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FASHION/SOCIAL ADVERTISING. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FASHION ADVERTISING MEETS SOCIAL ISSUES

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# FASHION/SOCIAL ADVERTISING. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FASHION MEETS SOCIAL ISSUES<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FASHION MEETS SOCIAL ISSUES<sup>1</sup>.

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### Abstract

Fashion/social advertising (FSA) is a composite phenomenon, which involves different perspectives: on one hand, we can talk about FSA when fashion advertising addresses social issues; on the other hand, when social advertising is about fashion or goes against fashion.

This paper aims to understand virtues and vices of the fashion/social advertising phenomenon through two different qualitative researches founded on media content analysis. The first one aims to analyse how fashion/social ads talk to the public. The second one focuses on the decisions of Italian Istituto dell'Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria about fashion/social ads, aiming to understand when and how fashion/social advertising doesn't talk ethically.

In respect of both the quoted perspectives, the research shows that FSA gives rise to an effective and efficient advertising model in terms of values, texts and practices (especially referring to the so-called "unconventional social advertising"). At the same time, the research highlights the shift between "thinking ethically" (on which FSA should be grounded) and "talking ethically"; this shift causes consistent problems concerning the management of ethical issues in Italian advertising.

### Keywords

Fashion, Advertising, Social issues, Self-Regulation, Ethics

### Resumen

*Fashion/social advertising (FSA) es un fenómeno compuesto que incluye diferentes perspectivas: por un lado, se habla de FSA cuando la publicidad de moda se fija en asuntos sociales, por el otro, cuando la publicidad social trata de moda o se pone en contra de esa.*

*Este artículo pretende comprender las virtudes y los vicios del FSA a través de dos investigaciones diferentes cualitativas basadas en análisis de contenido. La primera investigación analiza el modo en el que la FSA habla con el público. La segunda centra la atención sobre las decisiones del "Istituto dell'Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria" italiano sobre estas temáticas, intentando comprender cuando y como la publicidad de moda y la publicidad social dejan de hablar desde un punto de vista ético.*

*Analizando estas dos perspectivas, la investigación muestra que la FSA crea un efectivo y eficiente modelo de publicidad como valores, textos y prácticas (especialmente cuando se refiere a la así llamada "publicidad social no convencional"). Al mismo tiempo, la investigación subraya el cambio entre "pensar éticamente" (FSA tiene que basarse sobre ese concepto) y "hablar éticamente"; este cambio puede causar problemas importantes referidos a la gestión de los asuntos éticos en la publicidad italiana.*

### Palabras clave

*Moda, Publicidad, Asuntos Sociales, Autorregulación, Ética*

1. This essay is the joint work of both authors. However, paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 6 are to be attributed to Marica Spalletta, paragraphs 0, 4 and 5 to Lorenzo Ugolini.

## 0. Introducción:

Fashion/social advertising, as the name suggests, is a composite phenomenon, combining the peculiarities of two specific districts of the advertising empire: "fashion advertising" and "social advertising". Today, it represents one of the most interesting phenomena in the wide scenario of advertising, because it combines the artistic flair of fashion advertising with the issues of social advertising. In this way, it gives rise to an effective and efficient advertising model in terms of values

(it covers all the classic issues related to social advertising), texts (ironic, funny, provocative, never predictable) and practices (with a preference for unconventional strategies).

Fashion/social advertising takes shape in two different perspectives: on one hand, fashion industries address frequently social issues, and in this perspective fashion/social advertising often represents a tool of Corporate Social Responsibility; on the other hand, social advertising (non-profit organizations) addresses fashion, talking about it or going against it.

Over the past three decades, however, a significant paradox emerged referring to fashion/social advertising: social advertising should be grounded on “thinking ethically”, but often this “thinking ethically” doesn’t turn into “talking ethically”. Several decisions of Italian Istituto dell’Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria (IAP) confirm this trend: starting from 1990, many fashion/social ads were sanctioned because of their contents, their formats, and their languages.

This paper aims to understand virtues and vices of the fashion/social phenomenon through two different researches. The first one analyses a selection of about 100 ads from different countries, released over the past 30 years, aiming to highlight what is fashion/social advertising and how fashion/social ads talk to the public. The second one focuses on IAP decisions referring to fashion/social ads, aiming to understand when and how fashion/social advertising doesn’t talk ethically.

## **1. The fashion empire and its communication tools**

Over the last century, academics used several images to describe the fashion phenomenon. According to Massimo Baldini (2005: 37), fashion can be compared to a «wide empire» composed of several districts, each one corresponding to different merchandising areas: from the classic (i.e. clothing, hairdressing, accessories, make-up, etc.) to the modern ones (i.e. cultural industry, design, cars, travels and tourism). Therefore, fashion is an empire the size of which increases proportionally to the birth and strengthening of new trends (Calefato, 2011).

The empire metaphor, so efficient to describe the structure and evolution of the concept of fashion, is also very descriptive of how fashion communicates and expresses itself. Fashion communication can also be compared to an empire, the districts of which correspond to the different ways

of interaction between the fashion system and its stakeholders (Pambianco & Testoni, 2008).

