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Final Year Project

The controversial side of CRM

Study on the effect of cause-related marketing on consumers' perception of social causes

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Abstract: The use of Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) by corporations is on the increase. However, there is a growing concern that the objectives of corporations' and NGOs' differ. We argue that this may influence how consumers' perceive the social cause. We tested these predictions in a study in the context of a cancer awareness campaign. We develop recommendations on how CRM campaigns can avoid these problematic consequences.

Keywords: Cause-related marketing, social causes, consumer behavior, advertising, perceptions

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1   Introduction

Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) is an advertising tool, which has been increasingly used by more and more companies. Many corporations jump on this trend, because of its proven effectiveness and benefit (such as *stronger brand image, mass communication repercussion, and increase in sales*; Weeks, 2018).

The consumer community celebrates the involvement of big companies in the task of giving visualization to social causes. These efforts are praised, because via the utilization of their means and influence, a higher positive boost to the social causes at hand is predicted. This in theory sounds perfect, however, in practice, our world is not so utopian. And the truth is that, in recent years, we have witnessed how many campaigns, using cause-related marketing, the only thing they have achieved is controversy and ineffectiveness, increasing skepticism and threatening CRM authenticity perceptions. And by that, it is understandable that a higher expectation from the general public is put upon the ethics and the solidarity practices that corporations carry through.

It is key, thus, to study whether, when CRM campaigns lack alignment between its social cause and its format (using cute images for grave issues), it can, contrary to its objective, become harmful to consumers' perception of social causes, thus becoming a lose-win practice. An important research question then arises: *Can cause-related marketing harm consumers' perception of social causes?*

2   Cause-related marketing

Firms have long-term used the strategic approach of Corporate Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) as a tool to promote their products by tying them to sensible social causes. The origin of this type of marketing comes from the *"recognition that the marketplace would reward firms that acted in a socially responsible way and assist ordinary citizens to act responsibly too. This was an important realization which strengthened the connection between a company's primary activity (making money) and a non-for-profit organization's aim (improving welfare) both co-mingled with a single marketing effort"*. The first cause-related marketing campaign was carried out in 1983 by American Express and consisted of *donating one cent for each use of its credit card and one dollar for every new card issued* (Berglind & Nakata, 2005, p.445). In Spain, due to the lack of literature regarding cause-related marketing it is more difficult to set an origin, however, some evidences suggest that it first took place in 1996 with Eroski's collaboration with Banco de Alimentos[1] (Leal, 2004) and with Pepsi's collaboration with Medicos Sin Fronteras [2] (García, Gibaja & Mujika, 2003) in 1997. Some other pioneer corporations carrying out this type of marketing were MRW, Telefónica, Coca-Cola and El Corte Inglés (Leal, 2004, p.3).

Nowadays, cause-related marketing in Spain is more common in advertising, and the collaborations between corporations and NGOs or associations are more frequent. For example, Ausonia, a feminine hygiene brand, has been collaborating with AECC (Asociación Española Contra el Cáncer)[3] since 2009. For each package that a consumer buys, Ausonia pledges to donate an amount of money, equivalent to one minute of cancer research. Another example is Ikea's 2015 campaign in collaboration with Unicef and Save the Children. For each stuffed animal sold, the multinational donated €1 to these NGOs, with the aim of financing education programs for children from the most disadvantaged countries.

Brands try to signal their social values with CRM campaigns. They are aware that consumers' main objective when shopping is making a good purchase, nevertheless, individuals may also be in favor of helping a cause aligned with their values. CRM makes it possible for firms to tie a social cause with the promotion of a product, generating information to consumers of the corporate values and their aims besides generating profits. This process can promote *brand building* and also, can generate intangible benefits to corporations as a better reputation, memorability, and preference, among others, it can also differentiate them from competitors.

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[1] Food Bank
[2] Doctors without Borders
[3] Spanish Association Against Cancer

According to Docherty and Hibbert (2003) CRM can also increase corporations' sales reaching new segments of clients and strengthen customer loyalty. Besides, committing to this type of campaign can increase press coverage and *has been associated with financial success.* (Weeks, 2018, p.12).

The benefit that it offers to consumers is the chance of helping the less fortunate *by tying charity with an everyday act* (Berglind & Nakata, 2005, p.450), as when making daily purchasing decisions. This desire to help is sustained by the *prosocial behavior theory*, especially contained in the subcategory of 'helping behavior'. This explains the reason why some individuals support CRM campaigns, by following what they perceive to be a rational decision, they are simultaneously improving some social aspect they believe in. (Dahl & Lavack, 2009). In O'Connor's words (2009), *CRM makes consumers feel like philanthropists* and many consumers perceive it as a win-win.

CRM campaigns, just like regular advertising, typically makes use of *cute* and appealing images. *One need only to turn on a television or open a magazine, to see advertisements employing cute stimuli, or to see advertisements occurring alongside media content containing cute characters or situations* (Weeks, 2018, p.1). In the literature, the adjective *cute* according to Lorents (1973, cited by, Möller, 2011), reflects characteristics such as "helpless, playful, innocent, curious, clumsy and affectionate". Some studies, like Week's (2018) conclude that using cute stimuli in marketing can improve emotional response, increase the persuasiveness of the campaign and prompt prosocial behavior. Specifically, regarding Campbell (1995) it allows the advertiser to attract the attention of consumers and increase the interest in their products.

However, there may be a dark side to this phenomenon. Creating such cute and appealing CRM campaigns may distort consumers' perceptions regarding social causes. This kind of design may be useful for selling a product, but not for transmitting the nature of the cause, the use of appealing images seems incompatible when discussing grave social causes, but it has been normalised in the media. For example, breast cancer campaigns have *"normalized cancer, prettying it up, even presenting it, perversely as a positive and enviable experience."* (Ehrenreich, 2001, p.53). It has also been stated that this type of marketing *triggers charges of base profiteering from human suffering* (Berglind & Nakata, 2005, p.449), which arises the ethical doubt whether *CRM is just a mere tool that large corporations use for their own benefit.* If consumers believe that this is the case, the credibility of such campaigns is questioned because firms may be perceived as exploiting a serious issue in their own benefit. In response, consumers

may sanction the brand and turn away from it. A first example of this perceived "incongruence" could be the case of Gillete by *tackling toxic masculinity, a sociopolitical cause which did not align with their established brand reputation* (Vrendenburg et al.,2020,p.9). Nike also stepped up messaging in support of *racial justice* during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests worldwide, yet consumers and critics pointed to *woeful lack of supportive values, purpose, and practice, such as having Black board members* (Ritson 2020).

As marketing academics Kotler and Sarkar (2017); and Moorman (2020) state, consumers may not believe brands when they engage in insincere activism. They furthermore refer to the importance of authenticity in brand activism and the dangers of brands not "walking the talk", which informally speaking is called *woke washing* (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p.445).

