourselves in it. Its communication system is condensed in the promise of happiness: "You will enjoy" (Sánchez, 1997: 265). "Destapa la felicidad" (Open happiness) (Coca-Cola), "Si realmente crees en ello, cualquier cosa es posible" (Anything is possible if you really believe in it) (Red Bull), "La libertad es el premio" (Freedom is the prize) (Euromillones), "La fuerza está en ti" (The force is in you) (Galletas Príncipe), "Just Do It" (NIKE), "Més que un club" (More than just a club) (F.C. Barcelona), "La felicidad de disfrutar el auténtico sabor casero" (The happiness of enjoying real home-made flavour) (Hida), etc; but always through the objects of consumption offered to us.

The chance of "rebirth"

Linked to the temporal conception of hyperconsumption, brands are also responsible for incessantly "rejuvenating" the subject. The idea of *rebirth*, a concept present in various oriental philosophies and recognised as being necessarily evangelical in accordance with the Biblical text for seeing God, is the main attraction of consumerism: "it is the offer of a multitude of new beginnings and resurrections (opportunities for 'rebirth')" (Bauman, 2007: 73-74). The beer brand Voll Damm illustrated this in 2012 with its magnificent advert directed by Jaume Balagueró "Doble o Nada" (Double or Nothing). Its text ran: *"If you go for it you could be wrong. It could cost you your car, a couple of teeth, your next promotion. It might be cold, you might hurt yourself. You might lose your head or your manners, you might break the law. It might bring you ridicule, scorn or loneliness. But if you live the way you want, to very last, perhaps, and only perhaps, you will come to be who you are. Double or Nothing. Voll-Damm double malt.)"* Another majestic advert that reveals this concept is "Possibilities" (2013) by Nike, challenging us to overcome the limits of our lives and become someone else.[2]

All this is entirely related to the pointillist now culture, because "the tyranny of the moment in our liquid modern times, with its precept of *carpe diem*, is coming to replace the pre-modern tyranny of eternity, whose motto was *memento mori"* (Bauman, 2007: 142-143).

Towards a new model of consumption: the irrationality of the consumer

In fact, this trend has resulted in an investment in the *irrationality* of consumers. Dan Ariely (2008), exponent of so-called *behavioural economics,* states that people

do not make selections in absolute terms. Instead we decide something in relation to the possible alternatives. Far from the ideal behaviour projected by standard economic theory, we all are continually involved in the most unexpected forms of irrationality due to the influence of many hidden forces on our everyday decision making. Marketologists understand this elementary functioning of our brains, they take advantage of it and they invest in consumer irrationality rather than well-informed, coolly taken decisions. The market "is committed to awakening consumer emotions, not to cultivating reason" (Bauman, 2007: 72).

Many theorists have approached the study of shopping centres as social meeting places, rather than as sterile developments without further importance, where we find our individual expression and access the social circle we desire through shopping, and where the important thing is the experience and intangible value provided for us by the objects, rather than the goods themselves. Authors like Kowinski, Fiske, Brummett, Morris, Taylor, Bauer, Miller and Rifkin help us to understand this contemporary phenomenon. Pahl (2003) also analyses the quasi-religious nature of shopping centres. He states that the architecture of these malls tends to have common patterns as buildings are designed to operate as cathedrals for the religion of the market.

THE SPIRITUALISATION OF THE ADVERTISING DISCOURSE: BRANDING AND THE INTANGIBLE

There is no doubt, as Spanish professor Raúl Eguizábal, who is observing a new consumer condition, maintains with us, that "consumption operates in our society as a substitute for both religion and ideology and has become the central device in our culture" (2006: 35). The management of brands and advertising has a great deal to do with this process. As Costa says, "brands did not acquire all their importance and value until the saturation of production and the media made them numerous and omnipresent, placing them at the summit of consumerism. The brand, then, is invested with a symbolic discourse which makes it a *value*. The physical brand has, in this way, been transmuted into the intangible version of its own *imago* (mental image, public image, social image, beyond its exchange value and usage value)" (2004: 13-14).

