

Evolution of categories in advertising festivals in the period 2000-2023

Evolución de las categorías en los festivales publicitarios en el periodo 2000-2023

Evolução das categorias nos festivais de publicidade no período 2000-2023

Araceli Castelló-Martínez, Universidad de Alicante, Alicante, España
(araceli.castello@gcloud.ua.es)

Laura Ruiz-Martínez, Universidad de Alicante, Alicante, España
(lrm97@gcloud.ua.es)

ABSTRACT | Advertising festivals are currently a fundamental element in the advertising system, recognizing the work of agencies in different areas, such as creativity or effectiveness. Various studies have focused on advertising festivals, analyzing especially the gender perspective, the content analysis of the award-winning campaigns or the evaluation of the creative criteria of the juries. The main objective of this research is to analyze the evolution that sections, categories and subcategories of advertising festivals have undergone in the period 2000-2023. The method is based on a quantitative analysis of sections, categories and subcategories of 15 advertising festivals between 2000 and 2023 as well as a qualitative analysis of their titles for descriptive categorization into thematic areas. There are nine areas identified: branded content and brand narrative, effectiveness and creativity, innovation and technology, advertising media, artistic production, products and services, public relations and events, corporate social responsibility and social media and digital marketing. Over the period studied, the most popular sections and categories at festivals have evolved from those focused on advertising media to others based on artistic production, digital advertising and innovation. Analyzing the evolution of advertising festivals awards allows us to identify the tendency in the advertising industry to recognize the characteristics of compelling communication strategies regardless of the media or the advertisers' fields sectors of activity.

KEYWORDS: Advertising, advertising festivals, advertising creativity, communication, marketing.

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RESUMEN | Los festivales publicitarios, que reconocen la labor de las agencias en distintos ámbitos, como la creatividad o la eficacia, son un elemento fundamental en el sistema publicitario. Diversas investigaciones han puesto el foco en estos, especialmente en la perspectiva de género, el análisis de contenido de las campañas galardonadas o la evaluación del criterio creativo de los jurados. El principal objetivo de esta investigación es analizar la evolución que han vivido las secciones, las categorías y las subcategorías de los festivales publicitarios en el periodo 2000-2023. El método se basa en un análisis cuantitativo de estas dimensiones en 15 festivales publicitarios entre 2000 y 2023, así como en un análisis cualitativo de sus títulos para la clasificación descriptiva en bloques temáticos. Se identifican nueve bloques temáticos: branded content y narrativa de marca, eficacia y creatividad, innovación y tecnología, medios publicitarios, producción artística, productos y servicios, relaciones públicas y eventos, responsabilidad social corporativa y social media y marketing digital. A lo largo del periodo analizado, las secciones y categorías más populares en los festivales han evolucionado de aquellas centradas en los medios publicitarios a otras basadas en la producción artística, la publicidad digital y la innovación. El análisis de la evolución del palmarés de los festivales publicitarios permite identificar la tendencia en la industria publicitaria a reconocer las características de las estrategias de comunicación persuasiva, independientemente de los medios de difusión o los sectores de actividad de los anunciantes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Publicidad, festivales publicitarios, creatividad publicitaria, comunicación, marketing.

RESUMO | Os festivais publicitários são atualmente um elemento fundamental do sistema publicitário, que reconhecem o trabalho das agências em diferentes áreas, como a criatividade ou a eficácia. Diversas pesquisas e investigações têm-se centrado nesses festivais publicitários, focando-se especialmente na perspectiva de gênero, na análise de conteúdo de campanhas premiadas ou na avaliação dos critérios criativos dos júris. O principal objetivo deste estudo de investigação é analisar a evolução que as seções, categorias e subcategorias dos festivais publicitários experimentaram no período 2000-2023. O método baseia-se na análise quantitativa dessas dimensões dessas seções, categorias e subcategorias de em 15 festivais de publicidade publicitários entre 2000 e 2023, bem como na análise qualitativa de seus títulos para a classificação descritiva em blocos temáticos. São identificados 9 blocos temáticos: branded content e narrativa da marca, eficácia e criatividade, inovação e tecnologia, mídias publicitárias, produção artística, produtos e serviços, relações públicas e eventos, responsabilidade social corporativa e mídias sociais e marketing digital. Ao longo do período analisado, as seções e categorias mais populares dos festivais evoluíram daquelas focadas em meios publicitários para outras baseadas na produção artística, na publicidade digital e na inovação. A análise da evolução dos prêmios dos festivais de publicidade permite identificar a tendência da indústria publicitária em reconhecer as características das estratégias de comunicação persuasiva independentemente dos meios de comunicação ou dos setores de atividade dos anunciantes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: publicidade, festivais de publicidade, criatividade publicitária, comunicação, marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The advertising industry is currently experiencing revolutionary times that are the result of various trends: the demand for a discourse based on brand activism (Asenjo-McCabe, 2022); the use of owned and earned media thanks to media convergence – especially to spread corporate social responsibility– (López-González et al., 2023); the importance of personalization, transparency, interaction, and user-generated content in shaping the message (Kumar & Gupta, 2016) or the use of artificial intelligence in the development of communication strategies (Ford et al., 2023), among others. An advertising discourse based on true reality (Solana, 2010), inspired by insights (Martín Soladana & Sebastián Morillas, 2022) and far from artificiality and forced staging, makes the people the main subject of a type of advertising that should avoid disturbing, hindering or interrupting.

