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Digital Video Advertising: Breakthrough or Extension of TV Advertising in the New Digital Media Landscape?

Odysseas Garganas

Cultural and Visual Studies Laboratory, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 541 24 Thessaloniki, Greece; odysseag@jour.auth.gr

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to shape the identity of digital video advertising in the new digital media landscape, focusing on whether and to what extent popular digital ads on social media are differentiated from traditional television ads in the context of the convergence of traditional and new electronic media. Content analysis was preferred for the study of popular advertising content in social media. In this respect, the differentiation of digital video advertising from its television counterpart is examined in terms of the properties and effects of the transmission medium itself on the advertising content and of the features of the digital advertising content itself. Out of the findings emerged that digital video advertising is still in a phase of adaptation/transition, consisting of only a potential breakthrough in the contemporary media environment, since it has not yet exhausted the possibilities offered by the internet and Web 2.0. Currently, digital advertising only partially incorporates and exploits the advantages of enriched, multimedia, interactive, and personalized content, characteristics that would potentially differentiate it to a greater extent from advertising shown in traditional media, especially television.

Keywords: digital video advertising; social media; broadcasting media; streaming platforms; YouTube; advertainment



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1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been the catalysts for the transition to the digital age, which started gradually with video games in the 1970s, continued with the penetration of home computers in the 1980s, and then the internet in the 1990s, while since the beginning of the 21st century, we have been experiencing the development and evolution of Web 2.0. The term, attributed to Tim O'Reilly, (2005, as cited in [Laudon and Traver 2014](#)) is used to describe the new upgraded generation of the World Wide Web, as it takes shape through online platforms that allow interaction among users. In particular, it is the set of those software-based applications and websites that allow average users with minimal technical knowledge not only to consume but to create, edit, and share information, news, and entertainment content online, with social media as their main vehicle ([Kim et al. 2019](#)).

Nowadays, more than 5.3 billion people, or 65% of the world's population, have access to the Internet, of which 4.95 billion are active users of social media ([Shewale 2024](#)). At the same time, the prices of IT and networking products fall dramatically, with mobile digital devices (smartphones and tablets) emerging as the fastest growing content consumption platforms and becoming easy-to-use entertainment hubs, shaping a mobile multimedia environment and literally overwhelming the buying audience ([Laudon and Traver 2014](#)). Further, time spent using digital media exceeds that spent watching TV, and time spent on mobile devices exceeds that spent on computers, with content consumption increasingly shifting to mobile devices. In support of this, over 60% of total internet traffic is generated from mobile devices worldwide, while at the same time, mobile devices drive 65% of e-commerce traffic, creating new opportunities for marketers to advertise, with global digital ad spending exceeding USD 600 billion in 2023 ([Lebow 2023](#)).

In this new media landscape, consumers have the possibility of easy, direct, and affordable access to digital content, whether it is e-born or digitized content of traditional media. Data, text, sound, and images are integrated into streaming platforms and then distributed anytime online as news and entertainment content to the consumer (Laudon and Traver 2014). This process is described by new media theorists Bolter and Grusin (1999) as remediation, in which legacy media interact and ultimately integrate with new media, as with films and television shows that are uploaded and reproduced on the internet. In this way, a new interactive, mobile (via mobile devices), and social (via social media) online world with ubiquity and global reach is rapidly developing, offering excessive digital content to the consumer.

To this end, since 2010, a small elite of multinational tech companies such as Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon have moved very quickly to control the digital content value chain, taking advantage of the fact that they already own the technological infrastructure and know-how. However, these purely technological players limited themselves to the distribution and sale of digital content rather than the production of original content, shifting the industry's focus to content marketing and distribution accordingly (Simon and Bogdanowicz 2012). Essentially, these global digital platforms, which initially at least did not have access to original media content, partnered with traditional media providers, creators, and production studios, acting as content redistribution networks. More recently though, they have gone beyond the distribution and sale of digital content and have further expanded their activities, competing directly with traditional media content providers in the online entertainment industry. Although traditional media still retain the lion's share in terms of the production of original content, their digital counterparts are seeing a much faster penetration, with global streaming platforms such as YouTube and Netflix emerging as leading distributors and producers of entertainment content (Budzinski et al. 2021).