Fashion itself can be considered as the first district in the empire: clothing «serves a wide variety of communicative functions» (Rosenfeld & Plax, 1977: 24), it “speaks” (Squicciarino, 2000) and «we put clothing on for some of the same reasons as we speak» (Lurie, 1983: 27). As Roland Barthes (1959; 1967) argues, clothing is a «structured system of signs», but its meaning is totally dependent on context (Eco, 1972; Steele, 1996). In fact, «while clothing may “speak”, it seems to rarely engage in dialogue»<sup>2</sup>. According to Davis (1992: 25), «clothing, being the visual metaphor for our social identity, functions in fashion as a work of ambivalence management as much as any other self communicative device». Finally, Eco (1986: 195) argues «the syntactic structures of fashions also influence our view of the world».

Stores, catalogues and fashion shows inhabit the second district. Saviolo and Testa (2005) define stores as institutional communication tools, while catalogues and fashion shows represent seasonal ones. Beyond the difference, fashion industry uses all these tools to find a close benefit between the manufacturer’s product and the retailer’s customers (Easey, 2009; Bickle, 2011; Hines & Bruce, 2002).

The third district corresponds to public relations and marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2006). It consists of the most traditional strategies (based on the 4 P’s: product, promotion, place and production) (McCarthy, 1960), consumer-oriented strategies (based on the 4 C’s: consumer, cost, communication, convenience) (Lauterborn, 1990) and more innovative and daring strategies, such as guerrilla marketing (Levinson & Hanley, 2005; Megido, 2005).

Media represent the last district: they are necessary tools for fashion promotion and circulation (Calefato 2007) as they reach a much wider audience than the one visiting retail stores or attending fashion shows (Fumagalli & Braga, 2010).

Over the last century, media addressed fashion in many different ways. The first fashion magazines appeared at the end of the 18th Century, when *Le Journal des Dames et des Modes* was launched. The early fashion magazines initiated fashion journalism, an extremely popular journalistic genre the success of which is unchanged in time, as newspaper circulation data shows. At the time, fashion articles and columns could also be found in the cultural and features pages of mainstream newspapers (Nevinson, 1967;

2. Herbert Blumler, quoted by Davis (1992: 8).

Steinberg & Trevitt, 2006). In Italy, the Sunday edition of the *Corriere della Sera* would often feature fashion show reports, reviews of designer collections, commentary on trends, and essays on the cultural and social effects of fashion in a column on leisurely activities called *Tempi liberi* (Bergamini, 2006; Murialdi, 2006).

Fashion often plays a leading role in the television and movie industry. Iconic fashion designers such as Coco Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and Valentino have inspired extremely popular movies and documentaries. Even the world of fashion journalism is often portrayed in Hollywood blockbusters: it's no secret that the main character in *The Devil Wears Prada* is based on Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of *Vogue USA*. There is also a large number of reality shows about the fashion industry: from *Project Runway* to *Fashion Star* in the USA, to their international variations such as the Italian show *Ma come ti vesti?* (Blignaut, 2009).

The online world's fascination with fashion is also ever growing. From designers' websites to fashion forums and blogs, *The Sartorialist* being the first and most successful of its kind, all the way to Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter, the online discourse on fashion is the most inclusive and vibrant (Blignaut & Ciuni, 2009).

Nevertheless, advertising has been the most important fashion communication tool in the 20th century (Codeluppi, 2002). While helping fashion brands to make a profit, advertising is responsible for the elevation of fashion to a mythical status. Advertising is still extremely relevant in the landscape of fashion communication, and it's interesting to note that over the last thirty years fashion advertising has grown very close to social advertising, a phenomenon that requires a new definition and academic attention. Fashion/Social Advertising is the way we will refer to this phenomenon in the next pages.

## 2. Fashion/social advertising: a composite phenomenon

Fashion/social advertising, as the name suggests, is a composite phenomenon, combining the peculiarities of two specific districts of the advertising empire: "fashion advertising" and "social advertising".

### 2.1. The language of fashion advertising

Advertising is still the most important communication tool for fashion. As Galofaro (2005) wrote, fashion and advertising share the same origin

and language, and they are mirrors reflecting social change. According to Volli (2003), advertising can also be considered as fertile ground where new trends in fashion communication develop.

Fashion and advertising influence one another: advertising requires fashion to develop effective communication strategies, while fashion inspires new subjects, new languages, and new practices in advertising (Volli, 2003).

Among the different advertising typologies, fashion ads are unlike any other, as they tend to express themselves rather than to communicate something (Righetti, 1993). In fashion advertising, visual communication is most relevant than a written message (Galofaro, 2005): fashion ads, in fact, rarely feature typical advertising elements such as a headline or body-copy (Codeluppi, 2002).

The logo is the most important component of a fashion ad, used to convey the values and the philosophy behind the brand (Semprini, 1996).