The *brand* began in the move from the agrarian and craft economy to the Industrial Revolution, which gave rise to the production economy. With technological advances and increased production we saw a multiplication of new products: telephones, radios and domestic appliances of all kinds. In these new areas of business, brands were born along with the new products. Advertising was no longer limited to publicising them, but rather "was based on the creation of needs to stimulate their consumption" (Costa, 2004: 84).

Later, in the machine age, the market was flooded with almost identical mass-produced products (Klein, 2007: 36-37). It therefore became necessary to give all these similar products a differentiating, non-transferable identity: "what began as *announcing* was increasingly turning into *enunciating* (and, moreover, constructing the brand's own world)" (Caro, 1994: 96). It is from the twenties on-

wards, (Klein, 2007: 38) that we find the initial conceptualisation of advertising as a transcendental medium, supporting an identity going beyond the physical aspects of the product and aimed at getting inside the human being —emotions, needs for self-fulfilment, sense and meaning—.

From this point onwards, the advertising discourse went beyond the strictly economic context and became one of the most influential social activities thanks to the incorporation of these psychological techniques seeking to fill companies and products with soul. In psychology, the business world found "a very powerful ally which helps get consumers to stop being interested in the tangible values of the product and focus on the intangible ones. The product therefore moves from object to symbol" (Rey, 2006: 68). In addition to this, emotional recompense was more attractive than material benefits and the focus switched towards values and lifestyles, as well as to consumer behaviour.[3] One of the first big steps in this direction was taken in the forties by the executive Rosser Reeves, with his USP (*Unique Selling Proposition)* method (Reeves, 1997: 106-108). But this advertising philosophy was gradually directed towards an *Emotional Selling Proposition* rather than the consolidation of the USP. The polar opposite of the rational, economic dynamic of the USP, in which the consumer always chooses the alternative which provides the clearest benefit, was David Ogilvy and his *Brand Image* concept. The philosophy of Ogilvy, considered to be one of the most important creatives in the history of advertising, began to replace the USP towards the beginning of the sixties (Ogilvy, 1999: 7). As Ogilvy pointed out, the personality of a product is an "amalgam of many factors: its name, its packaging, its price, the style of its advertising and, above all, its own nature". In this way, it moves forward towards the mental, intangible and ideological (Eguizábal, 1998: 376-377).

Another important advertising milestone came at the beginning of the eighties, when Jack Trout and Al Ries presented a new concept: positioning. This is based on two principles: the first understands that we live in an over-communicated and sensorily overloaded society, which has come to be described as "infoxicated" (a term invented in Spanish as "infoxicada" by Alfons Cornella). The second responds to the first in the form of a solution and proposal: when faced with so much confusion the answer is the oversimplification of the message (Ries and Trout, 1981). This opens up a completely new perspective in marketing: thinking about the consumer's mind rather than the market, leaping from the object to the subject (Eguizábal, 1998: 411). This moves towards an increasingly dematerialised way of understanding brands and advertising: from the tangible to the intangible and from the specific to the abstract. Marketing specialists make an effort to explore lifestyles, stages of life, interests and common aspirations. If the highpoint of mass culture came in the fifties and sixties, in the seventies and eighties it was the turn of segmentation and individualism.

Corporate mythology

Firms like Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, Microsoft and Intel were pioneers in relegating their goods production operations to the background, externalising and delo-

calising their manufacturing thanks to market liberalisation, deregulation and globalising processes, which allowed them to focus their efforts not on making things but on selling them and managing their image. From the *industrial economy* we were moving to the *brand economy*. Ultimately, they thought, a product could be made "by anyone", while real business consists of:

> creating a corporate mythology powerful enough to infuse meaning into these raw objects just by signing its name. The corporate world has always had a deep New Age streak; fed-it has become clear- by a profound need that could not be met simply by trading widgets for cash. But when branding captured the corporate imagination, New Age vision quests took centre stage (Klein, 2007: 55).