In the context of the emerging digital entertainment content industry, digital marketing, and particularly digital advertising, plays a central role, not only as digital content but also as one of the key business models for digital transactions and revenue generation online.

2. Theoretical and Empirical Background

2.1. Overview of the Digital Marketing Literature

The widespread adoption of digital technologies and online social networks have been the major milestones that promoted the rapid development of digital marketing, innovating the way marketers engage with consumers. By deploying various digital platforms and ICT tools and devices (e.g., smartphones, social media, apps, etc.), organizations implement data-driven and interactive marketing, which provides a wider, often cross-cultural reach and cost-effectiveness (Petrescu et al. 2020). Hence, an all-encompassing definition of digital marketing could be: "the application of data, ICT-based technology (e.g., artificial intelligence), platforms (e.g., social networks), media and devices to extend the scope of marketing within both physical and virtual spaces, for the purpose of enhancing customer engagement" (Krishen et al. 2021, p. 2). There has been a remarkable rise in the use of social media, especially in the last two decades, that has increased the scope of digital marketing and led to the emergence of the social media marketing paradigm. Social media marketing aims at promoting goods/services and content on social media platforms that potentially target a far wider consumer base than traditional marketing (Varela-Neira et al. 2023).

In this context, the literature review in the current paper covered the main areas of interest related to digital, content, and social media marketing with a focus on digital advertising. It is worth mentioning that the increase in the number of articles published over the past two decades shows that digital marketing is still in the growth and diffusion phase and has not yet reached maturity. The period preceding the year 2000 and up to the year 2005 recorded fewer publications focusing on the adaptability of the Internet as a medium for advertising and retail/e-commerce, while from 2006 to 2010, there was a gradual increase in the volume of published literature. Then, from 2011 to 2015, in addition to the rapid increase in the number of publications, there was a diversification of research

streams mainly due to the introduction of smartphones and the wide adoption of social media for digital advertising and marketing. Finally, the period from 2016 onwards is described as a transformational stage and is predicted to reach maturity in the period between 2025 and 2030 (Krishen et al. 2021).

In the following table (Table 1), we summarize the major topics on digital marketing as detected in the international literature (Krishen et al. 2021).

Table 1. Major topics and most cited articles of digital marketing in the international literature.

Year	Major Topics	Most Cited Articles
Up to 2005	Customer trust, Internet marketing and advertising, Internet forums and reviews, customer satisfaction and loyalty (eCRM), interactive advertising	Hoffman and Novak (1996); Salomon and Koppelman (1992); Berthon (1996); Alba et al. (1997); Hamill and Gregory (1997); Hamill (1997); Novak et al. (2000); Liu and Arnett (2000); Mobasher et al. (2000); Childers et al. (2001); McKnight and Chervany (2001); Koufaris (2002); Srinivasan et al. (2002); Vander Heijden et al. (2003); Anderson and Srinivasan (2003); Pavlou (2003); Shankar et al. (2003); Corritore et al. (2003); Chen and Dubinsky (2003); Sawhney et al. (2005); Ko et al. (2005)
2006–2010	Customer trust, e-WOM, m-commerce, co-creation with customers, personalization, rise in online social network groups, online advertising	Chiu et al. (2006); Awad and Krishnan (2006); Gruen et al. (2006); Overby and Lee (2006); Dellarocas (2006); Dellarocas et al. (2007); Litvin et al. (2008); Duan et al. (2008); Mangold and Faulds (2009); Jansen et al. (2009); Valenzuela et al. (2009); Trusov et al. (2009); Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010); Hoyer et al. (2010)
2011–2015	Customer engagement, satisfaction, e-WOM, e-branding, e-commerce trust, CRM in social media, personalized advertising, social networks, big data analytics, virtual communities, and generation of co-creative content in social media marketing	Chu and Kim (2011); Hanna et al. (2011); Ye et al. (2011); Moe and Trusov (2011); De Vries et al. (2012); Kim and Ko (2012); Cheung and Thadani (2012); Sashi (2012); Brodie et al. (2013); Goh et al. (2013); Huang and Benyoucef (2013); Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013); Bolton et al. (2013); He et al. (2013); Kim and Park (2013); Filieri and McLeay (2014); Fang et al. (2014); Tucker (2014); Ashley and Tuten (2015); Ngai et al. (2015); Verhoef et al. (2015)
2016–2020	Social media marketing, digital branding, social media content using AI techniques, augmented reality and video advertising, celebrity or influencer endorsements in advertising, big data and data mining	Bello-Organ et al. (2016); BabicRosario et al. (2016); Salehan and Kim (2016); Hsiao et al. (2016); Akter and Wamba (2016); Chen et al. (2017); Xiang et al. (2017); Felix et al. (2017); Khan (2017); Kannan and Li (2017); Kapoor et al. (2018); Stieglitz et al. (2018); Kamboj et al. (2018); Kleis Nielsen and Ganter (2018); Shareef et al. (2019); Yen and Tang (2019); Arora and Sanni (2019); Martins et al. (2019)