According to Codeluppi (2002), fashion advertising is different from general advertising for four different reasons:

- a) Fashion advertising has to communicate a more conceptual message than general advertising, and less linked to a context. Images are more efficient than words in communicating the message of a fashion ad;
- b) Fashion advertising doesn't rely on mad-men<sup>3</sup>, rather on photographers, to develop a visual strategy;
- c) Fashion advertising relies on images as a universal means of communication to reach both the general public and fashion industry insiders;
- d) Fashion advertising relies on the memorability of images to counteract its ephemerality.

3. The expression "mad-men" usually describes the professionals of advertising involved in copywriting, art direction and, in general, creativity. This expression is due to the fact that, at the beginning of the 20th Century, the most important advertising agencies had their headquarters on Madison Avenue, in New York.

If we were to define fashion advertising according to Jakobson's theory of communication functions (1963), a fashion ad performs an aesthetic/poetic, emotive, phatic or metalinguistic function, rarely a referential or conative one (Spalletta & Carulli, 2006). Fashion ads tell a story that communicates the brand as a whole. Specific products featured in a fashion ad (clothes, shoes, accessories, etc.) are secondary: the brand itself is the real protagonist of the message (Galofaro, 2005).

## 2.2. *The 3 W's of social advertising: Who, What, Why*

The term “social advertising” refers to a form of advertising addressing relatively controversial topics (Mancini, 2011; Gadotti, 2001). Social advertising springs from a general, public interest (O’Keefe & Reid, 1990; Manrai & Gardner, 1992). Even though social advertising may pursue a private interest (the one of companies which want to propose themselves as supporters of socially relevant causes), that interest is still subordinated to a more general one (i.e. an interest referring to widely accepted values). Gadotti and Bernocchi (2010) argue that social advertising can be considered, not as a shaper of social change, but as a tool that can be used to trigger social change and, at the same time, a mirror that reflects it (Pollay, 1986).

Unlike commercial advertising, ideas rather than goods or services represent the object/ “product” of social advertising (Grandi, 2011). Even the targets change: the main purpose of social advertising is to raise the citizens’ awareness and knowledge on general interest issues, in order to modify their behaviour (Rothschild, 1979). Besides this function, which Mancini (2011) calls “functional integration”, social advertising can perform a “symbolic integration”, strengthening the identity of the actor and its characteristic values.

This function becomes central when we take into consideration the actors that normally promote social advertisements, such as public institutions, non-profit organization, private companies. For private companies, social advertising serves as an expression of corporate social responsibility (Kotler & Keller, 2006), and as a tool to strengthen relationships of trust with their stakeholders (Fabris, 2003). Institutions and non-profit organizations, on the other hand, use social advertising as an important, structural part of their communication. Social advertising is a tool of “good administration” in the first case, a tool through which the social capital takes shape in the latter (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003).

Social advertising covers a wide range of social issues: from human rights to welfare (health, safety, work, etc.), to environmental issues (pollution, climate change, animal cruelty, etc.). The messages used in social advertising can be moving or touching, distressing or aggressive, encouraging or posi-



tive, ironic or funny, paternalistic or prescriptive, provocative or irreverent, informative or descriptive (Gadotti & Bernocchi, 2010).

The development of social advertising follows a three-steps model:

- a) The actor identifies a relatively controversial issue and presents it to the public in three different ways: awareness campaign, education campaign, fund raising;
- b) The public takes it upon themselves to be a solution to the issue, adopting a coherent behaviour/lifestyle (or abandoning harmful behaviours or lifestyles);
- c) As a result, a relationship of trust is established between the actor and the public (Faccioli, 2000).

During the last century, social advertising was present on all kinds of traditional media: press, television, radio, events. The fusion of social advertising with guerrilla marketing and viral marketing which occurred in the last ten years represents the “new deal” of social advertising (Cova & Giordano & Pallera, 2007; Levinson & Hanley, 2005; Levinson & Forbes & Adkins, 2010; Mathos & Norman, 2012). In fact, the so-called «unconventional social advertising» (Peaverini & Spalletta, 2009) combines the traditional themes of social advertising with the aggressive strategies of guerrilla marketing (ambient marketing, buzz marketing, etc.). The messages used are never predictable and the audience is rarely asked to contribute with donations, rather to share the message on their social channels online, making it go viral (Peaverini & Spalletta, 2009).

### 3. Fashion/social advertising: a comparative research

As we mentioned above, fashion/social advertising is the combination of fashion advertising and social advertising.

We can use this definition both when fashion advertising addresses social issues, and when social advertising (non-profit organizations) address fashion. In this research, we will be analysing these two perspectives on a selection of about 100 ads from different countries, released over the past 30 years<sup>4</sup>.

From a methodological point of view, we will carry out a qualitative content analysis (Altheide, 1987, 1995; Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Macnamara,

4. All the ads we analysed can be found on [www.adsoftheworld.com](http://www.adsoftheworld.com).



2005) aimed at answering this question: what happens when fashion advertising meets social issues? Rather than focusing on statistics, we would like to highlight the topics, themes and trends that characterize the interaction between fashion and social issues (Corbetta, 2003). In order to do that, we chose a thematic approach (Pawson, 1995) and a narrative analysis (Newbold & Boyd-Barrett & Van Den Bulck, 2002)<sup>5</sup>.