We could summarise this age of brands and advertising as follows, using Klein's words:

> in the new model, however, the product always takes a back seat to the real product, the brand, and the selling of the brand acquired an extra component that can only be described as spiritual. [...] Branding, in its truest and most advanced incarnations, is about corporate transcendence (2007: 55).

Brand spirituality

Along these lines, León sees advertising above all "as a medium carrying a transcendental message encrypted in apparently trivial forms" (1998: 65). George Lewi, mythologist and expert in brands, states that "the consumers of today need to believe in their brands, just as the Greeks did their myths" (Salmon, 2007: 61).

The international marketing guru Martin Lindstrom adds that "in fact, these astute brands [...] are selling purity, spirituality, faith, virtue and, in some cases, atonement" (Lindstrom, 2011: 246). Because of this, when we speak of the purpose of brands —although not all of them of course— "it's no longer a case of seducing or convincing but rather of producing a *belief effect*" (Salmon, 2007: 63). "Nowadays, of the set of alternative religions, brands have become serious competitors for those providing beliefs, meanings, feelings of community and identity" (Atkin, 2008: 224). And the trend is increasing. This confirms the statement by the global agency Young & Rubicam in a report for the *Financial Times* (March, 2001): "Brands are the new religion. People go to them seeking meaning".[4]

The new *emotional branding* means that the brand is experienced as the product is consumed, and it is this that holds the true value for the consumer. This new trend has unleashed experience consumption, which is found in parallel with *fictional capitalism* (Verdú, 2003), very much part of the individualised hyperconsumer who seeks a meaningful, intense connection via sensitive marketing. Gobé (2005: 77-103) describes this new marketing as being based on sounds that transport, colours that fascinate, flavours that tempt, shapes that touch and fragrances that seduce. In this way, groups of consumers sharing a strong commitment to a certain class of product, chain or consumption activity are understood as "communities" or "consumption subcultures", although some scholars

identify a form of relationship with brands going beyond ordinary commitment, placing it closer to devotion and worship, and even divinisation. Adjusting the concept, we arrive at the "cult brand" introducing a more religious term that more accurately identifies the aspect of extreme commitment which some consumers can come to feel for their brands. The idea is developed in three fundamental works: Ragas and Bolivar (2002), Atkin (2008 [2004]) and Belk and Tumbat (2005). Since then, many business management books have suggested how to create this type of brand and transform consumers into truly loyal, believing, evangelists.

Atkin, in his book *The culting of brands*, connects religious beliefs with this century's dizzying consumerism and defines the concept of a "cult brand" as "a brand for which a group of customers shows great devotion or dedication. Its ideology is distinctive and it has a well-defined, committed community. It enjoys exclusive devotion (that is, not shared with another brand in the same category) and its members often become voluntary supporters or defenders" (2008: 21). Beyond love (*lovemarks*), cult brands are based on faith and belief, on the sphere of the divine, and on the sacralisation of the secular which we mentioned earlier.

For example, in their study, Belk and Tumbat (2005) identify the myths underlying the religious aspect of Apple and conclude that the Macintosh brand and its fans "constitute the equivalent of a religion" (207). For his part, Atkin[5] tells us that "brands are beliefs. They include a morality and incorporate values. […] Cult brands are the suppliers of our modern metaphysics and they imbue the world with sense and meaning. […] Brands operate as total meaning systems" (2008: 121). As Caro rightly points out: "when fully analysed, the cult of the brand can be just as valid as (for example) worshipping the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And, in this way, in the context of a generation, barring some essential exceptions, not really prone to lighting candles for saints, brands are there as an opportune substitute" (Caro, 1994: 130).

INTANGIBLES

Finally we find that brand creation and management is "a facet we call the management of intangibles. […] The intangibles of a brand are concepts like symbolism, meaning, the emotional discourse, messages, identity, personality, culture, reputation, the social side" (Costa, 2004: 195).