Advertising festivals are an element of the advertising system (Pérez Ruiz, 1996; Castellblanque, 2001; Galmés et al., 2016) that plays a key role in the commercial communication industry, as they give agencies the opportunity to highlight their work, show their professional excellence and enhance their reputation (Polonksky & Waller, 1995; Kilgour et al., 2013; De Waal Malefyt, 2013; Merino-Arribas & Arjona Martin, 2016; Repiso et al., 2018). On an individual level, winning awards at advertising festivals provides visibility, improves image and recognizes the professional skills of winning teams (Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023a). However, participation in these competitions also comes at a high personal cost and is subject to high pressure, which sometimes has an impact on health (Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023b).

Advertising festivals originated in the United States of America in the 1950s, when advertising competitions became popular, in which the communication or marketing departments of companies held tests to select the agency that would conduct the next advertising campaign, considering its creative quality and reputation (Merino Arribas & Repiso Caballero, 2016; Muñoz-Sánchez & Orozco-Toro, 2018). In 1954, the first International Advertising Film Festival was held in Venice, an event we know today as the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity (hereafter, Cannes Lions). This highlighted the advertising industry's need for creativity to be recognized.

International advertising festivals have characteristics that make them the ideal place to evaluate advertising creativity, as Repiso (2018) points out: they are open to all agencies, they have a group of experts who carry out the evaluation processes for the selection of finalists (shortlist) and winners, they reward the uniqueness of the ads, their creativity and efficiency, they establish a classification in sections, categories and subcategories –taking into account different themes that

represent the current situation of the advertising sector— and they give recognition to the professionals of both the agencies involved and the advertisers.

Advertising competitions are a reflection of trends in the advertising industry (Anand & Jones, 2008). Galmés and colleagues (2016) have identified five macrotrends in advertising that are reflected in advertising festivals: digitalization, new alternatives, innovation, integration and results. Research on advertising festivals has mainly focused on three blocks:

- The study of the gender perspective, both in the storytelling strategies of award-winning campaigns and in the composition of the jury that evaluates them (Roca Correa et al., 2012; Menéndez Menéndez, 2021; Ramos-Serrano et al., 2023; Tacket, 2023; Zayer et al., 2023; Castelló-Martínez et al., 2024), noting the need for advertising to break gender stereotypes and be designed by more gender-equitable teams, especially in leadership positions.
- The content analysis of award-winning campaigns (López Lita, 2010; Castelló-Martínez, 2016; Martínez Sáez et al., 2017; Sanz-Marcos & Micaletto Belda, 2019; Ortiz & Vilaplana-Aparicio, 2020; Castelló-Martínez, 2024a) and of the advertising media in which they were broadcast (Castelló-Martínez & DelPino-Romero, 2016). Among other findings, the studies highlight the evolution of the discourse from rational to emotional, the increasing presence of a brand purpose, and the omnichannel and transmediality of advertising strategies.
- The assesment of the creative criteria of festival juries (Barahona Navarro, 2014) and of the relationship between creativity and effectiveness, concluding that the link between both variables is not determinant and does not always exist (Martín-García & Alvarado-López, 2022), based on a comparison between the winners of the Premios a la Eficacia (Awards for Effectiveness), organized by the Asociación Española de Anunciantes (Spanish Association of Advertisers), and El Sol, Festival Iberoamericano de la Comunicación Publicitaria (Iberoamerican Festival of Advertising Communication), hereinafter referred to as El Sol.

A study conducted by the Asociación Española de Anunciantes (2023) shows that the winning campaigns of Premios a la Eficacia focus on consumers — telling emotional stories about real people— - use more digital media than the others and have a purpose. The Spanish-language festival that the academy has focused on the most is El Sol. López Lita (2010) has studied the evolution of the discourse of the campaigns awarded at this festival, highlighting the evolution from a rational message to an emotional message in the decades 1988-2008.

Other works have analyzed this list of winners in specific media or fields. The limited number of radio entries and the scarce presence of radio at the El Sol awards confirm the under-representation of radio advertising at the festival (Piñeiro, 2009). In contrast, Carretero Velasco and Rangel Pérez (2017) emphasize the growing weight of digital media and the generation of engagement through content creation in the award-winning actions in the integrated campaign categories in El Sol.

In fact, branded content is one of the techniques that has received the most attention in academic studies on El Sol. Llorente-Barroso et al. (2022) identify the creative features of the pieces that were awarded a grand prize or gold in these categories between 2015 and 2021: promises based on consumer benefits; presence of emotional and cultural insights; use of storytelling with a close and empathetic tone.

In the Film section, narrative ads that tell a story linked to the advertising message predominate, with a longer duration than non-narrative ads, archetypal plots and the use of humor and fun (Ortiz & Vilaplana-Aparicio, 2020). Menéndez Menéndez (2021) examines the promotion of equality, the breaking of gender roles and the empowerment of women through the storytelling of the advertising campaigns awarded in El Sol. She concludes that while sexism has decreased, creativity in advertising has not yet internalized an egalitarian paradigm.

