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Lenguaje, género y comunicación

Sergio Marín Conejo (ed.)

978-84-1324-300-9

EL MUNDO A TRAVÉS DE LAS PALABRAS

LENGUAJE, GÉNERO, Y COMUNICACIÓN

Sergio Marín-Conejo
(ed.)

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PREVENTING MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN THROUGH COMMUNICATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TELEVISION CAMPAIGNS OF THE ITALIAN AND SPANISH GOVERNMENTS

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1. Introduction

It is well-acknowledged that the media have the power to construct, spread or legitimize stereotypes of masculinity and femininity which are often thought as the cultural basis for gender discrimination as well as male violence on women (Suárez Villegas, 2011). However, the media can also be used by public institutions and non-profit organizations to deconstruct gender stereotypes circulating across wide sections of the population, thus contributing to fostering beliefs and behaviour that respect gender diversity. A growing number of EU countries has recently started pursuing this goal by implementing social campaigns against men's violence on women.

From this background, this paper shows some results from a large study, currently underway, which aims to identify what representations of male violence on women and what communication strategies for preventing and fighting the phenomenon are emerging from the national campaigns implemented by European Union Member States. In this regard, the study adopted the classification proposed by Corradi and Stöckl (2014), who distinguished the European Countries into *early-birds*, *intermediates* and *newcomers* depending on the time when government action against intimate partner violence developed. *Early-bird* countries have developed government action since the mid-1970s-early 1980s, *intermediate* countries since the late 1980s-early 1990s and *newcomer* countries since the mid-1990s.

The study aims to test the hypothesis that, as it goes from *newcomer* to *intermediate* to *early-bird* countries, governmental communication campaigns tend to become more tailored to specific target groups of population and more differentiated in terms of types of *male violence* addressed, modes of *representation of violent acts*, types of *target groups*, *frames of male violence* adopted by national governments as well as types of *communication objectives*.

In line with the general research scope, this paper presents a comparative analysis of the communication strategies adopted by the Governments of Italy and Spain, two European countries which have in common the ideology of machismo as a widespread trait of their national culture, but have different levels of experience in relation to the time when government action on intimate partner violence developed. In particular, Spain can be included among the *intermediate* countries, whereas Italy among the *newcomers*.

Section 2 proposes to apply the definition of “social problem” by Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) to male violence on women and analyses the role that governmental campaigns may play in preventing it.

Section 3 and section 4 present the methodology and main results of textual analysis of the television campaigns broadcast by the Italian and Spanish Governments from 2009 to 2017, with the ultimate aim of comparing how the campaigns in the two Countries

portrayed the perpetrators of violence against women and what stereotypes about masculinity the campaigns intended to combat.

2. The role of governmental campaigns in the prevention of male violence on women as a “social problem”

Male violence against women has recently entered the public agenda of an increasing number of national governments, which nowadays classify the phenomenon in terms of “social problem”. Referring to the symbolic interactionist model by Blumer (1971), Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) claimed that social problems should be considered as “products of a process of collective definition” (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 53) rather than as “objective and identifiable societal conditions that have intrinsically harmful effects” (ibidem). Different actors compete in the public arena not only to make the problem enter the public agenda by competing for “space” into the public discourse but also to draw attention to a specific definition of the problem rather than to a different one.

Communication campaigns implemented by national governments as “claim-makers” (Loseke, 1999) serve these purposes by *a)* framing a phenomenon as a “social problem”, *b)* proposing specific definitions of the problem, *c)* identifying prospective recipients of the proposed definitions and *d)* providing recipients with subsequent solutions to tackle the problem. As discussed elsewhere (Polizzi and Oliveri, 2015), this is happening in the field of male violence against women, too. As a consequence, more and more governments have started using strategies and techniques of *social marketing* (Kotler and Roberto, 1989) in order to implement public campaigns that aim to be effective. As with other fields of social marketing, a governmental communication campaign or a single advertisement in the field of male violence prevention may aim at six different types of communication objectives (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961; Kotler, 1967):

- a) *cognitive objectives*, such as *a.1)* raising *awareness* towards the existence of male violence as a social problem, and *a.2)* spreading specific *knowledge* about the recognition signals for different types of male violence (e.g. physical, psychological or sexual violence);
- b) *affective objectives*, such as *b.1)* fostering *dislike* of ideas and behaviour which national governments as communicators labelled as “harmful” to women’s human rights, and *b.2)* fostering *preference* towards ideas and behaviour which the communicators consider “socially responsible” rather than ideas and behaviour which are considered “harmful”;
- c) *conative objectives*, such as *c.1)* raising *conviction* towards the adoption of ideas or behaviour the communicator frames as “positive” as well as raising *conviction against the maintenance* of ideas or behaviour framed as “negative”, and *c.2)* fostering *purchase*. In the field of social problems, the term “purchase” refers to the *stable adoption* of new ideas or behaviour framed as “positive” along with the *phasing-out* of those labelled as “negative”.