The concept of "intangible" is an important element in anchoring the transcendental nature of the brand, because it expresses its "beyond"; its intangible fundamental; its spiritual nature. This is where, as Eguizábal (2009: 16) points out, advertising principles replace religious and political principles in our societies. The brand moves from being something —a product, a sign— to become a meaning: a social, economic, political, cultural, legal, formal and semiotic phenomenon, etc. Lee Clow, creative director of Apple's "Think Different" campaign, explains it like this: "Brands are no longer just the way of reminding you what you want to buy. They have become part of the social fabric of our society. Brands form part of our way of organising things; they even create the context in which we can be and live as people... Nowadays, brands articulate who you are

and the values that characterise you," (Atkin, 2008: 139). This personal treatment rescues the brand from anonymity. For Costa, the branding process is not just stamping or sealing a sign on a name, it is also "an act of baptism" (2004: 25).

Advertising and myth

For Eguizábal, what all traditional advertising messages say is one and the same thing: "the search for the object (the product) or the search for a 'mythical state' of happiness that has been expressed in a gestural rhetoric of satisfied smiles and demonstrations of bourgeois self-satisfaction or domestic wellbeing" (2012: 98).

Myth analysis as founded by Gilbert Durand is recognised as a useful tool for understanding the most effective advertising strategies in our age (Navarro, 2006: 56; Eguizábal, 2012: 95). We are justified in mentioning this "mythical" dimension in our study because of its human essence, sharing with the motivation of the *relegere* (or the religious) the function of making sense of the human condition. The advertising text has a dimension of (re)creating reality that feeds individual and social horizons, limiting chaos and providing meaning through its own narrative structure. The myth includes the imaginary, symbolic dimension of advertising and the brand.

Ultimately, advertising discourse behaves like a *microideology*. Consumption and the mass media reach millions of people and provide them with a way of thinking, an orientation in life. In this dimension at least, brands fulfil a religious function (from *relegere*). Who would have predicted that AXE, a brand of male deodorant, would create a campaign with a huge social impact under the slogan *Make Love, Not War* advertising their new product line AXE PEACE, under the *hashtag #kissforpeace,* and with the aim of "generating peaceful change in the world kiss by kiss"?[6] Qualter, in his book *Advertising and Democracy in the Mass Age,* also comments that one of the main functions of advertising today is providing "an authorised guide to social behaviour"(1994: 88-89).

"Advertising is becoming an ideology and a religion; goods are no longer objects, they are symbols, surrounded with mythology. They are not manufactured, they are created. [...] (Commercial brands) cease to be economic entities and become cultural entities which are therefore more comprehensible through anthropology than economics (Martín and Alvarado, 2007: 26).

Transcendental industry?

We have no doubt that advertising is a cultural industry (Rodríguez, 2008), but let us go a step further, because what has been said up to now makes us think of the step from an *industrial economy* to a *brand economy* and from *cultural industry* to *transcendental industry*. Why transcendental? Because "advertising shows, ultimately, that in a technological, materialist and apparently rational society, a series of mythical mechanisms, beliefs and forms of faith survive, now deposited in brands and in goods" (Eguizábal, 2012: 127).

And Atkin adds:

we live in a spiritual economy. There is a market for conceptions of the world and for communities, as well as for goods and services. There are both consumers and producers of belief systems and communities. The laws of supply and demand can be applied in the same way to spiritual, as well as economic exchange. The only point where the economic market differs from the spiritual one is that, in the former, demand can rise and fall while, in the latter, demand is usually constant. The need to belong and to construct meaning will always exist (2008: 223).