In this work, first of all we are going to distinguish the advertisements coming from the fashion industry (fashion addressing social issues) from those coming from the world of non-profit organizations (social advertising addressing fashion). In each category, we will analyse: a) the ads' social focus (human rights, welfare, environment, animal cruelty, etc.); b) the advertising formats (fundraising campaign, educational campaign, awareness campaign); c) the language used (dramatic, ironic, pathetic, etc.); d) the ways in which the message is conveyed (conventional or unconventional).

### 3.1. When the fashion industry addresses social issues

During the last thirty years, the fashion industry often used social issues as the focus of ad campaigns, making social advertising a tool of “societal marketing” (Kotler & Andreasen, 1975) or cause related marketing (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Using social issues to market fashion is very trendy among fashion brands, as demonstrated by our case studies.

As far as advertising formats are concerned, these campaigns hardly ever aim at fundraising. Awareness campaigns and education campaigns are much more frequent: the fashion industry identifies a social cause and supports it with, and for, its audience. This interaction strengthens the brand image, and enhances the trust between the stakeholders and the brand.

The issues approached are very diversified:

- a) Human rights protection: the values of brotherhood and equality recurring in Oliviero Toscani's campaign for Benetton Group (Pic. 1), the focus on African problems in the ads for the Mozambican Fashion Week (Pic. 2 and Pic. 3), the right to be informed in Reporters without borders' campaign (Pic. 4);
- b) Healthcare: “No Anorexia” by Nolita (Pic. 5), “Ciao, magre!” by Elena Mirò (Pic. 6);
- c) Eco-sustainability: Haikure's brand (Pic. 7), Pivot's eco-fashion store (Pic. 8).

5. We are aware that the choice of the issues made by the researchers is considered a limit of the thematic analysis (and also of the qualitative content analysis itself). At the same time, we think that this approach could be the best way to understand some aspects in a narrative analysis, which is – in our opinion – the most adequate to the study of this particular kind of advertising. As well, we preferred a thematic analysis in respect of a textual one (Pawson, 1995); choosing this second approach suggests to refer to important authors as Jean-Marie Floch (1990, 1995), Algirdas Greimas (1976) and Massimo Baldini (1996).

Another interesting trend emerging from these examples is closely linked to tendency to minimize the verbal elements to the advantage of the visual ones. This tendency is infrequent in social advertising, a type of advertising usually based on words, but it is fundamental in fashion advertising instead. From this point of view, Pivot's advertisement (Pic. 8) is really emblematic, as in it the verbal elements become a part of the visual ones. As far as the language used is concerned, fashion/social advertising rarely tries to be pathetic or accusatorial, as it tends to prefer ironic and provocative tones. Once again, the campaigns by Benetton/Toscani (Pic. 9 and Pic. 10), Elena Mirò (Pic. 6) and Nolita (Pic. 5) are very emblematic of this trend.

As far as the way in which the message is conveyed is concerned, we can observe that the influence of social advertising is pretty clear: in fact, in the last years it has increasingly recurred to unconventional practices (such as ambient marketing or viral marketing) which allow to reach a more specific audience than mainstream media. Furthermore, the dissemination of the message through online sharing guarantees an unlimited buzz effect (Peve-rini & Spalletta, 2009). Dove's campaign about Real beauty (Pic. 11 and Pic. 12) is the most emblematic example of this trend.

### *3.2. When social advertising is about fashion (or goes against fashion)*

In the previous section, we observed how, in recent times, the fashion industry has often sponsored social causes in its ads. However, the label "fashion/social advertising" can be applied to another phenomenon involving both the fashion industry and social issues: in fact, social advertising can either be about fashion or go against it.

The ads we analysed as case studies for the first of these two tendencies address a wide range of social issues (not just human rights, health or sustainability issues) using provocative tones, as well as pathetic tones. Ambient marketing seems to be the preferred strategy in these cases, and more often than not the fundraising element is predominant, although combined with awareness and education campaigns.

Based on the social issues addressed, here are some examples of social ads about fashion:

- a) Environmental protection: Italian activists group Legambiente used the window of a fashion store to protest against pollution, by

covering the mouths of the mannequins with anti-smog masks (Pic. 13);

b) Fight against paedophilia: to encourage people to report paedophilia, Lew Lara\TBWA Brazil placed children's underwear on the racks of sexy lingerie shops and department stores. The underwear carried a tag with the text: "This shouldn't be here, but some people pretend that they can't see it" (Pic. 14);

c) Poverty: Salvation Army placed images of needy people with pleading hands in the fitting rooms of retail stores. The hands featured plastic fingers in the shape of hangers, which retail customers have to use in order to hang their clothes while using the fitting room. The campaign encourages the public to donate their old clothes or to leave their used outfit in the store, which will be handed over to the Salvation Army (Pic. 15);

d) Children protection: UNICEF placed some "plastic clothes" in some children clothing stores in Germany. The tags on these "mini-dresses" said: "For only 8 euros per month, you can become a UNICEF sustaining member. And help give children around the world the protection they deserve" (Pic. 16);

e) Healthcare: Fight Breast Cancer Association displayed a mannequin with only one breast in lingerie and swimwear boutiques to raise awareness on the illness (Pic. 17);

f) Domestic violence: Amnesty International's ads use fashion shows as setting, to remember that "Domestic violence is still fashionable" (Pic. 18);

g) Animal cruelty: "What's chic this season?" Faada's ad asks, remembering that "A dog is not a fashion item" (Pic. 19).