2.1 *Goals of firms and NGOs*

According to Dahan and collaborators (2011), *the relationship between corporations and NGOs has been characterized by hostility and mistrust.* Corporations and NGOs have fundamentally different values and missions. That's why consumers are sometimes not convinced about the genuine social consciousness and as mentioned before, they express doubts about company's ethical standards (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

On the one side, *the goal of the for-profit organization is to build value for shareholders, which is perceived by some to be in direct conflict with the objective of the non-profit, namely to improve social conditions, educate, enlighten, and heal. Critics of CRM worry that the worthy missions of non-profits are being co-opted by rapacious marketers* (Berglind & Nakata, 2005, p.449).

Consumers care about insincere brand activism. When they make the decision to purchase a product with the added intention of contributing to a cause, they create an expectation and give importance to their individual contribution to it. If they feel that the cause and the non-profit organisation is being exploited by a private corporation, they will be deceived and react negatively towards that firm (Dahl & Lavack, 1996).

When observing CRM campaigns, normally consumers think of different motives of why private corporations would be promoting such type of advertising. They attribute the firms' engagement to a *continuum of strategic and egoistic motives, to other-centered motives, including values and stakeholder driven and win-win motives. Normally, consumers reacted more positively to the*

campaign when they infer both value-driven and strategic motives to the firm (Ellen et al., 2006, cited by Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, Gruber, 2017, p.2).

In short, consumers have a preconceived belief that corporations and NGOs do not share the same objectives and many times they try to find out the motives behind some CRM campaigns, judging some to be more ethical and thus preferred than others. This threatens the perceived credibility and authenticity of CRM campaigns and this, linked to consumers' awareness of differentiated objectives between corporations and NGOs, might influence the consumers' perspective of the social cause itself. In the next section, we will discuss this topic and describe some possible mechanisms of harm.

2.2   *Mechanisms of harm*

The disparity of objectives between NGOs and corporations can generate mistrust to consumers and end up altering their opinion and perception of the social cause present in those campaigns. The result of the interaction of these two, for example, in the use of cute and appealing campaigns (characteristic for private corporations) to fight against a social problem (which is mainly addressed by an NGO), such as breast cancer, may confuse consumers of the true state of the disease, its relative importance, its rate of mortality, and to which extent people are aware of the issue.

In the literature, various mechanisms through which cause-related marketing can produce harm are identified.

The mechanism of harm that Porroche (2017) describes linked to breast cancer campaigns is disinformation, described following the recommendation of the AECC (Asociación Española Contra el Cáncer) as the *provision of erroneous information through alarmist or morbid headlines, confusing scientific information, creation of stereotypes, invisibility of some groups of patients, little social context, inappropriate use, abuse or frivolization of terms, and little preventive information (p.1). Disinformation also includes the omission of valid and relevant information.* This is relevant to people's perception because "misinformation" can interfere with people's critical ability to make thoughtful decisions.

Specifically within disinformation, the author distinguishes between confusing scientific information: omission of controversies about the effectiveness of the tests, little contextual information, invisibility of some groups and little information on primary prevention.

Another mechanism of harm, which could be included within disinformation, is the invisibilisation of other social causes, stood out by Eikenberry (2009), she exposes that *the sheer volume of pink products seems to lead many consumers to believe that breast cancer is the most pressing health problem facing women today. However, it has been proven that it is not the leading cause of death among women, not the most common form of cancer, nor the principal cause of death among women diagnosed with cancer. But, because of the success of the cause marketing, breast cancer-related organizations receive attention which is disproportionate (p.5).* In other words, the focus of CRM campaigns for some specific causes, is altering the perceived incidence rank of breast cancer compared to other diseases.

This is what previous work has pointed out about the mechanisms of harm associated with CRM, in the next section, we will contribute to it by highlighting some additional problematic issues.

2.3 *Cute, realistic and neutral campaigns*

Deriving from Porroche (2017) work, we have developed a theory that exposes how the *cute* cause-related marketing campaigns carried out by firms can harm social causes. The harm mechanism we describe derives from disinformation (regarding the incidence of the disease and the "invisibilisation" of other more mortal diseases), perceived relevance, seriousness, credibility and unrealistic associations.

We hypothesize that the typology of *cute* campaigns may harm the cause more than other types of campaigns. As she mentions, the use of cuteness in communication, such as advertising can cause a *lack of critical thinking during the overuse of cuteness to consumers and create prejudices against this form of communications in the professional sphere. Also, it can lead to losing clients/viewers.*

As part of this approach, Porroche (2017, p.1) claims that the use of *cute* campaigns in diseases like breast cancer, is *frivolising* the real problematic of this collective. Even in the case of breast cancer, some advertisements have even used the terms of 'funny' and 'sexy' to define self-exploration and the disease in comparison to other types of cancer (Porroche, 2017, p.1)

In our study, we expect that the use of cute CRM campaigns, with appealing images of the social cause, will have positive outcomes in terms of attractiveness and likability of the ads and

also in terms of purchase likelihood of the advertised product. However, we expect that it will damage the perception of the social cause: that will decrease the level of truthful information regarding the social cause, decrease its perceived relevance compared to other causes, increase its perceived improvement these last decades and decrease emotional responses (above all regarding empathy and sadness.)

2.4 *Gender and skepticism*

In this theory we contemplate different results regarding the gender of the consumers, because according to the research from Chang and Cheng (2015), females tend to be more altruistic, assign more valence to a cause, show a greater tendency to collectivism and have a great intention to purchase a product because of the social cause. In other words, the authors express that *the congruence between the charitable context and the female sex role should result in a favorable attitude toward CRM, and less skepticism toward the advertising* (Chang and Cheng, 2015, p.341).

Extrapolating this thesis to our theory, we would say that *cute* CRM, advertising campaigns would harm more the perspectives of female consumers than male, because they feel greater empathy with the cause, evoke more emotions and thus, are more susceptible to CRM campaigns. In general terms, we hypothesize that the less skeptical consumers will be more sensitive to the mechanism of harm we describe in our theory.

3 Methodology

3.1 *Dependent and independent variables*

The aim of our paper is then to study the effects that Cause Related Marketing has on certain social causes, especially focusing on breast cancer. Moreover, it is intended to further analyze whether the romanticized way in which some campaigns are presented, has any impact both in consumers' perception and in future practices of other corporations.

For this purpose, we defined 6 different **dependent variables** which we think are relevant to analyze: *the attractiveness and likability of the ad, purchasing likelihood of the product, information distortion, perceived seriousness, experienced emotions, perceived improvement of medical treatment and perceived relevance of the cause.* The study includes **3 independent variables**: *gender, campaign type, skepticism* and the interactions between these.