There are not many field studies relating consumption, brands and religion,[7] but the one carried out by the University of Tel Aviv in Israel and the University of New York and Duke University in the United States provides a timely and complete vision of our research. Ron *et al*. (2010), in their research entitled *Brands: The Opiate of the Nonreligious Masses?*, published in the journal *Marketing Science*, show strong empirical evidence supporting the idea that brands and religiosity can, to some degree, be used as substitutes for one another.[8] Both allow individuals self-expression and self-worth. The study argues and demonstrates that religiosity and brand reliance are negatively related because both allow individuals to define their identity and to reinforce and express their personal worth.

In fact, they indicate that the substitution effect between religion and brand dependency identified in this study implies that brands and religion implicitly compete for consumers/believers. The two parties are already adopting their competitors' techniques: on the one hand spiritual leaders are managing their religions as if they were brands, as almost all denominations invest in designing logos, merchandising, etc. and, on the other hand, brands are injecting religious feeling into their products and services.

Ultimately, many authors have underlined the similarities between the pillars shared by religions and brands.

Rushkoff (2001) mentions twenty characteristics of religious worship and argues that their attributes are similar to those exercised by "cult brands" (p. 238-249). Rey (2006) initially approaches advertising as a new religion and mentions six similarities between the two discourses, such as the use of images, the promise of heaven, an obsession with cleanliness, dramatisation, the archetype and the reuse of festivals. Haig (2006) considers that many brands attempt to be mini-religions in themselves. In his analysis of the top 100 brands in the world, he devotes two pages (p. 12-13) to understanding how some of these begin to appear as differentiated religious cults. He establishes eight common characteristics between religions and brands:

1. Faith: one of the aims of brands is that the public should believe in what they offer.
2. Omnipresence: the McDonalds clown is recognised more widely throughout the world than the crucifix.
3. Gurus: successful brand managers are worshipped by both consumers and employees. Steve Jobs is one of the most obvious examples.
4. Goodness: brands are increasingly aware of philanthropic instincts.

5. Purity.
6. Spaces for worship: beyond the stores that contain their products and shopping centres, some brands have created their own temples for the brand, such as the *Nike Towns* and the crystalline *Apple Stores.*
7. Use of icons.
8. Miracles: everything from the multicultural nirvana offered by Benetton to the promise of a new body in a simple exercise DVD.

Lindstrom (2009) establishes ten common pillars (p. 123-134) supporting the majority of religions, despite their differences, relating them to the brands and products we consume: Belonging, clear vision, power over enemies, sensory attraction, narratives, greatness, evangelism (the term "evangelist customers" is very common in marketing jargon, understood as customers who sell the brand without being paid for it because they firmly believe in its products or firmly and passionately recommend them), symbols, mystery (the secret formula of Coca-Cola is an example of this or Unilever's "ridiculous" Factor X9) and rituals.[9]

RED BULL AND THE MARKETING OF EXTREME EMOTIONS

We will now explore the advertising discourse of the World of Red Bull campaign (Spain, 2012),[10] carried out by the international Red Bull brand.

The company and its brand

Red Bull has created a *marketing of extreme emotions*, a catalyst for power in human beings through sport: "the inspiration of sport allows us to be constantly reborn" (Klein, 2007: 58). A brand raised up to the highest heaven, despite its youth (since 1987), constructing a metamessage with its whole discourse which transcends what might be expected for a drink. It offers an intangible essence allowing human beings to believe in their chances of constructing a more satisfactory life. All its actions seek to incite the consumer not only to buy the product, but also to experiment and take part in its world.

Red Bull is a super-brand covering a multitude of industries and cultural and social spheres. It not only associates itself with the values of those spheres, it actually gives rise to them. All the sponsorship of athletes and sports teams, the creation of its own (cultural and sporting) events and the production of audiovisual and digital content makes us wonder whether Red Bull is a brand of content that sells energy drinks or vice versa.

The advert: World of Red Bull 2012 (Bienvenido al Mundo de Red Bull – Spain)

The campaign analysed represents the communicative turning point in Red Bull's advertising discourse, leaving behind the cartoons that had traditionally

accompanied it for more than twenty years. This was the first advert along the new audiovisual lines it has based itself on in 2013 and 2014. The campaign had great support in the digital sphere (#TeDaAlas),[11] increasing participation and engagement there.