All the examples mentioned above use fashion in a positive or neutral way. Instead, when social advertising goes against fashion, fashion is portrayed in extremely negative ways. The tones used are aggressive and violent, and fashion is described as the main cause of social problems. Two examples are emblematic of this trend.

The first one is a campaign by IFAW (International Fund for Animals Welfare) to raise awareness against animal cruelty in Italy. The protagonist of this campaign, dating back to the 1990s, is Marina Ripa di Meana, an Italian celebrity, as a spokesperson. In the ad, Ripa di Meana was portrayed naked, with pubic hair in evidence. The ad claim says: "The only fur I'm not ashamed to wear" (Pic. 20).

The second example addresses the issue of anorexia, and consists of two different ads.

The first one was created in Germany by the Internet forum “magersucht.de”: to highlight the fashion industry’s responsibility in the spread of anorexia, the forum organized a mailing campaign, sending packages to celebrities among which were Karl Lagerfeld and Heidi Klum. The packages were disguised as a sample designer belts “for inspection” which dramatically demonstrates the deadly consequences of the fashion trends of the last years. A booklet explained the dangers of anorexia and invited the celebrities to participate in a debate on the online forum (Pic. 21).

The second ad is campaign by ANAD. To demonstrate the unhealthy beauty ideals promoted by the fashion industry, the organization re-painted some famous masterpieces (i.e. Manet’s Olympia), and place them in fine art museums, exactly where visitors would expect to see manifestations of true beauty (Pic. 22).

#### **4. Fashion advertising and social advertising: when ads don’t talk ethically**

From its very beginning, communication and especially advertising had to cope with accusations of manipulating consumers’ minds, of pushing them to buy goods they don’t need or, worse still, goods that don’t correspond to their image in the ads, which means that advertising is considered as a fraud. According to Codeluppi (2001, 2002) this attitude is based on a widespread criticism of the complex of industrialization, of which advertising becomes a symbol; a criticism and a symbolism that increase from the middle of the 20th Century, especially due to the analysis of Vance Packard (1957), Herbert Marcuse (1964) and Guy Debord (1967).

In all the countries where advertising was growing, even if in different moments, the world of advertising had to hold out and find a way to face these accusations: for this reason, it provided itself with tools aimed to “remove most of the prejudices which lie heavy on this kind of communication, let the public accept it, create a new climate of trust around it” (Fusi, Testa, 1983: 20). Since the beginning, self-regulation is considered the most effective and incisive way to act.

In Italy, the idea of self-regulation began to emerge in the 1950s. During the 1963 National Congress of Advertising, all the different subjects that compose the advertising system (professionals, media, companies that invest in advertising) approved a shared self-regulation code (“Code of Advertising

Fairness”): they accepted to submit the rules of the code and the decisions of a judging authority, called “Giurì”. In 1976, the evolution of this system gave birth to the “Istituto dell’Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria” (IAP).

During the last 50 years the code, which current name is “Code of Marketing Communication Self-Regulation”, has gone through several and important upgrades, which have kept it in line with the times and with the needs of advertising, media and communication scenario (Falabrino, 1999). As far as our research is concerned, the most important upgrade was in 1995, with the addition of a new section aimed to regulate social advertising.

During the same period, Italian media studies have often analysed the IAP’s decisions (Bettetini & Fumagalli, 2010; Stella, 2008; Scandaletti, 2005), focusing on how it is able to answer to advertising’s ethical issues (Fabris, 2014; Spalletta, 2010). From this point of view, within the huge and diversified domain of advertising, social advertising and fashion advertising are two of the most controversial fields.

#### 4.1. Social advertising

Several ethical issues came to light with the development and the diversification of the phenomenon of social advertising, also because it is structurally involved in ethics. In the shift between “thinking ethically” and “talking ethically” (Stella, 2008), social advertising found itself at a very important juncture: on one side, the need to respect any sensitivity and any rule, following an “ethically correct” behaviour that refers to the “politically correct”; on the other side, the will to break these rules to get a strong reaction from the audience. In the first case, the result was a common, boring and ineffective communication; in the second one, a form of communication that risked sanctions from the IAP, as any other advertising form, of which social advertising used and emulated strategies, languages and tools (Peverini & Spalletta, 2009).

The Title 6 of the code focuses on “social marketing communication” and corresponds to the only art. 46. Although it concerns “any message aimed at raising the awareness of the public as to issues of social relevance”, this article highlights the part of social advertising that mainly corresponds to commercial advertising: the cases in which social advertising asks the public to contribute with financial help, that is the message “which directly or indirectly solicits donations of any kind for the purpose of achieving objectives of a social nature” (Peverini & Spalletta, 2009).