Castelló-Martínez (2024b) analyzes the evolution of El Sol's sections, categories and subcategories between 2003 and 2023, noting the tendency to abolish classifications by sector or media, as well as the current importance of the convergence between digital, social and mobile for the advertising industry. According to this study, the introduction of categories and sub-categories at this festival that focus on the global characteristics of the advertising campaign — such as brand experience, innovation or transformative creativity— is a reward for the idea over the medium and a sign of the professionalization of the sector as a result of the refinement of the El Sol awards.

In the case of Cannes Lions, the study by Fernández Gómez and colleagues (2022), based on a sample of the works presented at this festival, proves the importance of testimonials and the use of celebrities in advertising. Alves (2022) analyzes the evolution of the categories in this competition between 2009 and 2019, highlighting the complexity and fragmentation they have experienced. Muñoz-Sánchez and Orozco-Toro (2018) examine the presence of social advertising at Cannes Lions and the Festival Iberoamericano de Publicidad (FIAP) (Iberoamerican Advertising Festival) and identify the categories in which this type of message predominates: promotional use and creative use of the media.

From this contextualization arises the relevance of advertising festivals as an object of study, as a transcendent element of the advertising system, as well as the need to give continuity to the review of their role in the trends of the industry itself. The following research questions are therefore proposed:

RQ1. How have the sections, categories and subcategories of advertising festivals evolved?

RQ2. Into which blocks can the sections, categories and subcategories of advertising festivals be grouped?

RQ3. How has the presence of areas such as digital advertising and branded content evolved in the festival awards?

RQ4. What is the presence of advertising media categories in the latest editions of advertising festivals compared to the first editions of the 21st century?

METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the evolution of the sections, categories and subcategories of advertising festivals in the period 2000-2023, a quantitative analysis of all of them was carried out, as well as a qualitative analysis of their titles for a descriptive classification into thematic blocks based on the creation of related semantic fields.

The selection of advertising festivals was made considering the ten best rated by marketers in Spain (Scopen, 2023), in this order: Premios Eficacia, Cannes Lions, El Sol, Nacionales de Creatividad del Club de Creativos (CdeC) —National Creativity Awards of the Club de Creativos—, Nacionales de Marketing —National Marketing Awards—, Inspirational, Genio, Clio Awards, Premios Aspid and ADG Laus.

This selection is complemented by a purposive sampling of five festivals chosen for various reasons:

- Local events such as ALCe (Alicante Advertising Festival), La Lluna (Valencia Advertising Festival) and Premios Agripina (Andalusian communication festival).
- Specific to a particular sector, such as El Chupete, an international festival for children's communication, or for communication and public relations, such as the Premios Dircom Ramón del Corral.

#	Festival	Year of creation	URL
1	Agripina	2010	https://premiosagripina.es/
2	ALCe	2002	https://www.asociacion361.es/palmares-premios-alce/
3	Aspid	1997	https://www1.premiosaspid.es/index.php/home/
4	Cannes Lions	1954	https://www.canneslions.com/
5	Clio Awards	1959	https://clios.com/awards
6	Dircom Ramón del Corral	2017	https://premios.dircom.org/
7	Eficacia	1997	https://www.premioseficacia.com/
8	El Chupete	2005	https://www.elchupete.com/
9	El Sol	1986	https://elsolfestival.com/
10	Genio	2006	https://www.premiosgenio.com/
11	Inspirational	2009	https://inspirational.es/
12	La Lluna	2007	https://festivallluna.com/
13	ADG Laus	1964	https://www.adg-fad.org/es/laus/premios
14	Nacionales de Creatividad	1999	https://www.clubdecreativos.com/archivodelacreatividad/piezas.html
15	Nacionales de Marketing	2009	https://www.asociacionmkt.es/premios-nacionales-de-marketing/

Table 1. Sample advertising festival

Fuente: Own elaboration.

The sample of festivals is listed in table 1. A total of 248 editions of these 15 festivals in the period 2000-2023 were analyzed (an average of 16.5 editions per festival), for three reasons. Firstly, in some cases the festival was only launched after the initial year of the analysis period and in some years certain festivals did not take place. Secondly, in certain years it was not possible to obtain information on the winners of some festivals.

For ten of the 15 festivals, all editions since their inception until 2023 are analyzed. These are the following: Agripina, ALCe, Dircom Ramón del Corral, El Sol, Genio, Inspirational, La Lluna, Nacionales de Creatividad, Nacionales de Marketing and Premios Eficacia. The Premios Eficacia did not take place in 2000. It should also be noted that the festival Inspirational had no sections or categories in its first year, 2009, and did not take place in 2018 either. The La Lluna festival was held every two years for a while, with no awards in 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017. In 2020, several festivals were not held due to COVID-19.

For six festivals, no information is available for the entire analysis period, although we requested it from the respective organizers: Premios Aspid –the period 2000-2004 is missing–, El Chupete –the period 2005-2015 is missing–, ADG Laus –the period 2000-2015 is missing–, Cannes Lions and Clio Awards –the 2000 edition of these two is missing. The sample of these 15 festivals thus comprises a total of 282 editions between 2000 and 2023, of which 87.9% were analyzed.