The level of skepticism was measured using the scale of skepticism towards advertising from Obermiller & Spangenberg (1998), which consists of 9 statements about advertising and ask participants to express their opinion, from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). For each participant, we aggregated their responses and the results could take values from 9 to 45, being 9 the more skeptical, to 45 being the less skeptical. We then calculated the median, which was 18 and then transformed the variable into a binary one where $=1$ (if the person is more skeptical, $\prec 18$) and 0 if it is less skeptical ($\succeq 18$).

3.2 *Hypothesis*

For each dependent variable, we hypothesized different results regarding the independent variables in which we would allocate the participants (in case of the condition), in which they would self-select themselves (gender) or in which they would reveal their beliefs (level of skepticism).

In the *attractiveness* (H_1) and *likability* (H_2) domains of the campaign, we hypothesized that cute campaigns would be perceived as more attractive and the level of likability would be higher, compared to the neutral and realistic condition. Regarding the *purchasing likelihood* (H_3), we hypothesized that in the *cute* condition, participants would express a higher likelihood to buy the product, compared to the realistic or neutral conditions, as we believe consumers may show more preference towards them due to familiarity with *"romantized" campaigns.* With respect

to gender and skepticism, we expect that more skeptical participants will like *cute campaigns* less, we do not expect divergences regarding gender.

The role of *information* (H_4) in this study is to determine the knowledge that participants infer from the type of campaign regarding the incidence of breast cancer relative to other death causes of females. We hypothesize that participants who see the cute condition will perceive breast cancer as less mortal compared to other death causes (such as respiratory, mental, circulatory diseases, gender violence and suicide). Contrary to the realistic condition, in which we expect people to place breast cancer as the most mortal cause of death. Finally, we do not hold any hypothesis for the neutral condition, perhaps, the answers will be the most adjusted to the actual rank of causes of mortality.

In terms of *perceived seriousness* (H_5), measured as the incidence that participants think that breast cancer can have on them or their circle of friends and family. We hypothesize that people in the *cute* condition will show lower measures of perceived seriousness, while in the *realistic* condition, participants will believe that the disease is more likely to affect them, again we do not hold any special hypothesis for the *neutral (control)* condition, as the honest opinion of the participant itself.

With respect to *emotions*, we measure responses of anxiety, concern, empathy, irritation, sadness and tenderness (H_6). We expect to prompt stronger emotional reactions in the realistic condition compared to the *cute* and the *neutral one*. Furthermore, in this domain, we expect divergences between gender, as women regarding the revision of the bibliography, have more tendency to collective behavior, experiencing more empathy and compassion towards others. Also, because they might be the ones who can have more likelihood to suffer the diseases compared to men, in which it has less incidence.

And last but not least, on our hypothesis on *improvement of medical treatment* (H_7) we want to find out, using a scale from 0 to 100, how consumers feel about the general overview of the progress that breast cancer has experienced these latter years. Our initial hypothesis is that those exposed to the *cute condition* will perceive a higher percentage of progress, compared to those exposed to the realistic and neutral campaign.

3.3 *Participants*

Our study is embedded in a national online survey designed through Qualtrics. The survey was distributed to a sample of adults residing in Spain and Catalonia and thus is performed in Spanish. Data were collected at the end of October and the beginning of November 2020 and distributed through social networks and communication media, achieving a sample of 448 responses. We then dropped the data of participants who did not identify with any gender, as we planned to use this variable in the analysis. We also dropped the data of those participants not actually residing in Spain, leading to a final sample of 429 participants. The mean duration of the study was 6 minutes.

3.4 *Procedure*

Participants were exposed to one of three advertising campaigns from a fictitious shampoo brand. In this campaign, the brand pledges to donate to breast cancer research. There were three versions of the campaign: cute, neutral and realistic. Which one they saw was randomly selected. 146 respondents were allocated to the cute condition, 154 to the neutral condition and 141 to the realistic condition.

The main reasoning behind the idea of showing different advertising campaigns in such a randomized way, was to observe the effects each image had on participants' answers and how they varied depending if the campaign was cute, neutral or realistic.

[**Figure 1**]

Images used for the campaigns, cute, neutral and realistic respectively. Self-creation, using real photos.

[Figure 2]

		Male	Female	Total
CONDITIONS	Neutral	41	107	148
	Realistic	50	88	138
	Cute	37	106	143
	Total	128	301	429

Summary of the data. *Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).*

Respondents received these instructions when seeing the campaign: *The shampoo firm 'Neutro soft' has created an advertising campaign in which it collaborates with the AECC (Asociación española Contra el Cáncer). For each bottle sold, the firm donates for 1 minute of research on breast cancer, which can affect both men and women.*

Then participants responded to a series of questions regarding the campaign. First, they evaluated the attractiveness and likability of the campaign. Next, participants indicated their likelihood to buy the product announced, the shampoo.

Third, a question probed the level of knowledge the respondents have about the main causes of deaths in females, followed by a question regarding the relative level of importance that respondents attach to breast cancer compared to other causes, such as racism, gender-equality, poverty, and drugs.

Fifth, we measured the perceived seriousness of the disease and the emotions that the campaign elicited.

Then we obtained the opinion of participants regarding the improvement that breast cancer research has or has not produced and finally, we measured levels of skepticism regarding advertising using a 9-questions scale created by Obermiller & Spangenberg (1998, p.159-186). The survey concluded with a block of demographic questions asking age, level of studies, whether they know somebody or experienced breast cancer themselves, country of residence and finally, it includes an optional question about what respondents think the hypothesis or purpose of the study is.

3.5 Data analysis

We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess the effectiveness of our study, multiple regression analysis and between-subjects contrasts in order to validate our data by R studio and SPSS in order to create the corresponding graphs.

The null hypothesis (H_0) of the Between-subject test holds that the mean of the studied variable is the same in the different groups, in contrast, the alternative hypothesis says that at least two of the different means differ. If the p-value of the between-subject test is statistically significant, H_0 is rejected. That would imply that the gender and conditions matter with respect to the dependent variable in question when observing the campaigns.

We carried out the multiple regression analysis using three different approaches. In the first one, we regressed the different attitude measures (*attractiveness, likability, purchasing likelihood, information, seriousness, emotions, perceived improvement and perceived relevance*) on gender and conditions (*cute, neutral, realistic*). In the second one, we carried out the same analysis, adding the variable skepticism in order to study if more skeptic people in comparison to less skeptic ones have different perceptions of the same campaigns. Finally, in the third one, we studied the relationship between emotions, skepticism and gender. All of our analyses and graphs used the 95% confidence level (with a significance level of 5%). Because of the large number of analyses, we will first present the results, followed by an interpretation of all the analyses.

4   Results

Attractiveness

The results of the question of the campaign's attractiveness (see figure A1) presented significant results regarding the condition (type of campaign) in which participants were allocated [p-value = 0,02]. One possible explanation for this could be the possibility that people in the study are skeptical. Actually, the variable which measures skepticism is significant [p-value = $\prec 0,001$]. The fact that in the results people in general like this realistic and cute campaign less, is driven by the effect of highly skeptical people who prefer the neutral one more. This is verified by the interaction term between conditions and skepticism which is marginally significant [p-value = 0,076]. This suggests that there is an effect of the condition that depends on the level of skepticism as previously mentioned.