The application of an exhaustive *semiotic methodology* shows up the importance of the symbolic message (connotation), which is responsible for the effectiveness of the advertisement (Sánchez, 1997: 298), along with the symbolic nature of modern advertising.

The structure and narrative resources (characters, values, space, time and dramatic structure), as well as the expressive substance, from visual decoding (shots, framing, camera movements, light, etc.) to sound (voices, music, sounds and silence), form part of a persuasive textual surgery, leading the recipient towards a specific, transcendental ideology.

In summary, we can say that the advert opens with a series of spectacular aerial images, suddenly submerging us in the ocean and then returning us to earth. We are shown imposing, virgin, heavenly nature, selling us an emotional, (Sánchez, 1997: 294) euphoric, utopian landscape. It evokes the heavenly, revealing the infinite, the free spirit and the transcendental in a natural way (Eliade, 1981: 72, 78, 107). Different sportspeople prepare for action, alone against natural forces and the world. Among them the Spaniard Josef Ajram is identified, appearing twice. His voice says: *"The challenge of my life is discovering how far I can go"*. Horacio Llorens does not appear in the advert, but his voice says: *"That moment, just there, is the only one that matters"* closing the advert by saying, *"Anything is possible if you really believe in it"*.[12] The sportspeople jump, descend, dive and fly in different scenarios and risk disciplines, united by a fall that seems to defy gravity and whose happy outcome results in the ecstasy of overcoming natural elements and their own limitations and they invite us to enter the World of Red Bull. The shots follow one another very quickly, with clean cuts, creating fast-paced sequences and a multidimensional nature we identify with. The final packshot blends into an image with manipulated light and colour: smile, embrace, sky and sun, with the brand and the world offered to us by Red Bull. What is presented is a place to truly *be* and to discover the power within oneself. With this "new" gospel, whose commitment is inside me and within the reach of my domestic budget, I am "Welcome to the world of Red Bull", which promises to give me wings to be capable of anything.

Ideological/philosophical interpretation

According to the data extracted, we conclude that the philosophical proposition of the advert has at least the following characteristics:

- Importance of the natural, ecological space ("return to nature").
- Unique value of the here and now ("pointillist" time), the opportunity to *be* in the potential of the moment offered.
- Aesthetic/sensory, emotional and experiential intensity.
- Individuality, personalisation, independence, own interior universe.

- The human being as the centre, the protagonist of existence.
- Ascension, improvement, unlimited capacity of the human being, self-transcendence, personal enlightenment (discovery).[13]

The parallels between this narrative/religious approach and subtle New Age ideas are more than clear if we take time to analyse them. According to the *New Age position*, the "myth" of the *External Saviour* is replaced by the myth of the *hero inside* (in the human being). In people, there is a higher self, an internal power (which we are challenged to seek in the advert) which encourages the search for unknown limits. It is a form of self-transcendence and a cult of the self.

Red Bull's advertising is confirmed to be a micro-ideology, a vehicle for a metamessage going beyond its tangibility or referentiality and offering us transcendental, ideological and philosophical consumption. It is not only a cultural industry or an economic phenomenon, it is the provider of a cosmic vision: a transcendental industry.

CONCLUSIONS

- Far from abolishing magic, religion and spirituality, we are experiencing a re-enchantment which sacralises the secular and is visible in consumer behaviour (it is necessary to (re)conceptualise what is considered *religious*).
- Hyperconsumption is presented here as a way towards happiness, guaranteeing it and providing it here and now and updating the messianic promise. Rebirth used to be a uniquely divine power, now it is a power of the Market.
- This new social context enjoys transcendental characteristics providing fertile ground so that brands and their discourse —advertising— can set their sights beyond the product and focus on the search for meaning through a life of consumption.
- The history of brands and advertising confirms their evolution towards the intangible, symbolic and spiritual, replacing overthrown institutions and purveying religious content (*religare* and *relegere*) to individuals.
- Although brands are far from being an institutionalised or conceptually traditional religion (although they are in the case of "cult brands") we can state that both they and their discourse are established as transmitters and standard bearers of a form of open religiosity exposed to continuous renewal, whose centre corresponds to a fluctuating imagination lacking a core beyond post-modern ideologies and philosophies that have shown they add a spiritual dimension to existence.