The awards for which the most editions are analyzed are Nacionales de Marketing and El Sol (both with 24 editions), followed by Clio Awards and Premios Eficacia (both with 23 editions). Cannes Lions, ALCe, Aspid and Genio also have more than 15 editions analyzed. By editions, 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023 are the years in which the editions of all the festivals in the sample were analyzed.

This breakdown is shown in table 2. The reviewed editions of these festivals comprise a total of 9013 units: 2935 sections (32.6%), 5307 categories (58.9%) and 771 subcategories –first and second level (8.6%). Of these, one or more prizes are awarded in 7806 units: 2024 sections (69%), 5079 categories (95.7%) and 703 first and second level subcategories (91.2%). Of these 7806 prizes, 16.5% (1284) were for special prizes and young talent competitions, with the remainder (6522 or 83.5%) for the subject areas, categories and subcategories surveyed. The years in which the most units were analyzed coincide with those in which each festival in the sample is analyzed: 2023 with 586 sections and categories (9%), 2022 with 492 sections and categories (7.5%); and 2019, with 460 sections and categories (7.1%).

The data comes from the websites of the advertising festivals, from inquiries to the organizing institutions and from information in specialized publications such as *Adlatina*, *Anuncios*, *Control Publicidad*, *El Programa de la Publicidad*, *El Publicista*, *Interactiva Digital*, *IPMark*, *Marketing Directo*, *PR Noticias* and *Reason Why*. The fieldwork was conducted between January and June 2024. Data collection and analysis was carried out in Excel.

Festival	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	TOTAL
Agripina											x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13
ALCe		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	21
Aspid				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	19
CannesLions		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	22
Clio Awards		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	23
Dircom Ramón del Corral																									6
Eficacia		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	23
El Chupete																									8
El Sol		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	24
Genio								x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
Inspirational												x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13
La Lluna																									12
ADG Laus																									8
Nacion. de Creatividad		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	24
Nacion. de Marketing																									15
TOTAL	2	5	6	6	6	7	7	9	9	10	11	11	12	11	12	11	14	13	14	15	12	15	15	15	248

Table 2. Editions analyzed for each advertising festival

Source: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

Thematic blocks of sections, categories and subcategories

Nine thematic blocks can be extracted from the analysis of the 248 issues of the 15 advertising festivals in the sample, into which the 6,522 sections, categories and subcategories (first and second level) can be categorized: branded content and brand storytelling, effectiveness and creativity, innovation and technology, advertising media, artistic production, products and services, public relations and events, corporate social responsibility (hereafter CSR), and social media and digital marketing (table 3).

The sections, categories and subcategories are divided into these nine blocks, considering the keywords contained in their nomenclature and thus defining semantic fields for each block:

- Branded content and brand storytelling. These awards recognize aspects related to these elements.
- Effectiveness and creativity. The units in this block reward creative effectiveness, creative strategy, creative commerce or creative data (Cannes Lions), transformative creativity through business transformation or brand transformation (El Sol), the most original and disruptive strategy (Premios a la Eficacia) or strategic thinking and disruptive ideas (Inspirational).
- Innovation and technology. These include awards that explicitly recognize innovation (creation of a specific action, technological innovation, product innovation or others), such as the Premios Nacionales de Creatividad. This block also includes the awards given to the use of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, multiplatform experience or storytelling, new realities, real-time, native integration or voice-activated (Clio Awards).
- Advertising media. The sections, categories and subcategories are organized according to the distribution medium: radio, television, press, magazines, outdoor advertising, cinema, film, graphics, etc.
- Artistic production. This block summarizes the technical awards: production management, editing, cinematography, packaging, animation, illustration, sound, art direction, design, digital craftwork, cinematographic craftwork, casting and direction of actors, special effects, editing, etc.

Theme block /Year (20xx)	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	TOTAL
Branded content	1	2				5	4	4	4	7	7	15	16	28	34	32	21	35	55	56	42	51	76	85	580
Effectiveness/creativity			19	2	2	2	2	11	11	10	10	12	12	5	7	8	7	4	7	11	5	10	16	42	213
Innovation/technology	1	4	6	2	12	15	12	18	6	46	54	41	49	41	30	37	56	55	54	61	77	76	108	119	980
Advertising media	8	23	33	110	80	102	82	104	122	175	171	76	57	55	37	31	51	42	90	93	36	73	78	101	1.830
Artistic production	3	6	3	1	2	2	2	5	10	20	24	46	57	64	72	45	86	92	117	113	77	83	112	122	1.164
Products/services		18	11		6	21	8	9	7	37	28	15	6	6	4	5	5	5	8	10	10	10	14	18	261
PR and events	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	8	14	16	16	12	15	14	28	27	29	21	35	37	21	21	32	35	412
CSR	1	2				2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	5	6	7	13	20	19	12	19	19	21	158
Social media	4	10	11	16	31	21	22	31	35	33	21	71	54	47	58	48	55	98	59	60	25	34	37	43	924
TOTAL	20	68	73	152	137	172	139	192	210	346	332	290	268	262	275	239	317	365	445	460	305	377	492	586	6.522

Table 3. Sections, categories and subcategories by thematic block (2003-2023)

Source: Own elaboration.