Likeability

For the question of "how much individuals *like* the advertising campaign" (see figure A2), two main effects were found: the type of campaign (condition) which is significant at [p-value = 0,003] and the level of skepticism [p-value = $\prec 0,001$]. Therefore, depending on the campaign observed and how skeptical the participant is, the level of likeability varies. Both male and female liked the neutral campaign the most compared to the realistic and cute campaigns. More skeptical participants follow the same pattern showing more preference for the neutral condition, although the likeability means are lower in all conditions, compared to the non-skeptical participants (there was no difference found between neutral and realistic condition).

The interaction term between conditions and skepticism was marginally significant at [p-value= 0,069], which suggests that the effect of condition depends on the participants' level of skepticism.

Purchasing likelihood

With respect to the outcome variable *purchasing likelihood* (see figure A3) it was found that the effect of gender is significant [p-value = 0,048] as well as the skepticism level [p-value = $\prec 0,001$]. Depending on the gender and how skeptical the participant is, the level of likelihood to purchase varies.

A 95% confidence intervals were performed because if we look at females and focus on the cute campaign, the higher bound of the cute campaign is slightly lower than the average of the realistic campaign. Because of this, further exploratory analysis was carried out and gender was separately analysed. For both genders, it was found that the condition had a significant

effect [p-value = $\prec 0,001$]. Therefore, females would be less likely to buy the shampoo when the campaign is cute compared to realistic and neutral (see figure A13). For men, the opposite happens[p-value = $\prec 0,001$], they express a higher purchasing likelihood when the campaign is cute compared to realistic and neutral. The interaction term between gender and skepticism was found to be marginally significant [p-value=0.052].

Relative importance

With respect to "how important is the breast cancer problem for our participants compared to other social causes they consider to be important" (see figure A4), it was found that the main effects come from gender being significant [p-value=$\prec 0,001$], as well as the skepticism level [p-value= $\prec 0,001$]. Therefore, depending on the gender and how skeptical the participant is, the level of relative importance of breast cancer varies.

Attitude measures (emotions)

Anxiety

When analyzing the level of anxiety (see figure A5), we found that the main effect, provoking such emotion came from the type of campaign [p-value=$\prec 0,001$] as well as the skepticism [p-value= $\prec 0,001$] (which imply lower means of anxiety generally). Gender is marginally significant [p-value=0.058]. Both genders experienced higher anxiety in the realistic condition, however,the patterns in the neutral and cute conditions are inverted. Further exploratory analysis was conducted (see figure A11) and it was found that females felt more anxiety from the neutral condition, and males from the cute, however the differences although significant were little.

Empathy

Analyzing responses for empathy (see figure A6), it was found that the main effects were the type of campaign, being significant at [p-value = $\prec 0,001$], as well as, the skepticism level [p-value= $\prec 0,001$]. Then, depending on the type of campaign and how skeptical the participant is, the level of empathy varies. Overall the means of empathy are lower in the cute condition, especially for skeptical participants, in contrast with the realistic and neutral campaigns which have higher levels of such emotion.

Concern

With respect to concern (see figure A7), it was found that the gender [p-value = 0,001], effect of type of campaign [p-value = $\prec 0,001$], as well as, the skepticism level [p-value = 0,001] are

significant. Depending on the gender, of the type of campaign and how skeptical the participant is, the level of concern varies.

It can be observed that skeptical people show less levels of concern in general and that focusing on the condition, the realistic one provokes a higher level of concern, followed by the neutral condition and finally by the cute one. This pattern is replicated for both genders, but generally, females show higher means of concern compared to males.

Tenderness

With respect to tenderness (see figure A8) it was found that the skepticism level [p-value= 0,001] is significant, as well as, the type of campaign. Depending on how skeptical the participant is and the condition, the level of tenderness varies.

Generally, the skeptical people experience lower levels of tenderness, especially in the cute conditions. On the contrary, non-skeptical people experience similar levels of tenderness in the different conditions, nonetheless the means go from the highest levels of tenderness in the neutral condition, followed by the realistic and lastly, the cute.

Sadness

With respect to sadness (see figure A9) it was found that the gender [p-value=$\prec 0,001$], the effect of type of campaign [p-value=$\prec 0,001$], as well as, the skepticism level [p-value=$\prec 0,001$] are significant. Depending on the gender, of the type of campaign and how skeptical the participant is, the level of sadness varies.

It can be clearly observed that the realistic campaign is the one which provokes higher levels of sadness, regardless of gender and skepticism, followed by the neutral and the cute, with the lowest means. Also, it can be expressed that females experience higher levels of sadness whether they are skeptical or not.

Irritation

With respect to irritation (see figure A10), it was found that the skepticism level [p-value= 0,001] is significant. The variable gender is marginally significant [p-value = 0,063]. Therefore, depending on how skeptical the participant is and the gender, the level of irritation varies. It can be seen that, in general, females tend to experience higher levels of irritation in comparison to males. Also, skeptical females tend to experience lower levels of irritation compared to non skeptical ones. The condition is not significant if we include skepticism.

5   Interpretation of the results

The results of the experiment were consistent with some of the initial hypotheses, but not for all. Next, some of the results obtained will be discussed.

For the *attractiveness dimension*, it was initially presumed that cute campaigns would be preferred by participants, but the results of the study suggest that these found neutral campaigns more attractive compared to realistic and cute ones. For the *likability dimension*, it would have been expected for non skeptical people to like the cute campaign the most, however, there was no substantial change between conditions. Furthermore, variability can be observed among conditions for those highly skeptical, which liked realistic and cute campaigns less compared to the neutral.

The results of *attractiveness and likability* suggest that skeptical people feel more comfortable with types of campaigns which are more restrained and simple, it seems that realistic and cute conditions increase skepticism among participants. This could be due to the fact that the neutral condition just showed a pink ribbon, and perhaps this format allowed a wider interpretation of the concept of breast cancer. However, the realistic and cute conditions could arise more specific connotations. In the first, patients in advanced breast cancer stages were shown and in the second, apparently healthy people wearing 'cute' pink accessories were shown.

One of the initial hypotheses was that the cute campaign would increase the purchasing likelihood of the product. This is consistent in the case of male participants but not for females. One of the reasons behind why females show a lower mean of purchasing intention in cute campaigns, could be, related to women's pro-social inclination to help others (Chang & Cheng, 2015). The cute campaign might not create the perception of 'need' of help as much as the realistic campaign. For the neutral campaign, as we said before, because of the wide interpretation of breast cancer, it could be explained by the same mechanism as the realistic. Females may evoke their thoughts of the need for breast cancer research and not make the decision depend on the campaign as much.