While there has been significant growth in the volume of literature related to digital marketing and advertising since 2016, the research stream has not been thoroughly oriented to advertising content and its features, especially on social media. Customer satisfaction, customer co-creation of content and engagement, and, lately, AI and virtual reality applications in advertising have emerged as the most prominent research areas. Additionally, there is little debate on cross-media synergies that lack studies that compare direct advertisements on TV and the internet, creating a gap in the existing literature. Thus, the current paper seeks to contribute to this area by highlighting the similarities/differences between connectivity media by shaping the identity of digital advertising on social media.

2.2. Digital Video Advertising in the New Media Landscape

Back in the 2000s, Richards and Curran (2002, p. 74) defined internet advertising based on its traditional counterpart on the basis that it is found on the internet “as a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the recipient to take some action now or in the future”. However, the fact that Internet advertising has gradually incorporated all the features of Web 2.0 differentiates it from advertising in traditional media and even from Internet advertising prior to the upgrade of the World Wide Web, which essentially reproduced the narrative structures of traditional media. Since then, academia and industry have broadened its definition, using various terms interchangeably, such as online advertising (Barnes 2002; Truong et al. 2010), interactive

advertising (Cheng et al. 2009; Leckenby and Li 2000; Taylor 2009), and digital advertising (Lee and Cho 2020). In the current study, we adopt the term digital advertising since the proper way to understand advertising in the digital era involves first understanding the main characteristics of digital media. The most prominent attribute of digital media is interactivity, along with the advantages of enriched, multimedia, and personalized content. We therefore propose that digital advertising refers to “a message of persuasion that interacts with consumers through digital media” (Lee and Cho 2020, p. 4).

The rapid penetration of digital advertising is inextricably linked to the transformation of the entertainment industry, led by global streaming platforms, as a result of the widespread diffusion of the Internet. While the low bandwidth connections of the early Internet made it difficult to receive and share audio and video files, the upgrade to broadband has made it feasible and commonplace to distribute all forms of online content that now constitutes the majority of Web traffic. The explosion of the mobile devices market and the rapid development of streaming platforms for video and music have made the Internet a key source and a vast database for download and on-demand multimedia content, with users showing a willingness to subscribe for quality, portable, and easily accessible content. Whether it is information, entertainment, or even ads, high-quality video has become such a natural part of the web browsing experience that advertisers can use it to quickly interact with their audience, while inducing consumption (Chandrasekar 2018).

Online videos are the most consumed digital media and the most popular type of content on the internet, accounting for 80% of all web traffic, with 13% being live-streaming video (Cisco 2020). Indeed, browsing the Web today is almost monopolized by viewing an endless succession of videos, with 3.1 billion people consuming videos on the Internet on a daily basis (Shewale 2024). Based on this, 85% of businesses have already leveraged the use of video as a marketing tool, and there is a 95% increase in expenditure on video-based advertising (Hayes 2020). Moreover, 50% of people watch videos of the products and their demos before buying them, especially on social media (Ruby 2024). Modern-day consumers live in an increasingly omnisocial world in which social media intersects with most aspects of their lives through digitally enabled social interactivity in such domains as travel (e.g., TripAdvisor), work (e.g., LinkedIn), food (e.g., Yelp), music (e.g., Spotify), and more. Accordingly, virtually every step of a consumer’s decision-making process is prone to social media influence, activated for instance when consumers watch their favorite influencer exhibiting a new product on YouTube or when asking their Facebook friends for product information and recommendations (Kim et al. 2019).