Traditional *target populations* addressed by governmental campaigns against violence on women are the victims, but more and more countries have started paying attention to different segments of population such as the male perpetrators of violent acts (Flood, 2011), as well as witnesses, local community and educators (e.g. parents, teachers, etc.).

As with any other type of social campaign, governmental campaigns against violence on women may use a wide range of *communication channels*, such as paper media, radio, television, websites and social media, depending on the media coverage and the type of communication goal they aim to achieve. For example, television covers wider sections of the population in comparison to other media. In addition, due to their short

format, TV public service advertisements seem to be more suitable to raise awareness towards the existence of male violence rather than giving detailed information about single types of it.

3. Research hypotheses and methodology

As already mentioned in the Introduction, this research, which is focused on Italy and Spain, is part of a larger study aiming to test the hypothesis that countries with different experiences of public intervention in the field of gender violence are implementing different communication campaigns, as it goes from *newcomer* to *intermediate* to *early-bird* countries. These differences can be directly observed in terms of: types of *male violence* addressed; modes of *representation of violent acts*, types of *target groups*; *frames of male violence* adopted by the Governments; and types of *communication objectives*. Given that Italy is commonly considered a *newcomer* country whereas Spain is an *intermediate* country, a comparative textual analysis was carried out on the public service adverts broadcast by the national Governments of Italy and Spain on television between 2009 and 2017. The choice of the 2009-2017 timeframe was based on the results from a previous study carried out by Polizzi and Oliveri (2015) on the television public service adverts broadcast by the Italian Government between 2009 and 2015. The study identified 2009 as the year in which some fundamental regulatory measures were introduced in Italy, such as those against stalking, and an increasing number of national campaigns against violence on women started to be launched by the Italian Government.

The present research analysed 26 TV public service adverts, 9 by the Italian and 17 by the Spanish Government. The adverts were retrieved from the official web sites of the Italian Department for Equal Opportunities (source: <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/controla-violenza-sessuale-e-di-genere/campagne-di-comunicazione/>) and the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equal Opportunities (source: <http://www.violenciagenero.igualdad.mpr.gob.es/sensibilizacionConcienciacion/campañas/violenciaGobierno/campañasAnteriores/home.htm>).

Television adverts were chosen as units of analysis, since television is the most widespread medium across the EU Countries (European Commission, 2016), it covers wider sections of the population in comparison to other media, and the larger study from which the present research derives aims to explore the representation of violence against women as spread to the general public. The indicators used to analyse the Italian and Spanish TV adverts were drawn from a longer list proposed by Polizzi and Oliveri (2015), and are the following:

1. *Types of male violence addressed by governmental adverts* (measured as binary variables). After comparing the classification of male violence adopted by the Italian Statistical Institute (Istat, 2007) to that of Spain (Gobierno de España-Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2015), four main possible types of violence were identified: 1.1) physical violence, 1.2) sexual violence, 1.3) psychological violence, treated in Spain as three separate types of violence, i.e. controlling behaviour, emotional abuse and economic violence, and 1.4) stalking.
2. *Modes of representation of violent acts*. They consist of two categorical variables: 2.1) the violent act is either showed in the moment when it occurs or just told since it occurred; 2.2) consequences of the violent act are either showed or not showed.
3. *Types of target audiences* (measured as binary variables), namely the types of recipients to whom each advert may be addressed. They were classified into 3.1) victims, 3.2) perpetrators, 3.3) witnesses, 3.4) other citizens (different from witnesses) acting as “influencers” (i.e. parents, teachers, ecc.), and 3.5) non-

governmental institutions or organisations engaged in fighting and preventing male violence against women (including the media system).

4. *Characteristics of the perpetrators of violence.* They were measured by variables such as age, socio-economic status and kind of relationship with victims.
5. *Frames of male violence against women as a “social problem”.* Social campaigns may propose numerous types of definitions of violence against women as a social problem. In the present research, the most common definitions of such problems were grouped into three general categories, which were measured as binary variables:
 - 5.1) the problem of “protecting victims’ human rights”, whose solution might consist of action aiming to help and support victims, whether they are women directly abused by men or children witnessing men’s violence;
 - 5.2) the problem of punishing the perpetrators by means of criminal sanctions or social punishments;
 - 5.3) the problem of “preventing violence against women”, which may consist of interventions at the educational and cultural level addressed to prospective victims, prospective perpetrators, prospective bystanders as well as the civil society as a whole.
6. *Gender beliefs and behaviour addressed by governmental adverts:*
 - 6.1) gender beliefs and behaviour that the adverts labelled as “negative”, asking their recipients to phase-out;
 - 6.2) gender beliefs and behaviour that the adverts labelled as “positive”, asking their recipients to adopt.
7. *Adverts’ communication objectives.* They were classified into the six types discussed in Section 2:
 - 7.1) raising awareness;
 - 7.2) spreading specific *knowledge*;
 - 7.3) fostering *dislike*;
 - 7.4) fostering *preference*;
 - 7.5) raising *conviction*;
 - 7.6) raising *stable adoption and/or rejection*.