With respect to the relative importance, our hypothesis was not fulfilled, the condition did not have an effect on this perception. Females independently of the type of campaign, perceived breast cancer to be more important relative to what males participants reported.

Out of the analysis including skepticism, it is interesting to note how for skeptical people, the

issue of breast cancer is always perceived as relatively less important to the other cause they had to choose as a priority for them. As an explanation of this fact, it can be speculated that skeptical people may choose different causes compared to non-skeptical. For example, the first might choose problems which attain the whole world population, and thus, perceive a disease that is not the most mortal, as less important.

Regarding the attitude measures, our hypotheses were consistent with the result. It was noticed that cute campaigns elicited the lowest levels of emotions, in anxiety, empathy, concern, tenderness and sadness compared to the other conditions, from which the realistic condition gets the higher means. Generally, females reported higher emotions than men, especially, in the neutral and realistic campaigns. Lastly, skeptical participants regardless of gender experienced less emotions.

For irritation, the hypotheses are not fulfilled, the levels are also higher in females compared to male, but for men there is not a lot of variability of the conditions, but the means of irritation are higher for the cute campaign, and then followed by the realistic and neutral. For females, the variability is higher between conditions, they go from realistic (higher mean) to cute and neutral. It is speculated that perhaps the notion of irritation could have two perspectives, for some it could be the irritation against the disease, whereas for others, the irritation against the use of breast cancer in a certain campaign (for example cute).

The explanation why results were consistent with some hypotheses, but not for others, could be due to some limitations of our study, which will be described next.

First, the survey was carried out through Qualtrics and distributed through social networks and communication media. For that reason, we could not obtain a gender balanced sample having obtained 135 men and 306 women, which could have affected the data. Also, in the sample, 74.88% of the participants had university studies, which would represent an educational level above the average. Besides, 58% of the sample is considered to be young, as it contained participants between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Which would imply a higher critical thinking and consciousness of the main goal of the study and the survey, as we could observe in the optional open question asking them to guess the hypothesis of the research. In the literature, moreover, it is suggested that people with higher levels of studies are more skeptical, so perhaps our sample had more skeptical consumers than average.

Second, breast cancer is very '*mediatic*'. Participants could have been influenced by their previous experiences and opinions and perhaps, our experimental design was not successful enough

in competing with such fixed stances. This could be an explanation of why our hypotheses were not fulfilled in many cases. Also, the use of cute campaigns for breast cancer is much more 'normalised' that for example using 'cute campaigns' for suicide prevention.

Thirdly, the social cause of breast cancer has been seen for a long time and mostly perceived as a women's disease, perhaps that is the reason why many differences in responses between males and females were found.

6   General discussion

Although prior research has studied many aspects of CRM marketing, it has particularly focused on the benefits to firms and NGOs on its implementation. However, our research delves into the nature of the social cause and above all, the changes in consumers perception' of it, that CRM campaigns may cause. So, we built a theory assuming this dynamic stance of perceptions of the cause, treating them not as fixed but as susceptible to change. Therefore, the implications of this project are recognising that firms and NGOs decisions may affect the social cause itself, many times negatively.

The mechanism of harm we described was based on disinformation, perception of importance, perceived improvement, etc. and although some hypotheses were not fulfilled, we reached some interesting implications. Among them, we found that cute campaigns, in fact arise less emotions compared to neutral and realistic campaigns. This could mean that the use of the CRM could be beneficial for firms, because as seen in the literature, sales increase when advertising makes consumers, feel the less negative emotions, but it may be harmful to the social cause. So, answering the initial research question of '*can cause-related marketing harm consumers' perception of social causes?*', we conclude that indeed there is an effect.

If cute campaigns provoke less empathy, concern and sadness, among others, then the use of CRM is deviating from its initial purpose, raising awareness, and becomes a mere source of benefit for corporations. This could justify the increase of the levels of skepticism towards CRM campaigns. Therefore, the initial idea we included in the theoretical framework, the differentiation between corporations' objectives and NGOs' objectives would be feasible and dangerous to the cause.

The real world application of our results would be to reinforce the need to study the effects that a campaign may have when using a social cause. It should not be forgotten that the main priority should be to solve a certain problem, which requires an approach different from the traditional marketing one. In the sense that, when a campaign is designed by corporations' marketers, deeper prior analysis of the campaign should be done to ensure that CRM is being successful in helping the cause. Thus, ensuring it is not being counterproductive and creating a problem of disinformation and '*misperception*' among consumers that will aggravate it and step society away from the solution.

For the future, we recommend further research using a more representative sample and reformulating the dependent variables to ones that may be more susceptible to the 1-time shown CRM campaign. Other considerations, would be to carry out longitudinal studies to analyse the dynamic nature of social causes perceptions'. Another line of investigation could be showing CRM campaigns concerning other social causes that could affect both genders equally, as for example, hunger, poverty, LGBTI rights, etc. Possibly, breast cancer may have more incidence in females concerns, raising gender differences in responses and also, due to the overuse of this social cause, this could raise a greater deal of preconceived ideas.

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Appendix

Survey

Next, it is included the survey carried out by the participants and designed through Qualtrics. This one would be an example for a participant allocated in the *condition of realistic campaign.*[4]

¡Gracias por participar en este estudio!

Este estudio trata sobre los hábitos de los consumidores y sus opiniones respecto a los problemas sociales.

En primer lugar, le mostraremos una campaña que trata concretamente sobre el cáncer de mama.

A continuación, deberá contestar a una serie de preguntas. No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas.

Los datos recogidos en este estudio serán utilizados únicamente para propósitos de investigación y estarán totalmente anonimizados.

Doy mi consentimiento	No doy mi consentimiento
○	○

La firma de champú 'Neutro Soft' ha creado una **campaña publicitaria** en la que colabora con la AECC (Asociación Española Contra el Cáncer). Por cada envase que venda, la empresa hará una donación por 1 minuto de investigación contra el cáncer de mama, que puede afectar tanto a hombres como a mujeres.
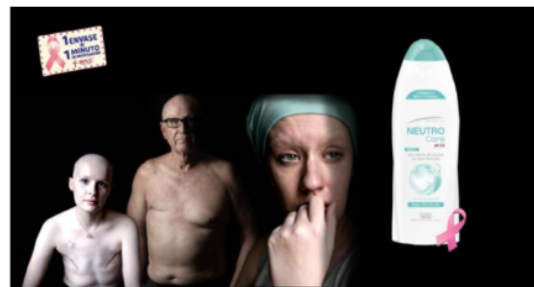
Preste atención a la imagen, le haremos algunas preguntas al respecto.

¿Qué producto se promocionaba en la campaña?

○ Ropa

○ Champú

○ Taza

¿A qué causa social se hace la donación por cada envase vendido?