- Products and services. These are awards given according to product type or field of activity: food, automotive, alcoholic beverages, non-alcoholic beverages, fashion, utilities, household products, banking and finance, electronic devices, etc.
- Public relations and events. This includes sections, categories and subcategories that refer specifically to public relations and events, along with those that reward public relations strategies and tactics such as corporate image, crisis management, internal communications and employee engagement, public affairs, etc.
- This block catalogs actions that relate to social marketing or have a social purpose –as indicated in the nomenclature of sections, categories and subcategories. For example, Dircom Ramón del Corral rewards social and environmental commitment or good governance and La Lluna values ideas for a sustainable world.
- Social media and digital marketing. This block concerns awards related to the use of social networks and digital environments, such as applications, gaming, influencers, mobile resources and digital advertising, among others.

Figure 1 shows the number of editions of the advertising festivals analyzed in which each thematic block is represented in the list of winners. The innovation and technology block is the most represented with 72.2% of the 248 editions analyzed (179). It is followed by social media and digital marketing with 67.7% (168), and branded content y brand storytelling with 147 editions (59.3%).

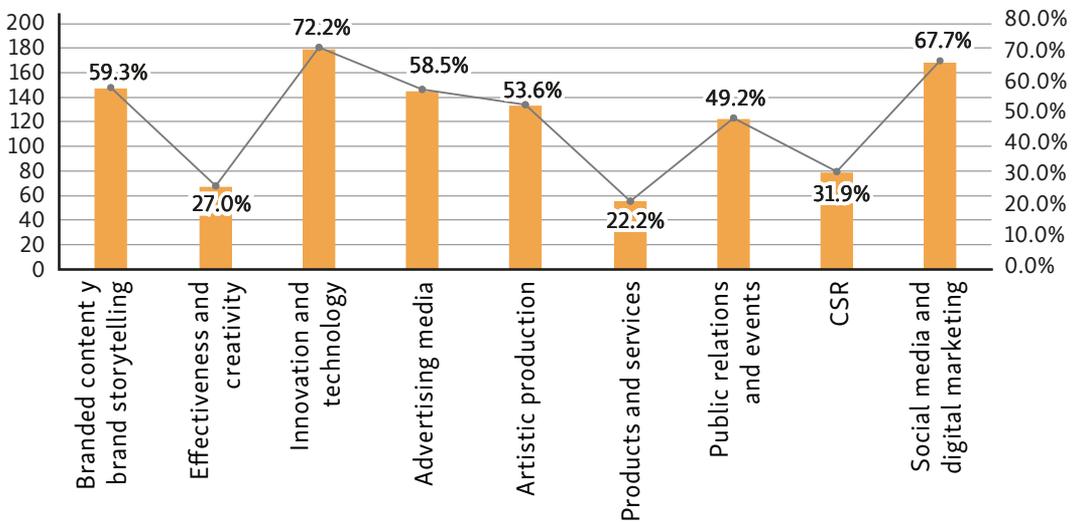


Figure 1. Number of editions of advertising festivals in which each theme block has a presence

Source: Own elaboration.

The evolution of the advertising media block

As can be seen in figure 2, the block with the most sections, categories and subcategories in the period analyzed is advertising media, with 1,830 entries (28.1%). It is followed by artistic production (1164, with 17.8%), innovation and technology (980, which corresponds to 15%) and social media and digital marketing with 14.2% (924). The blocks with the fewest entries are corporate social responsibility (158, with 2.4%), effectiveness and creativity (213, with 3.3%) and products and services (261, with 4%). However, these positions do not remain the same over time. Between 2000 and 2011, the most popular sections and categories are those relating to advertising media. In these first editions of the period studied, it is also common for there to be categories organized by economic sector within the sections dedicated to advertising media. This is the case of El Sol, an event that includes a classification of 14 sectors of activity within the television/cinema and graphics sections. It is noteworthy that in 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2010, the products and services block took second place, which it shared in 2002 and 2005 with the social media and digital marketing block.