The art. 46 aims to face social advertising ethical issues, on one hand by reaffirming some important concepts already stated in the code but particularly significant in social advertising (as the recourse to fear, the abuse of credulity, the reference to violent, vulgar or repugnant contents, or the necessary respect of moral, civic and religious beliefs, and of human dignity); on the other hand by introducing some characteristics of social advertising, in which it's more frequent to find messages that might "unduly exploit human suffering by offending human dignity, or use shock tactics that might generate unwarranted panic, fear, or distress", or "generate feelings of guilt or responsibility upon persons who decide not to support the appeal".

#### 4.2. Fashion advertising

Fashion advertising is another kind of advertising that often faced sanctions from the IAP. As social advertising, fashion advertising has been punished for reasons strictly linked to its object of communication: for example, because of the intrinsic need of the fashion product (dresses, perfumes, hairstyles, make up, accessories) to be seductive and desirable, or because of the structural use of women's and men's bodies, sometimes nearly undressed, as in underwear or swimsuits ads. The IAP often punished fashion ads, in particular cases where they turned out to be offensive for women's image (Tom Ford Eyewear, pic. 23) or also for men's one (Swish jeans)<sup>6</sup> or elder people too (Diesel, pic. 24); where ads instigate to violent behaviour, especially against women (Dolce&Gabbana, pic. 25); where ads treated women's body as a commercial good (Gucci, pic. 26).

In those cases, the most broken code articles are certainly n. 8, n. 9 and n. 10<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, it is necessary to add the most controversial case in Italian fashion advertising: the Benetton campaigns realized by Oliviero Toscani. In twenty years of collaboration, Benetton and Toscani proposed several discussed campaigns, in particular at the beginning of the 1990s. The ads were punished because the promotion of the brand was not clearly understandable; because of the non-ethical use of ethical values and appeals; because of the exasperation of the de-contextualization, typical of advertising. Benetton's advocacy is particularly interesting for us, because the Italian brand and the photographer always argued the will to use advertising to con-

6. The claims of this 2000 ad were "Men are the real sluts" and "Men? Much looser than loose women".

7. Art. 8 (Superstition, credulity, fear): Marketing communication should not play on superstition, credulity or, except in justifiable cases, fear. Art. 9 (Violence, vulgarity, indecency): Marketing communication should not contain statements, audio or visual treatments depicting physical or moral violence, or that may be considered indecent, vulgar or repugnant to prevailing standards. Art. 10 (Moral, Civil, and Religious Beliefs and Human Dignity): Marketing communication should not offend moral, civil and religious beliefs. Marketing communication should respect human dignity in every form and expression and should avoid any form of discrimination, including that of gender.



vey messages of a bigger range, to “arouse consciences” (by using Toscani’s words). The reference to social advertising is obvious.

### **5. Fashion/social advertising and twenty-five years of IAP decisions**

Social advertising and fashion advertising present several similarities. Furthermore, as we observed in the first part of this paper, fashion advertising often blends with social advertising because each one faced each other’s issues. Moreover, both advertising fields raise problems related to communication ethics, because of their common attitude to skate, even though for different reasons, on the thin ice that separates ethical behaviour from non-ethical one (Spalletta, 2010).

This research aims to analyse the activity of Italian IAP when the ads present simultaneously the characteristics of fashion advertising and social advertising. We analysed all the decisions adopted by IAP since its foundation. In particular, we considered the aforementioned upgrade of 1995 (when a specific regulation of social advertising was added to the Code) as a crucial turn of our analysis. We intend to clarify that our intent is neither statistical nor regulatory in nature: in other words, we do not want to analyse the legal procedures applied by the IAP, nor measure the impact of self-regulation on fashion advertising. Our aim is to understand whether and how the IAP faced ethical issues raised by fashion advertising that presented social characteristics (in both meanings we indicated).

To this purpose, we analysed the cases in which the code articles more involved in fashion/social advertising have been implicated, namely articles n. 8, n. 9, n. 10 and, since 1995, n. 46. It is interesting to notice that, from the 1960s to 1973, these articles are called into question mainly for non-fashion products ads, or for products that concern fashion only marginally (beauty or slimming treatments), while from 1973 onwards the clothing is more frequently involved, especially with jeans advertising. The turning point was represented by the first shocking campaign realized by Oliviero Toscani: to advertise Jesus Jeans, he proposed two strongly sensual pictures with controversial claims “Thou shalt not have any other jeans but me” and “He who loves me follows me” (pic. 27). Clothing advertising starts to face ethical issues, but not with characteristics that could be defined as “social”.

The phenomenon of fashion/social advertising grows in the early 1990s, because of its most emblematic cases: the Benetton campaigns realized once again by Oliviero Toscani. IAP dealt with almost all Toscani ads (i.e. pic.