○ Feminismo

○ Cáncer de mama

○ Igualdad salarial
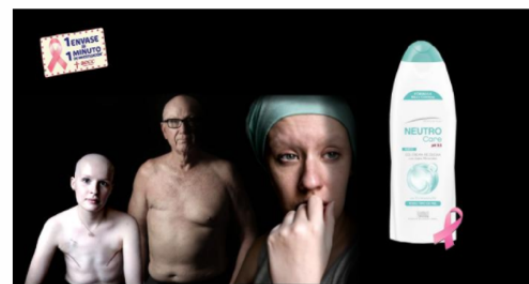
¿Cómo de atractiva opina que es esta campaña de marketing?

Nada atractiva 1	2	3	4	Muy atractiva 5
○	○	○	○	○

¿Cuánto le gusta a usted este tipo de campaña publicitaria?

Nada 1	2	3	4	Mucho 5
○	○	○	○	○

---

[4]Follow the questions horizontally

0% ▬▬▬▬▬ 100%

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¿Cómo de probable sería que usted comprase este producto con respecto a otros champús (suponiendo que tiene el mismo precio y calidad)?

Poco probable 1	2	3	4	Muy probable 5
○	○	○	○	○

→

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Barcelona

A continuación se muestra una lista de causas que abarcan problemas sociales, ambientales y morales.
De la siguiente lista de problemas sociales, seleccione **1 CAUSA** que considere **REALMENTE importante** para usted:

○ Accidentes de tráfico	○ Inmigración
○ Guerras	○ Racismo
○ Acceso a la educación	○ Pobreza
○ Derechos LGBTI	○ Terrorismo
○ Cambio climático	○ Igualdad de género
○ Violencia de género	○ Drogas

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¿Con qué probabilidad cree que el cáncer de mama puede afectarle a usted o a su familia y amigos?

Poco probable   Muy probable
0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

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Basándose en su conocimiento y experiencia previa (sin buscar información extra), ordene las siguientes causas de muertes que **crea que afectan más a las mujeres.**
De más mortales (primera) a menos mortales (última), para hacerlo, arrastre los diferentes elementos, el número le saldrá a la izquierda.

Suicidio
Enfermedades circulatorias
Cáncer de mama
Enfermedades mentales (alzheimer, etc.)
Enfermedades respiratorias
Violencia de género

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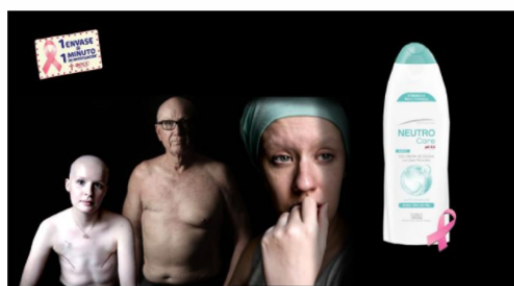
En comparación con la causa previamente seleccionada, ¿cómo de importante es el problema del cáncer de mama para usted?

Menos importante que	2	3	4	Igual de importante que
○	○	○	○	○

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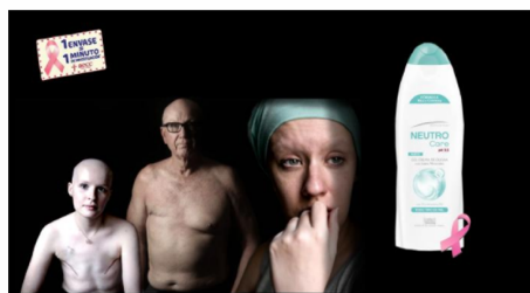
¿Le despierta esta campaña algunas de las siguientes emociones?

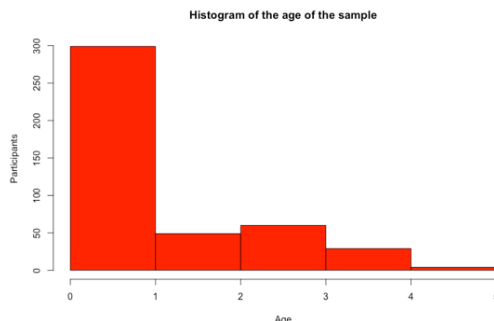|	Nada 1	2	3	4	Mucho 5
Preocupación	○	○	○	○	○
Enfado	○	○	○	○	○
Ansiedad	○	○	○	○	○
Tristeza	○	○	○	○	○
Ternura	○	○	○	○	○
Empatía	○	○	○	○	○

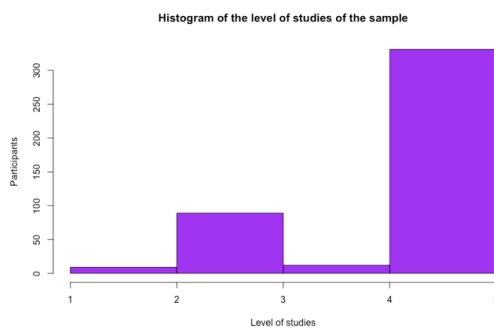**Figure 1.1**: Images of the survey. Own creation

Graphs of the results

**Figure A.** Histogram of the sample (age)

(In this histogram 0 corresponds to 18-25 pps, 1 to 26-35, 2 to 36-44, 3 to 45-54, 4 to 55-64 and 5 to 65-74 years old) Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