The authors of this paper performed textual analysis by carrying out independent observations of the 26 governmental adverts retrieved from the web, finally building a shared observational grid. The Italian and Spanish data were then compared and analysed. Research results are summarised in Section 4.

4. Research results

The textual analysis of the Italian and Spanish Governments’ TV adverts shows noticeable differences between the communication strategies of the two countries. One of the most relevant differences refers to the *types of male violence addressed by the adverts*. In line with the research hypotheses, most of the Italian adverts deal with the issue of violence against women *as a whole* and rarely distinguish between specific types of violence (e.g. stalking), whereas the Spanish adverts distinguish and treat separately different types of violence, especially the psychological ones. Both the Italian and Spanish campaigns pay little attention to sexual violence. Consistently with these findings, both the Italian and Spanish campaigns pursue cognitive objectives, with the former focusing on raising *awareness* towards the general issue of violence against women and the latter aiming to increase *knowledge* about the recognition signals for

different types of male violence. As to other communication objectives, the Italian and Spanish campaigns share *knowing the Government helpline service* – i.e. a cognitive objective – and *using it* – i.e. a conative objective – as the most frequent. A relevant difference deals with the emotional dimension of communication – i.e. the affective objectives –, which the Italian campaigns seem to neglect, whereas the Spanish seem to emphasise by means of a *different way to represent victims and perpetrators as well as their violent relationships*.

In this regard, looking at the adverts' *target audiences*, female victims of violence, followed by witnesses in fewer cases, are the prevalent recipients of the Italian adverts. In line with the starting hypotheses, the Italian Government's adverts portray female victims as an undifferentiated group and hardly ever speak to perpetrators. A different strategy has been chosen by the Spanish Government, which aims to reach two additional target groups, i.e. *witnesses*, portrayed as fundamental support for victims, as well as *perpetrators*, whose socio-demographic characteristics in terms of age and relationship with the victim are clearly portrayed.

Focusing on the modes of *representation of male perpetrators*, textual analysis highlights differences between the two Governments' adverts. Whereas the Spanish campaigns show the perpetrator *in the foreground* with his face, voice, hands as well as his whole body acting against his victim, the Italian campaigns almost never show the perpetrator or, in case he is shown, images of his shoulders or his blurred silhouette are prevalent. These differences between the communication strategies of the two Governments affect the *representation of violent acts*, too, since the Italian campaigns *tell about* the violent relationship between perpetrator and victim, as well as about the consequences of violence, but they almost never *show* violent acts as while these acts are occurring. In contrast, the Spanish adverts show male violence acts at the exact moment when they are occurring, along with the consequences of violence.

Looking at the *frames of male violence* adopted by the two Governments, the Italian campaigns define the issue as a "female problem" more than a "societal problem", and implicitly portray the victim as the only person who can tackle it. In line with this frame, the Italian campaigns seem to fight stereotypes such as the beliefs that male violence is not a crime and a woman has the duty to stay with her man despite being abused by him. Differently from the Italian, the Spanish campaigns define more frequently male violence as a "societal problem", as it is evident from the slogan "*Si la maltratas a ella, me maltratas a mí*" ("If you abuse her, you abuse me") adopted by some of the most popular adverts. As a consequence, the Spanish campaigns frequently encourage people close to the victim as well as ordinary people to *take action* against violence by supporting the victim first-hand or seeking external help. In addition, the Spanish campaigns seem to fight subtle stereotypes such as that violent men are masculine, and their behaviour will not be punished by society. In line with this frame, the Spanish campaigns clearly seem to foster a cultural shift towards *new beliefs and behaviour*, such as the *idea* that habitual offenders do not deserve to be considered part of the society, and the subsequent *action* of social expulsion of the perpetrators that slogans such as "*Saca tarjeta roja al maltratador*" ("Give a red card to the abuser") encourage witnesses and ordinary people to do.

5. Conclusions

Textual analysis of the Italian and Spanish Governments' public service adverts broadcast on television showed noticeable differences in terms of types of *male violence* addressed, modes of *representation of violent acts*, types of *target groups*, *frames of male violence* adopted by national governments, as well as types of *communication objectives*. These

findings seem to support the hypothesis that governmental communication campaigns tend to be more tailored to specific target groups of population and more differentiated, as it goes from a *newcomer* country like Italy to an *intermediate* country like Spain. Further research is required to test this hypothesis, by including a larger number of European countries as well as by analysing governmental texts other than television public service adverts.

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