In this context, consumers become more informed, empowered, connected, and digitally influenced than ever before. As they take control of marketing communications, it becomes clear that digital video advertising gradually becomes more than a mere extension of its television counterpart.

2.3. Digital Video Advertising versus Television Advertising

In the present study, digital advertising in video form is compared directly to traditional television advertising, since it is a common assumption in the literature that they share similarities due to, but also besides, their similar formats. Like TV commercials, digital video advertising is more effective when used with low involvement, hedonic products than with high involvement, utilitarian products. Specifically, advertising for low-involvement, hedonic products resulted in stronger attitudes toward the ad and brand, stronger purchase intentions, and a likelihood to opt in for more information (Stewart et al. 2019; Geuens et al. 2011). Content-wise, more complex narrative structures with clear influences from television fiction and cinema, enriched with increased doses of entertainment, prevail in advertising in both media. This is not a new trend, since media audiences have gradually become familiar with and aware of the rules of visual communication, maintaining a cautious attitude towards the media messages, with advertisers responding by refining their tools and avoiding direct guidance of consumers (Leiss et al. 2005). Advertising is increasingly merging with entertainment content in order to reach consumers with

more engaging messages, recruiting to this end emotional appeal, celebrities, and humor in both media (Kim et al. 2019; Hudson and Hudson 2006; Garganas 2021; Cruz-Silva and López-Paredes 2022). More than that, advertising content itself becomes more and more entertaining—in a broader sense though—as a means of experiencing not only enjoyment and hedonic pleasure but also human meaningfulness (Oliver and Raney 2011; Vorderer and Ritterfeld 2009).

However, there are some unique characteristics distinguishing digital video advertising from television advertising. Research findings focus on the narrative ability of digital video advertising, suggesting that longer-form and mid-roll in-stream ads tend to generate better memory effects, while digital video advertising intruding into the entertainment content and utilizing higher emotional appeals reduces ad avoidance and improves ad viewing in the context of the online skip ad culture (Kim et al. 2019). Henceforth, digital video advertising, as part of content marketing, is more effective than traditional advertising because the content is more relevant and engaging than TV ads. Unlike “buying” media in traditional advertising, the concept of “buying” audiences is imported in digital advertising, since it is more targeted to the audiences the marketers want their message to reach (Lee and Cho 2020). To sum up, digital video advertising has greater storytelling potential than television advertising, blurring the boundaries between promotional and entertainment content and thus being considered as entertainment content itself. Digital video advertising in social media, particularly, maximizes its reach, taking advantage of interactivity and upgrading to viral content, while at the same time, it becomes more targeted to the most appropriate audience through programmatic advertising (Malthouse et al. 2018; Garganas 2021).

Based on the assumption that digital video advertising and television advertising differ in terms of the attributes and properties of the transmission media that subsequently affect the content of the ads, the debate is extended by industry and academia to launching effective advertising campaigns across multiple media. As consumers get skilled at simultaneous media use, advertisers become increasingly eager to achieve cross-media synergies (Sheehan and Doherty 2001). Cross-media or multichannel synergies arise when the combined effect of several media activities in multiple channels creates added value beyond the sum of individual media efforts, with television and Internet advertising synergies being regarded as the most popular fit (Yamin 2018; Schultz et al. 2012). According to research, cross-media campaigns are considered more persuasive and more credible than a repetitive campaign through a single medium, since consumers tend to perceive each medium as an independent source of information (Chang and Thorson 2004; Voorveld 2011). Furthermore, marketers have recently attempted to integrate online and offline media, adopting an omnichannel approach for complete media convergence (Paredes et al. 2024) since reports from industry sources show that consumers respond better to integrated marketing campaigns, with social media taking a leading role in online advertising campaigns (Kotler et al. 2023; Yamin 2018; Kumar 2017; Lobschat et al. 2017). YouTube, the most popular digital video-sharing platform worldwide, was selected as the key data collection resource for the study of digital video advertising in the current research.