**Figure B.** Histogram of the sample (level of studies)

(In this histogram 1 corresponds to 'no studies', 2 to 'elementary school', 3 to 'high school diploma or professional training, 4 to middle grade and 5 to university studies). Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure C. Histogram of the sample (gender)
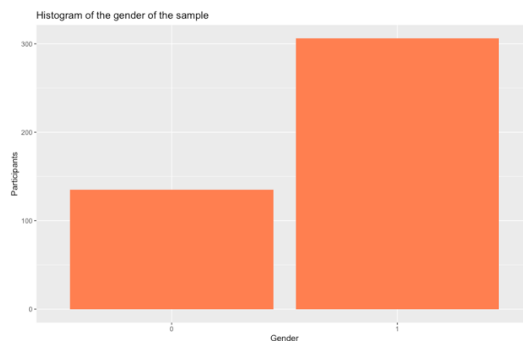
(In this histogram 1 corresponds to the number of females a 0 to the number of males in the sample). Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A1. How attractive do you think this marketing campaign is?
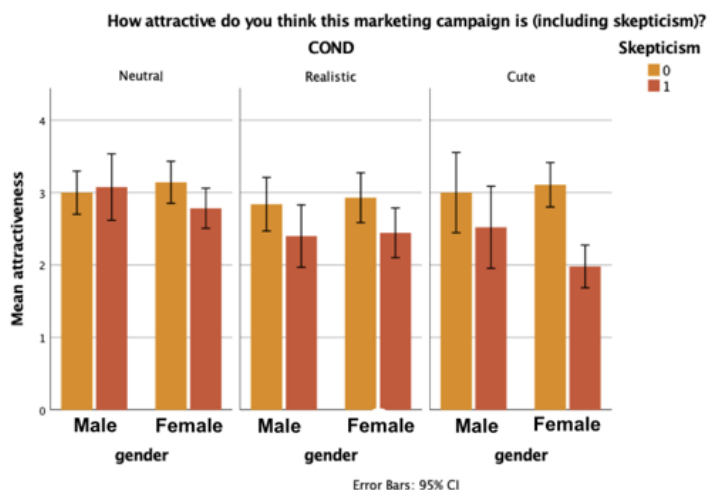
Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A2. How much do you like this kind of advertising campaign?
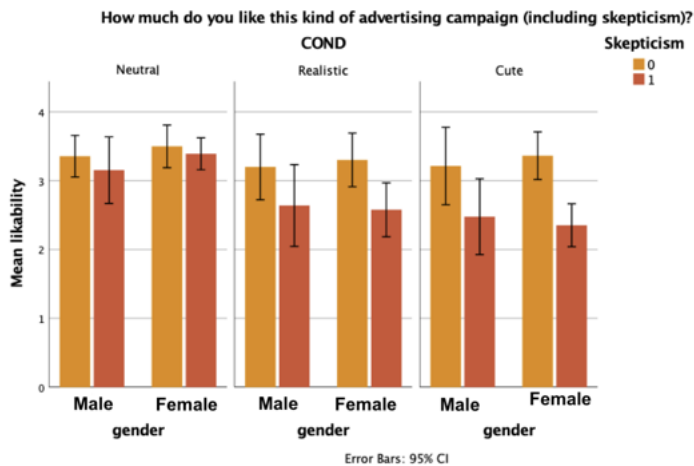
Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A3. How likely would it be for you to buy this product compared to other shampoos?
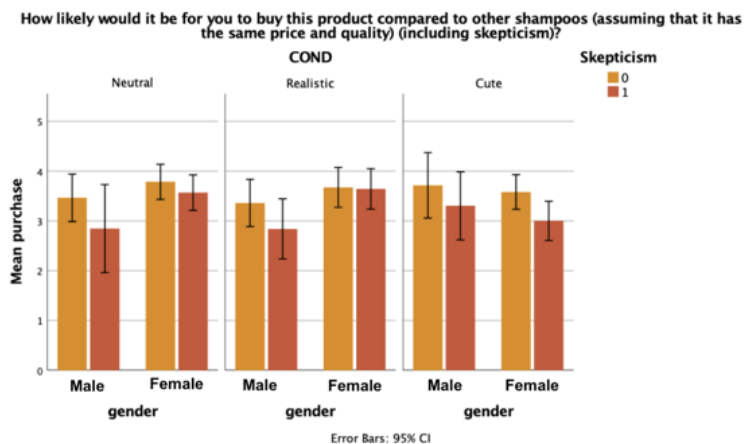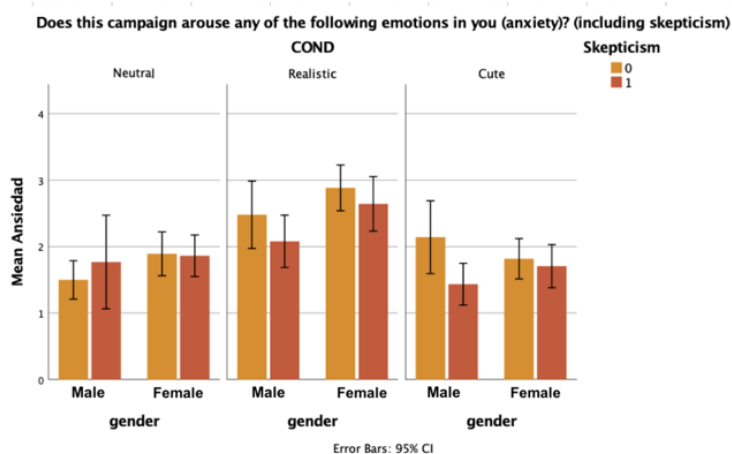

Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A4. Compared to the cause previously selected, how important is the breast cancer problem for you?
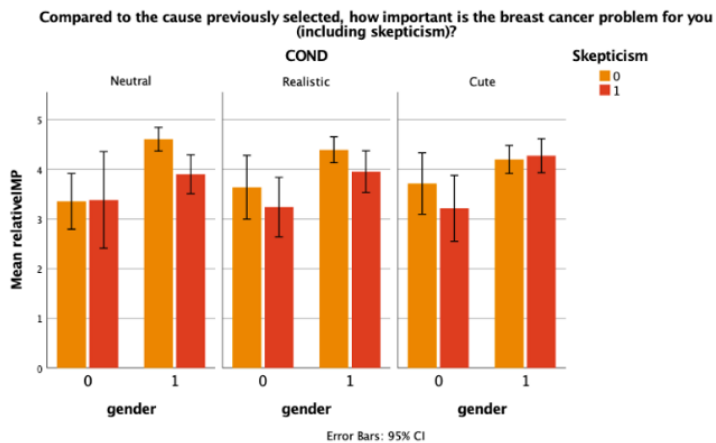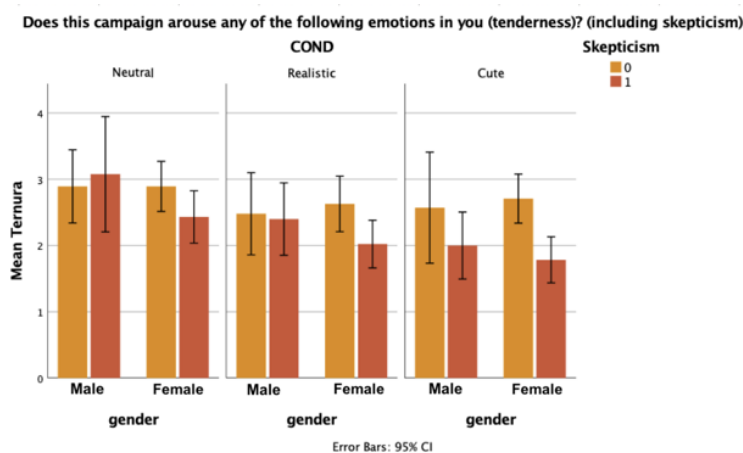

Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A5. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (anxiety)?