28, 29 and 30), for possible violation of articles 8 and especially 9 and 10. Another interesting aspect to underline is that, in those years, other clothing companies seemed to move their communication guidelines on even more borderline issues, with social suggestions far apart from the clothes promotion. In particular, we refer to the Italian brand Diesel, which proposed two ads (punished by IAP in 1993) in which the brand promotion is associated with issues such as violence among minors and prostitution<sup>8</sup>. In the wake of Toscani and Benetton, fashion advertising transgresses and decontextualizes by inserting social or pseudo-social messages.

In our opinion, the need of a discipline of social advertising has been noticed also because of the discussion, raised by Toscani, about the legitimacy for a fashion brand to debate social issues in its advertising. It is no coincidence that in 1996, the first year of article 46 application, IAP punished two ads, corresponding to two International Fund for Animal Welfare campaigns: the first against the use of seal skins in fur industry, the second, mentioned above, in which a celebrity is portrayed naked to fight against the use of fur in general (pic. 20). However, since then, article 46 will be considered in only two fashion advertising cases, in which cosmetics companies claimed to donate part of their proceeds to charities.

8. The two body-copies were: "Modern children need to solve their own problems: teaching kids to kill helps them deal directly with reality – but they learn so much quicker when you give them a guiding hand! Make them proud and confident! If they never learn to blast the brains out of their neighbors, what kind of damn future has this country of ours got???" and "How getting the most of love? Are you tired of your life passing you by? Exploit at most the magic power of love. You could meet someone truly 'special'. Just imagine: furs, cars, diamonds, exotic holidays. So, if he's no longer young, close your eyes, take a deep breath and go where gold is!".

On the other hand, when fashion advertising touched upon social issues, the articles considered by IAP are again those most closely related to fashion advertising. The most famous is probably the Nolita campaign against anorexia, where the French model Isabelle Caro (pic. 5) was portrayed naked, to show explicitly the effects of anorexia on a woman's body. In that case, despite the obvious social intent of Nolita, art. 46 was not taken into account: the cessation of the campaign was ordered because of art. 10.

It is also interesting to note that the IAP has not examined some of the social campaigns that have created the greatest public debate in Italy (and not only): we refer to the two Benetton campaigns, "Food for Life 2003" (pic. 31) and "Unhate" (pic. 32) in 2011. The debates arisen about these two campaigns were very similar to those that concerned the campaigns that Benetton and Oliviero Toscani led together from 1982 to 2000, but there is no trace about them in the corpus of the decisions adopted by the IAP.

## 6. Conclusions

As stated in the introduction's final paragraphs, this paper aimed to answer two different questions: on one hand, *what is fashion/social advertising and how fashion/social ads talk to the public*; on the other hand, when and *how fashion/social advertising doesn't talk ethically*. Our researches allow us to answer these questions.

Referring to the first topic, fashion/social advertising was born already thirty years ago (in Italy because of the partnership between Benetton group and Oliverio Toscani), and is to date extremely dynamic. Social issues represent one of the favourite contents of fashion industry's ads because they are perfect tools for spreading the brand's philosophy.

At the same time, in the last years a new idea of fashion/social advertising has taken shape: we can talk about "fashion/social advertising" certainly when fashion advertising addresses social issues, but also when social advertising addresses fashion. In the last perspective, the approach can be positive/neutral (social advertising being about fashion) or negative (social advertising going against fashion). Then, referring to the question *what is fashion/social advertising*, our research allows us to answer that today the expression "fashion/social advertising" presents two meanings, related to two different phenomena.

Today fashion/social advertising emerges in the wide scenario of advertising not only in terms of contents, but especially referring to its texts and practices. In this perspective, the burning question isn't *what is fashion/social advertising*, but rather *how fashion/social ads talk to the public*.

As we suggested, fashion/social advertising enhances a typical advertising feature that concerns in being poised between the "ethically correct" and the "not ethically correct". In order to draw the attention of the public, fashion/social advertising has to play with the public: it must be ironic, funny, provocative, and never predictable. The cases mentioned in this paper confirm this trend: fashion/social advertising prefers this kind of languages and often commits its diffusion to unconventional practices.

However, because it's walking a fine line, fashion/social advertising often risks talking unethically. This is the second topic we aimed to analyse in this paper, answering to the following question: *when and how fashion/social advertising doesn't talk ethically*.

Benetton and Toscani's campaigns, on the one hand, brought the ethical issue in advertising to the core of the public debate, on the other hand represented a model for both fashion brand advertisers and fashion opponents for social meanings. Fashion/social advertising campaigns brought to the highest point the discussion concerning what is allowed and what is not allowed in advertising.

The introduction of art. 46, which was originally intended to regulate the advertising carried out by institutions, offered to the IAP the opportunity to deal with this issue by establishing the boundaries within which a social message could reinforce the fashion brand character.

This is a fundamental aspect of the action of IAP. Spalletta (2010) observed that this Institute, in some areas of its business, offers clear definitions of possible problems (for example regarding comparative advertising issues), whereas the values at the basis of articles 8, 9 and 10 (credulity, vulgarity, indecency, moral and civil beliefs) are less precisely explained.

The management of fashion/social advertising issues by IAP shows that, apparently, it followed public debate about those issues. Except from very few cases, IAP did not acknowledge a particular status to fashion/social advertising. IAP dealt with fashion/social advertising issues by the same processes employed for "normal" fashion ads.