2.4. YouTube Advertising Platform

The vision of YouTube since its acquisition by Google back in 2006 has been to develop from being a purely online platform hosting mainly user-generated video content to gradually entering and, over time, gaining a strong foothold in the traditional media and entertainment industry (Cunningham et al. 2016).

To this end, from 2008, YouTube began an effort to upgrade the quality of its video content offerings by first reaching out to traditional media providers in the United States, such as Hollywood movie studios (Sony, Lionsgate Entertainment, MGM) and cable and television networks (NBC, BBC, CBS) to agree to provide content that has already been shown in the cinema and on television. Then, in 2010, they introduced an on-demand movie and TV series rental service (YouTube Premium) and in 2013, ran a funding program

for independent and well-known Hollywood artists, directors, and producers to produce online video content broadcast on 150 dedicated subscription channels. In 2017, Google launched a new type of Internet-based television network in the United States, seeking to reshape the TV and film industries. YouTube TV is a subscription service that competes directly with cable and broadcast TV for mass audiences and, of course, advertising, through which subscribers can watch more than seventy (70) TV and cable channels via the platform live or on demand. Today, YouTube TV, with over eight million paying subscribers (Mohan 2024), is the largest internet-delivered pay TV provider in the United States (Leichtman Research Group 2023). Furthermore, YouTube is the second-most popular social media channel after Facebook and the second-most visited website in the world after Google, with almost two and a half (2.5) billion monthly active users, constituting almost one-third of all internet users (Aslam 2020; Kemp 2023). This massive userbase provides a vast audience for advertisers, either to achieve reach or target specific niches since very few other advertising platforms can reach such a large audience, which makes YouTube the most prevalent and dynamic marketing tool worldwide. Thus, YouTube is the advertising platform of choice for many brands and marketers, with its global advertising revenues hitting about \$31.5 billion in 2023 and YouTube ads reaching approximately 30.9% of the world's population (Ceci 2024). It is no coincidence then that the business model that YouTube adopts is based mainly on revenue derived primarily from advertisements on viewed video content offered on the platform. Today, YouTube is the most popular advertising platform, with revenue derived from 598.3 million visits, paid social, paid search traffic, and the distribution of professional entertainment content (Collins 2024).

Given all this, the choice of YouTube as the most popular advertising platform and distributor of entertainment video content is a one-way option for the thorough study of digital video advertising.

3. Aim, Hypothesis, and Research Question

The aim of the current research was to shape the identity of digital video advertising in the new digital media landscape. To this end, we examined advertising messages, either digital or digitized from traditional media, uploaded to social media, with a special focus on the most popular foreign ads displayed on YouTube from 2014 to 2022, as ranked and published on "YouTube ads Leaderboard".

On the one hand, digital advertising in video form is directly compared to traditional television advertising based on the premise that they share similarities due to and besides their similar formats. On the other hand, digital video advertising and television advertising differ in terms of the attributes and properties of the transmission media, which subsequently affects the content of the ads. Under these assumptions, the research question addressed in this paper is formulated as follows:

RQ: Does digital video advertising constitute a breakthrough or simply an extension and continuation of traditional television advertising that is adapted and transferred to the digital field in the context of the process of convergence of traditional and new electronic media? In this respect, the differentiation of digital video advertising from its television counterpart is examined in terms of the properties and effects of the connectivity medium itself on the advertising content and of the features of the digital advertising content itself.

4. Methodology

Content analysis has evolved over time to become one of the prevailing research methods in the field of media and communication studies (Callcott and Lee 1994; Dahl et al. 2009; McQuarrie and Phillips 2008; Turley and Kelley 1997) and it was therefore selected as the most appropriate method for demonstrating the evolution of digital video advertising on social media in the years 2014–2022 to identify and examine the features and shape the identity of digital advertising compared to television advertising. In particular, we adopted the methodological approach of Neuendorf, defined as "the concise quantitative analysis of messages based on a scientific method focusing on objectivity, prior design,

reliability, validity, generalizability and testing of research hypotheses” (2002, p. 10). It is a multi-step process that requires the development of categories for coding thematic content, the training of specialized coders, coding of data by category, and statistical analysis in order to identify the frequency of specific explicit and implicit variables in the advertising content. A typical flowchart of the content analysis process based on Neuendorf’s approach follows (Figure 1).