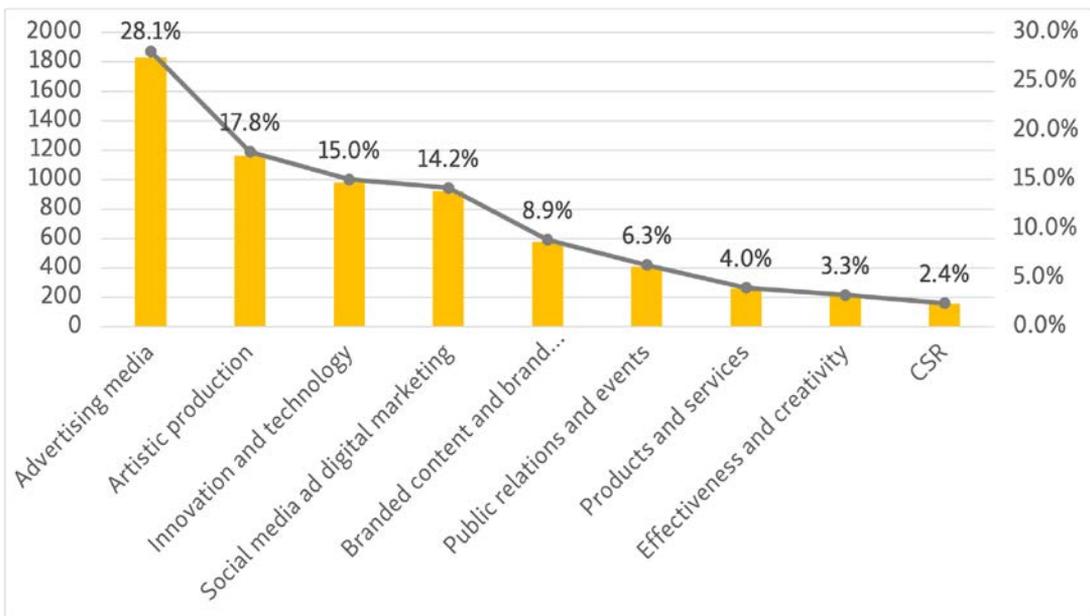


Figure 2. Total number of sections, categories and subcategories of each theme block (2003-2023)

Source: Own elaboration.

In 2011, a year in which the block dedicated to digital occupies the second position in terms of the number of sections, categories and subcategories, there was a significant change: although it was the most popular group in 2009 and 2010 –with 175 (50.6%) and 171 (51.5%) awards, respectively, the advertising media block falls to 76 (26.2%) awards in 2011. Even with this figure, it retained the top position this year and shared the lead with the artistic production block in 2012, both with 57 (21.3%) sections and categories.

Presence of other theme blocks on the list of winners

In 2013, the advertising media block lost its leading position and ended up in second place with 55 units (21%), behind the artistic production awards group, which received 64 awards (24.4%). Although it maintained this position in 2018 and 2019, the number of sections, categories and subcategories fell between 2013 and 2023.

From 2013 to 2023, the thematic blocks with the most awards at the festivals analyzed are:

- Artistic production, throughout the period, with the exception of 2015 and 2017.
- Innovation and technology, sharing first place with artistic production in 2020.
- Social media and digital marketing in 2015 and 2017.

Within the block dedicated to artistic production, the Premios Nacionales de Creatividad 2014 include categories such as: animation (motion design), casting and direction of actors, art direction, cinematography, production management, direction, graphic design, special effects, photography, illustration, editing, writing and sound/music. In 2018, festivals such as La Lluna also included several categories of this type, such as animation, copy, art direction, web design, illustration or packaging. In 2021, the Agripina awards recognized advertising photography, packaging, animation and advertising illustration, among other categories dedicated to artistic production. As for the innovation and technology awards, several festivals dedicate exclusive categories to it, such as the 2020 Premios Aspid (innovation), Premios a la Eficacia (most innovative strategy) and Premios

Nacionales de Marketing (innovation). In 2020, the Premios Nacionales de Creatividad awarded several prizes for innovation: creation of a unique action, technological creation, product creation, service creation, use of an existing medium/format, use of an existing technology, creation of a medium/format, disruption, tactics, insights, ideas, etc. That same year, the Genio competition also included subcategories within the innovation in marketing, communication and use of media (eight subcategories) and the innovation in product and service design (two subcategories).

In 2015, social media and digital marketing added categories such as web, social media, mobile apps, global online campaign or direct marketing in the ALCe awards. In this section, the Inspirational festival –dedicated to digital advertising– awarded in 2017 online audio, transmedia campaigns, online video, the best campaign on social networks, best use of a social network, best use of real time, best use of influence and prescription, website and mobile application.

Figure 3 shows the evolution of the sections, categories and subcategories in the period under review for the advertising media, artistic production, innovation and technology and social media and digital marketing blocks.

In 2020, the block dedicated to branded content and brand storytelling took second place with 42 entries (13.8%). In 2022 and 2023, this block ranked third with 76 (15.4%) and 85 (14.5%) sections and categories respectively. In 2022, Premios a la Eficacia, La Lluna and El Chupete awarded a prize for the best branded content campaign. In 2023, Cannes Lions rewarded, as branded content proposals, entertainment for games, entertainment for music or entertainment for sport.

The thematic blocks with sections, categories and subcategories related to public relations and events on the one hand and corporate social responsibility on the other grew in absolute numbers in the reporting period. However, this growth does not correspond to a percentage increase in the winning positions of the festivals in recent editions. In the case of public relations and events, the number increases from five (6.8%) units in 2002 to 35 (6%) in 2023, with a total of 412 (6.3%) sections, categories and subcategories over the entire period.