This choice is certainly understandable: as far as the problem concerns the form (for example, vulgarity) the goal of the vulgar message is somehow less relevant. The intrinsic subjectivity of such concepts also allows adapting the decisions to the society in which advertising is proposed. However, the effectiveness and success of phenomena such as fashion/social advertising lead us to think that this kind of choice may be short-sighted.

In fact, one of the guidelines of the current evolution of fashion advertising (and not only) is certainly the association of the brand with social values that represent it; at the same time, social advertising campaigns more frequently use strategies that border with non-ethical behaviour.

As IAP gives up dealing with this debate, it may not examine it in the most effective way: that is, on the one hand, ensuring the respect of all the fundamental values of advertising self-regulation, and on the other hand, allowing the advertising world to evolve concomitantly with the society, its

communication scenario and its needs. The boundary between “thinking ethically” and “talking ethically”, which is central in fashion/social advertising, must continue to be determined by what advertising cannot do, but should not neglect the evolution of what it can and should do to strike the public.

## Imágenes

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Picture. 01



Picture. 02





Picture. 03



Picture. 04



Picture. 05



Picture. 06





Picture. 07



Picture. 08



Picture. 09



Picture. 10



Picture. 11



Picture. 12





Picture. 13



Picture. 14



Picture. 15



Picture. 16



Picture. 17



Picture. 18



Picture. 19



Picture. 20





Picture. 21



Picture. 22



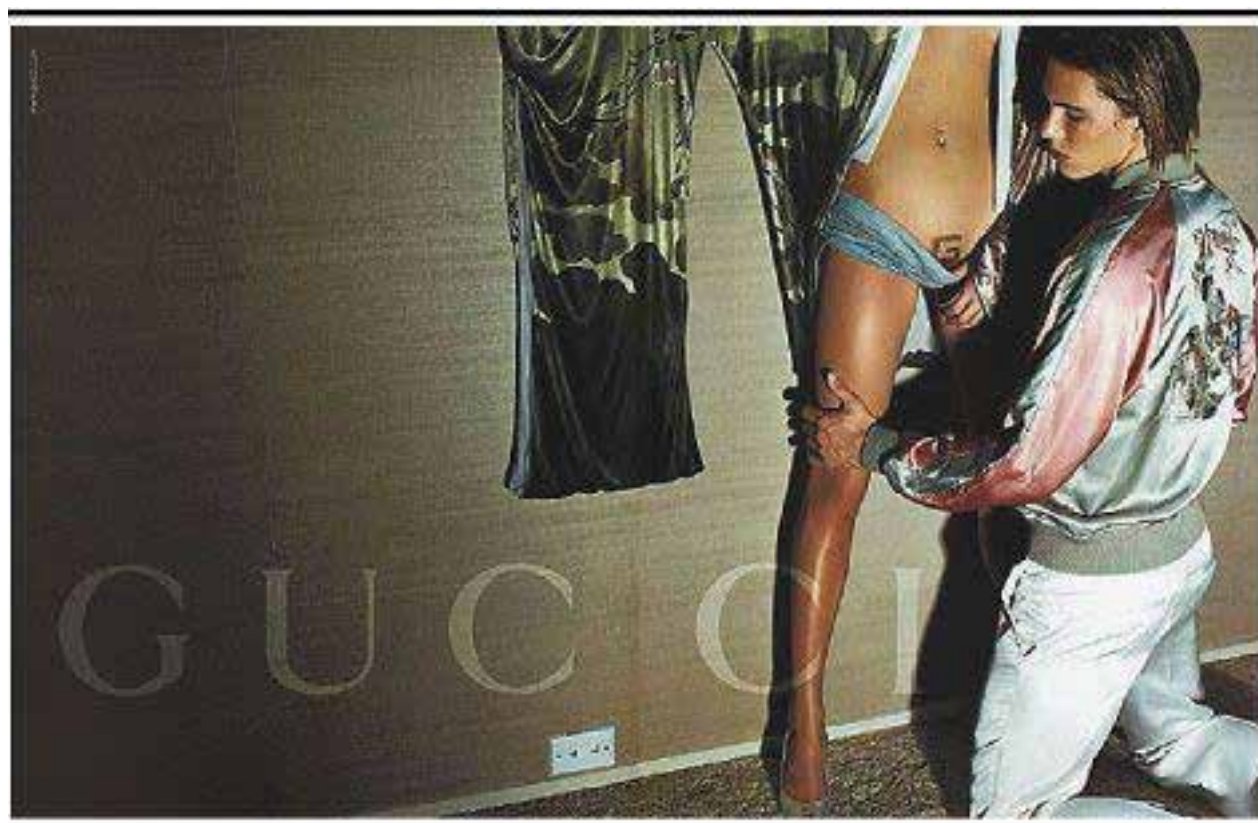
Picture. 23



Picture. 24



Picture. 25



Picture. 26





Picture. 27



Picture. 28



Picture. 29



Picture. 30





Picture. 31



Picture. 32

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