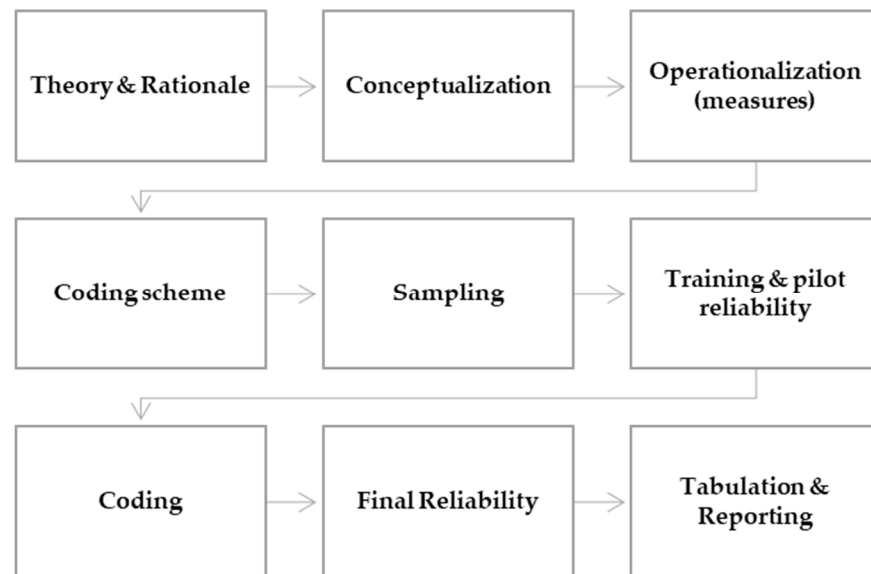


Figure 1. Neuendorf’s flowchart of the content analysis process (2002).

In the current research, we coded whether the ads in our sample were digitized or digital—i.e., the original transmission media—the ad duration, the most advertised product categories (explicit variables), and the appeal identified in the advertising content (implicit variable). An advertising appeal is defined as the directive act or statement embedded in a message that is designed and planned to motivate consumer action or, in other words, the promise of the special significant benefit provided by the product or service. In the current research, we adopt Albers-Miller and Stafford’s (1999) typology of appeals, which distinguishes between emotional and logical appeals and is based on Pollay’s list of 42 appeals (Pollay 1986) (Appendix A). The coding scheme variables are presented in the coding form below (Figure 2).

1	Coding scheme variables
2	Date of coding
3	Coder: 1 or 2
4	a/a: 1, 2 ... 360
5	Ad Title
6	url link
7	Year of broadcast: 2014 to 2022
8	Rank in YouTube Ads Leaderboard: 1 to 40
9	Ad Duration
10	Brand name
11	Product category
12	Transmission media: TV ad
	Digital ad
	TV adaptation
13	Advertising appeal: 1 to 42

Figure 2. Coding scheme variables.

Regarding the research sample, we proceeded with a convenience sample based on a selection of all readily available ads displayed on YouTube, the social network with the fastest and most dynamic penetration in the world, as the unique official source of data (Alexa 2020). In a convenience sample, it is the researcher who decides what units he or she deems appropriate to include in the final sample (Krippendorff 2018). In the current case, the primary criterion was popularity, that is, the main objective of this research was to analyze not just foreign advertisements found on YouTube, but the most popular ones. The YouTube ads Leaderboard ranks the most popular ads—digital and digitized—by user preferences based on an algorithm specially designed by Google, which takes into account the paid views, the organic views, the number of click-throughs, and the duration of viewing of the ad by the audience, i.e., the audience retention time (Google 2020; Strickland 2008). Coding the most popular ads on social media, on the one hand, lets us identify to what extent TV ads become viral in the context of media convergence and, on the other hand, helps us to shape the identity of digital video advertising based on the current social media trends. Therefore, a total of three hundred and sixty (360) popular foreign video ads displayed on YouTube from 2014 to 2022, as published on the global version of the YouTube ads Leaderboard (Google 2020), were recorded by two independent coders. Their chronological distribution was carried out proportionally—forty (40) most popular ads per year covering a total period of nine (9) years, from 2014 to 2022. To measure the final reliability in this study, Cohen's k coefficient was used to measure the percentage agreement between coders, with all results considered reliable since they reached 90% agreement (0.80 was initially chosen as the reliability standard).