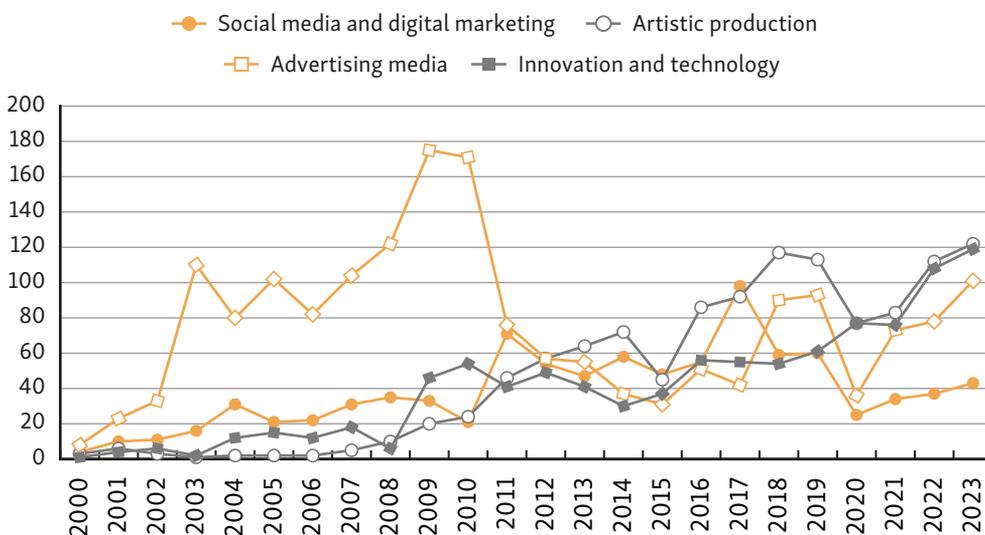


Figura 3. Sections, categories and subcategories by block and year (2003-2023)

Source: Own elaboration.

CSR is, as mentioned above, the block with the fewest units, with an evolution from 2 (2.7%) units in 2002 to 21 (3.6%) in 2023.

Distribution of theme blocks by festival

Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the sections, categories and subcategories of each thematic block for each advertising festival. All festivals, with the exception of the Premios Nacionales de Marketing, occupy one of the top three places in one of the nine thematic blocks in terms of the number of sections, categories and subcategories awarded. The Premios Nacionales de Marketing are not among the top three in any of the thematic blocks.

The Clio Awards is the festival that appears most frequently in these three top positions by number of sections and categories for each thematic area: it ranks first in branded content and brand storytelling (168 units, with 29% of the sections and categories in this block), followed by El Sol (92 units, with 15.9%) and Premios Nacionales de Creatividad (64 units, with 11%). This competition also ranks first in innovation and technology (267 units, 27.2%), advertising media (745 units, 40.7%), followed by El Sol (587 units, 32.1%), artistic production (410 units, 35.2%) and public relations and events (163 units, 39.6% of the total number of sections and categories awarded in this block).

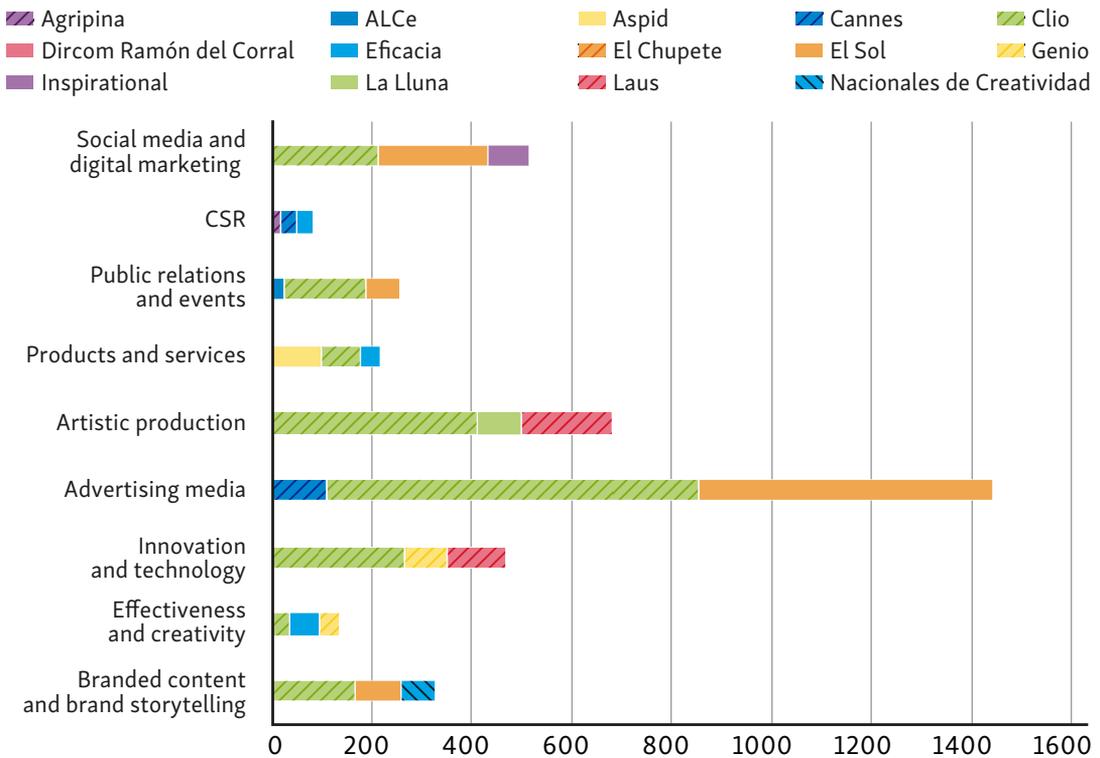


Figure 4. Number of sections, categories and subcategories of thematic blocks per festival

Source: Own elaboration.