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La profecía de la imagen-mundo: para una genealogía del paradigma informativo. Valencia: IVAC. (2009). C*uando la televisión lo podía todo: Quien Sabe Donde en la cumbre del Modelo Difusión*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva. (2013) *Política () Psicoanálisis: Cinco textos desde Valencia para inventar un vínculo.* (Coordinator). Santander: Shangrila. (2005) *Guía para ver y analizar Matrix*. Valencia: Nau LLibres / Octaedro (cowritten with Rebeca Crespo) (Guide to viewing and analyzing *The Matrix*). His research has been focused on the evolution of Western iconicity. He is currently working on visual and narrative structures in the post-classical cinema as well as on political dynamics generated by social media.

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Notes

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[2] Available at: <http://nikeinc.com/news/nike-evolves-just-do-it-with-new-campaign>.

[3] Madison Avenue adopted psychograms in order to make sure recipients understood its messages. One of the most commonly used psychographic approaches in the advertising field has been VALS (Values and Life Styles), designed by the SRI International (Stanford Research Institute), which was set up in 1946 as a company to advise businesses and governments all over the world.

[4] HUMPHREYS&CO (2001). Available at: http://www.humphreys.co.uk/articles/intellectual_property_1.htm> [Consulted December 2012]. See a summary of Richard Tomkins' article at: WWRN, *Brands are the new religion* (2001). Available at: <http://wwrn.org/articles/3961/?&section=miscellaneous> [Consulted December 2012].

[5] See a concise, interesting interview with Atkin in which he goes over many of these topics. Available at: <http://www.presston.com/feedback/art.asp?id=303> [Consulted August 2013].

[6] See <http://www.axepeace.com> and <http://www.peaceoneday.org/axe-peace>.

[7] On the relationship between religiosity and various aspects of purchasing and consumption behaviour, see these three pieces of research suggesting that purchasing behaviour could be related to religious belief and that brand communities demonstrate religious practices and beliefs. See in the References: Sood, J.; Nassu, Y. (1995); Essoo, N.; Dibb, S. (2004); Rindfleisch, A.; Wong, N.; Burroughs, J.E. (2010).

[8] See this study for detailed statistics. For his part, Prof. of Sociology Pérez-Agote (2012), referring to the vicissitudes of secularisation in Spain and mostly using the CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas), relates and matches what he calls a "second wave of secularisation" with the configuration of Spanish society as a society of mass consumption.

[9] An example: <http://www.movimientoritual.com/website/home.php>.

[10] Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN8ChJxaE6c>.

[11] Relevant digital platform available at: <www.tedaalas.redbull.es>

[12] It is copy that inevitably reminds us of the well-known and often repeated words of Jesus Christ, recorded in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 9, verse 23: "Everything is possible for one who believes" (New International Version). The adapted phrase follows the same structure and has an identical philosophical meaning, although in this case it is not necessary to believe in God or any superior being, but rather in the "king", who is nothing more than "myself".

[13] This psychological pattern coincides with that of other brands and campaigns, such as: Nike, "Find Your Greatness", "Just Do It – Possibilities", "#Makeitcount" or "Rise & Shine!"; Duracell, "Trust Your Power – Derrick Coleman"; Voll Damm, "Doble o Nada"; White Label, "Live True"; Steinlager, "Keep it Pure"; Coca-Cola, "Razones para creer" or "Cámaras de seguridad"; Microsoft, "Super Bowl Commercial – Empowering". It is an ideology which is very much present in the modern advertising discourse.

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