However, this study acknowledges several limitations because even though it is an original and ambitious research project, it is also largely exploratory in terms of the selected method. Its originality lies in the fact that few studies that have researched online advertising through content analysis have been published. In fact, most of these have focused on the analysis of digital applications, websites, and blogs, with very few focusing on social media advertising (Okazaki and Taylor 2013). Nevertheless, the rich literature on quantitative analysis of advertising in traditional media has guided this research. Moreover, application of the research method to the digital field involved several challenges, especially in terms of sampling, which were magnified by the scarcity of similar references in the international literature. In general, the use of non-random sampling is often criticized in the international literature as undesirable due to lack of representativeness and inability to control data and generalize findings and is only used when no other options are available (Neuendorf 2002). In the current case, and since we have been studying popular ads, the use of a convenience sample was compulsory, even though the reliability and objectivity of the Google search algorithms used could be strongly questioned.

In summary, given that YouTube was selected as the data collection resource in the current research, all the available ads published on the YouTube ads Leaderboard from the launch of the service in 2014 to the last reporting year (2022) were recorded and analyzed.

5. Analysis and Results

The key finding that emerged from the research is that digital video advertising is still in a transitional/adaptation phase, where legacy media, such as television, is gradually being integrated into the internet in the context of the process of remediation of traditional media to new digital ones. As a result, most advertising messages are transferred unaltered from television to the internet after being digitized; furthermore, online advertising, as either digitized or e-born content, at least for the time being, largely reproduces the narrative structures of television advertising.

5.1. Product Categories

The product categories predominantly represented in popular advertisements on YouTube are consumer and semi-durable products of low or moderate consumer involvement in purchase decision-making. In particular, the most advertised categories in our

sample are electronic products (20%) and entertainment–culture–philanthropy services (20%), which are further organized into gaming, media, and non-governmental organizations, followed by alcoholic beverages (12%), personal hygiene products (12%) and sports equipment (12%). These findings (Table 2) confirm past research, which showed advertising for low-involvement, hedonic products as more popular and more effective in both traditional and digital media (Stewart et al. 2019; De Mooij 2007; Whitelock and Pimblett 1997).

Table 2. Most popular product categories in terms of frequency (%) of popular foreign ads.

Popular Foreign Ads			
Product Category	Sub-Category	Brands	%
Electronic products		Duracell, Samsung, Apple, Amazon, OPPO F7, Motorola, Playstation, Nintendo, T-Mobile	20
Entertainment–Culture–Philanthropy	Gaming	Super Cell, Pokemon, Lego	20
	Media	Youtube Music, FanPage.it, Google, Netflix, HBO, Disney+, Hulu, Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, Discovery+, Quibi, Peacock	
	NGO's	Ad Council, IRC	
Alcoholic beverages		Budweiser, Heineken, Mtn-Dew, Stella Artois	12
Personal Hygiene		Always, Procter & Gamble, Miss Dior, Durex, Dove, Gillette, Old Spice	12
Sports Equipment		Nike, Adidas, Reebok	12
Food products		Knorr, Gatorade, Skittles, Oreo, Doritos	10
Automotive products		Hyundai, Kia, Audi, GMC, Toyota	8
Home products		Mr Clean, Bosch	4

5.2. Transmission Media and Ad Duration

In the sample studied in the current research, the composition of the most popular ads on YouTube consisted of television commercials that were digitized and uploaded on social media (45%), television commercials with an online—usually extended—version (33%), and digital ads that were exclusively shown on the internet (22%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of popular foreign ads per transmission media.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Digitized TV commercials	50%	50%	60%	50%	50%	40%	50%	30%	20%
Digital versions of TV commercials	50%	30%	30%	30%	40%	30%	30%	30%	30%
Digital Ads	0%	20%	10%	20%	10%	30%	20%	40%	50%
Ad length (in min.)	2.00	2.10	2.00	2.05	2.10	2.10	3.05	2.15	2.20