The effectiveness and creativity block was dominated by Premios a la Eficacia with 60 awards (28.2%). Aspid is the leading competition in the sections, categories and subcategories of products and services with 100 awards (38.3%). In the area of corporate social responsibility, the Premios a la Eficacia account for 21.5% of the awards with 34 sections and categories. Finally, in the field of social media and digital marketing, El Sol is the most important festival with 217 sections, categories and subcategories (23.5%), followed by Clio Awards (with 214 units, 23.2%) and Inspirational (84 units, 9%).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the evolution of the sections, categories and subcategories of the 15 selected advertising festivals reflects the changes that the winning lists of these events have undergone in line with trends in advertising practice, as demonstrated by Anand and Jones (2008). In relation to the first two research questions, the 6,522 units analyzed could be categorized into nine themes. The shift in importance revealed by the field research from sections and categories focused on advertising media to others dedicated to artistic production, innovation and technology coincides with the findings of Galmés et al. (2016), who identified innovation as one of the five macrotrends in advertising that materialize in advertising festivals. With regard to the third research question, the importance of branded content and brand storytelling stands out in the most recent editions analyzed, after social media and digital marketing took first place in the number of sections, categories and subcategories at the festivals between 2015 and 2017. This confirms another macrotrend of the proposals from the study by Galmés and colleagues (2016), and in exactly the same period: digitalization.

In response to the last research question, the results of this study confirm the trend analyzed by Castelló-Martínez (2024b) only for El Sol in all advertising festivals to eliminate classification by media or sector of activity: while the advertising events analyzed in 2005 and 2010 included a total of 21 and 28 sections and categories dedicated exclusively to products and services, respectively, between 2012 and 2021 this number does not exceed 10.

The answers to the proposed research questions and the numerical evolution of the nine thematic blocks found thus confirm the evolution of advertising trends. On the one hand, the sector of activity or the distribution medium are becoming secondary, making way for innovation, strategy and creativity, regardless of the product, medium or format. On the other hand, the data confirms the importance of digitalization and branded content in advertising communication strategies.

The percentage weight of the predominant thematic blocks identified during the period studied also shows the refinement and professionalization that advertising festivals and the advertising industry have achieved. While in the first editions the leading thematic block (advertising media) reached a high percentage –in 2003 it was over 72% and remained over 50% until 2010– the most popular thematic block (artistic production) did not even reach 21% in 2023, despite having received 122 awards. The main finding of this study, which is new compared to previous research on advertising festivals, is that the profession is currently focusing on rewarding the characteristics of compelling communication strategies such as effectiveness and creativity, regardless of the media used or the advertiser's field of activity. Although it is among the thematic blocks with the fewest sections, categories and subcategories in the entire period analyzed, the recognition of effectiveness and creativity has evolved exponentially, especially in recent years, from 16 units in 2022 to 42 in 2023. This was not the case in the first years analyzed, when the focus was on media or sectors of activity.

The originality and relevance of this study is based particularly on the size of the sample with 9,013 identified units (sections, categories and subcategories) and the analysis of 6,522 units originating from 15 advertising festivals. The breadth of the 24-year period studied (2000-2023) makes it possible to determine the evolution of trends in the advertising industry over time. It is the first study to approach advertising festivals from the point of view of changes in their winners' lists without focusing on a single event.

The main limitations of the study are due to the difficulty of finding information on all the editions of the festivals in the sample (34 editions of 6 festivals). Although this number represents 12.1% of the total number of editions identified between 2000 and 2023, it makes the data verifiable, especially in the early years. It should also be considered a bias that not all festivals have existed since 2000, so they were included during the analysis period. The most recent is the Dircom Ramón del Corral awards, launched in 2017.

Future research should focus on extending the period, increasing the number of advertising festivals analyzed and increasing the sample of sections, categories and subcategories by including special awards and those granted to young talent, which total 1,284 units between 2000 and 2023 in the 15 selected advertising festivals. This would make it possible to identify, on the one hand, the type of special awards granted by the advertising industry over time and, on the other, the criteria used to evaluate the proposals of future professionals.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ARACELI CASTELLÓ-MARTÍNEZ, full professor at the Universidad de Alicante. Her main areas of research are creative strategy, brands with a purpose, advertising festivals, advertising trends and digital advertising. She has two six-year CNEAI research periods. Her publications include more than 50 articles in scientific journals and more than 50 books and book chapters, accumulating more than 3,250 citations (October 2024) in Google Scholar (<https://bit.ly/araceli-scholar>), with an h-index of 29 and an i10-index of 54.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5783-344X>

LAURA RUÍZ-MARTÍNEZ, holds a degree in Advertising and PR from the Universidad de Alicante (2024). Collaborator in the Protocol Office of that same university (2022-2024) and recipient of a collaborative scholarship from the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports with the Department of Communication and Social Psychology (academic year 2023-2024).

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2075-6672>