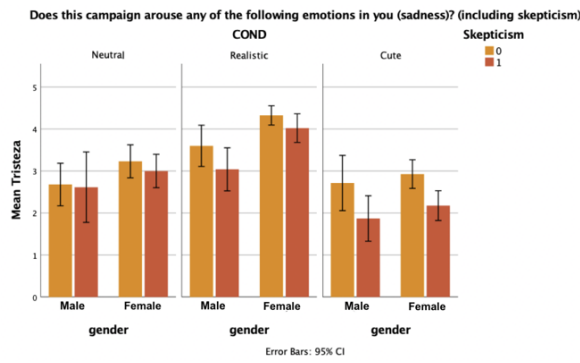*Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).*

Figure A6. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (empathy)?
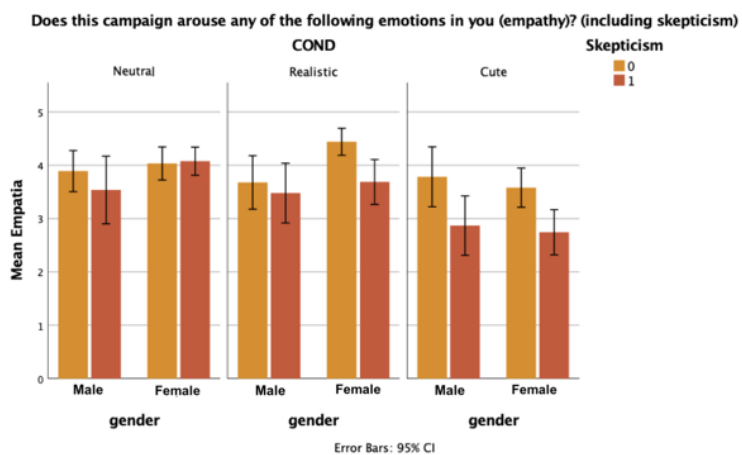
Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A7. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (concern)?
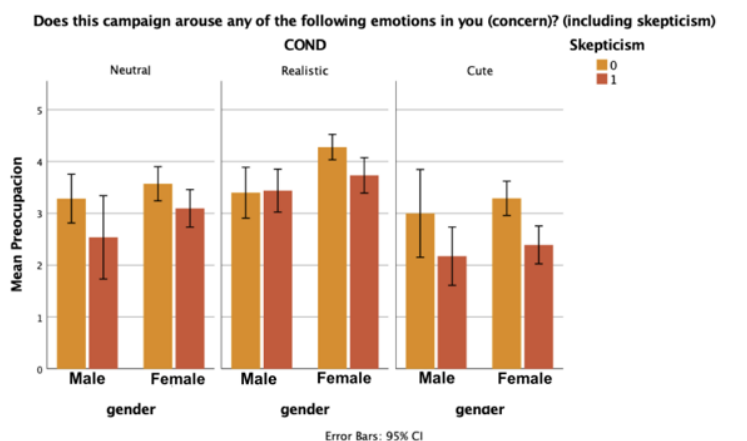
Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A8. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (tenderness)?

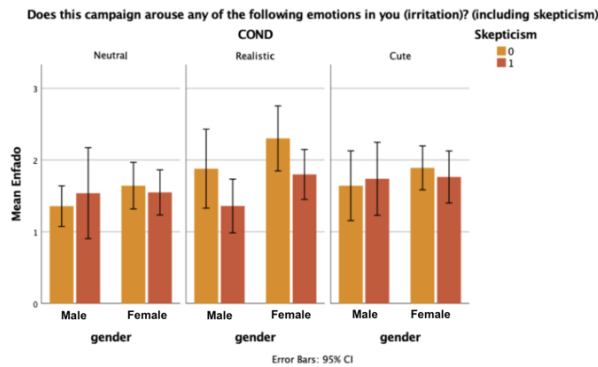*Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).*

Figure A9. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (sadness)?

Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A10. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (irritation)?
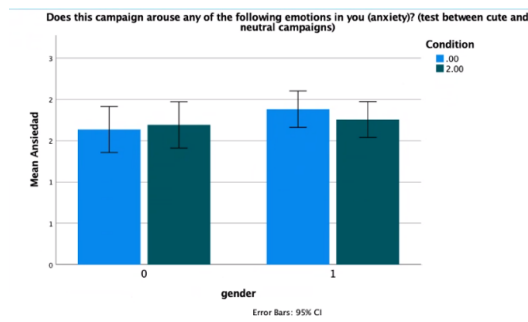

Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Exploratory analysis

Figure A11. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (anxiety)?
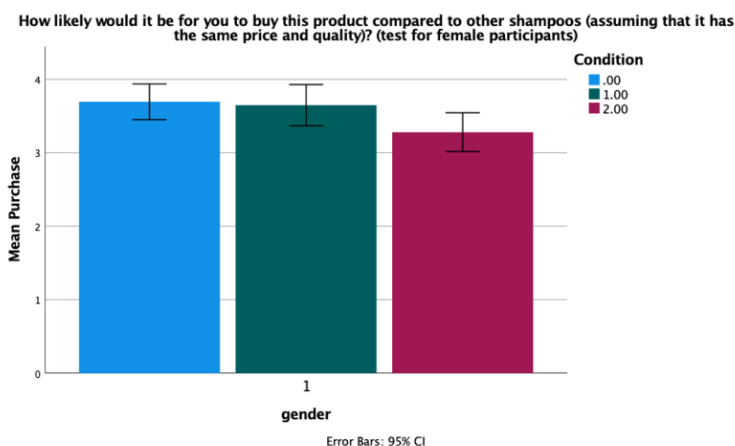*Study between cute and neutral conditions.*

(0.00 is the neutral condition (light blue) and 2.00 is the cute condition (blue-green). 0 belongs to male results and 1 to female results.) Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A12. Does this campaign arouse any of the following emotions in you (tenderness)? *Study between cute and neutral conditions.*
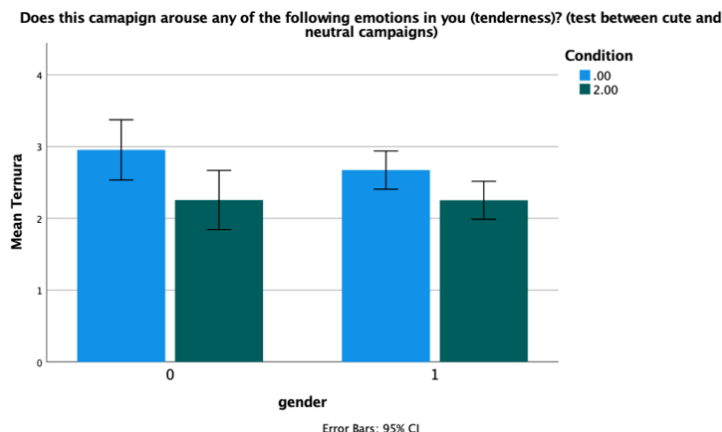
(0.00 is the neutral condition (light blue) and 2.00 is the cute condition (blue-green). 0 belongs to male results and 1 to female results.) Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).

Figure A13. How likely would it be for you to buy this product compared to other shampoos (assuming that it has the same price and quality?) *Test of conditions only for females.*

(0.00 is the neutral condition (light blue), 1.00 is the realistic condition (green(and 2.00 is the cute condition (red). The number 1 in the x-axis belongs to just female results.) Own elaboration based on empirical research (survey).