In particular, almost half of all advertisements were first shown on TV and then—or in parallel—uploaded on the Web. These advertisements do not necessarily involve the placement of paid advertisements on the internet, but the uploading of popular TV commercials, usually on the brand's YouTube channel. This is a typical example of remediation, with television advertising being embedded on the internet while retaining its original narrative structure. In particular, these ads were created to be shown primarily on television, with the majority of them aired during the American Super Bowl, the biggest television entertainment show in the United States, which attracts massive TV audiences and consequently huge advertising budgets every year. Ads shown during sporting mega-events, such as the Super Bowl, are watched by millions of viewers and at the same time are rapidly

reproduced and spread on social media as viral content, in the context of an emerging viral culture resulting from the synergies between television and the internet.

The synergies that develop between television and the internet are more evident in the case of advertisements shown on both media, where the online versions are usually carried on television in a customized shorter-run version as part of a multi-channel media plan. The top positions on the YouTube Ads Leaderboard for the research period (2014–2022) were dominated by ads that aired on both media, especially as part of long-running campaigns (e.g., P&G, Budweiser, Nike). In particular, Nike ads, online gaming ads (e.g., Super Cell, Mobile strike, Pokemon), as well as spots created on the occasion of the Super Bowl (e.g., Always, Budweiser, Hyundai, Amazon) consistently stood out in terms of popularity. In this respect, television advertising often acts as a teaser for digital advertising, while social media hosts more comprehensive narratives through digital advertising. Typical examples are mini-movies by Nike, Apple, Gatorade, and Samsung, which were created initially with a view of being shown on both media and adapting the content to the potential of each medium. In the case of the campaigns by Nike, Apple, and Gatorade, the purpose remains entertainment, while in the case of the ads by Samsung launching the company's new mobile phone models, the online version becomes part of the consumer market research process (DMI 2020). More specifically, Samsung ads function more as product tutorials in video form, introducing a new narrative structure of promotional communication that succeeds, over time, and complements its television counterpart. In any case, the online, more narrative versions of TV commercials, whether they have informative/promotional or entertainment content, aim to enhance the brand's image and increase consumer loyalty and engagement with the brand.

The research sample is completed by also containing exclusively digital video ads, with 22% of them having been shown only on the Internet. These mostly include ads for online services (YouTube Music, FanPage.it, Google), online gaming (League of Legends, Clash Royale), and ads for streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO, Disney+, Hulu, Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, Discovery+, Quibi, Peacock), which have essentially dominated the YouTube ads Leaderboard from 2021 onwards. Content-wise, exclusively digital ads usually feature online celebrities (e.g., Oreo-Dude Perfect), ads with enriched interactive content that seek user engagement (e.g., Knorr), as well as ads by non-profit organizations with social content that may not have the potential to be shown on television (e.g., IRC). On top of this, the number of purely digital ads is increasing, with almost half of popular ads from 2021 onwards being aired exclusively online, foreshadowing the trend for the near future (Table 3).

As far as the duration of the ads under examination is concerned, according to indicative published data from Nielsen, the highest number of TV commercials in the U.S. remain at a 30-s duration (Friedman 2017). Similarly, the average duration per advertisement in the overall online sample (2014–2022) on YouTube is 2 min and 15 s, which in itself constitutes an important differentiating factor between the two media. Furthermore, when comparing the average duration of a television spot (30') with the average duration of the exclusively digital versions of the advertisements in our sample, there is an even greater increase in the difference in duration, with the most popular digital ads having an average duration of 3 min and 35 s, demonstrating that longer-form ads enhance the narrative potential of the internet compared to television.

5.3. Popular Advertising Content

It has been mentioned that both television and digital storytelling within the context of contemporary advertising are inextricably linked with the transition from hard-sell, simpler, and more explanatory rhetorical advertising structures to soft-sell, symbolic, and more complex forms of promotion within which borrowings from cinema and TV fiction are increasingly found in advertising messages. Advertisers, in an attempt to attract the attention of more cautious and demanding consumers, make more sophisticated messages, utilizing emotional appeals, enriched with increased doses of humor and entertainment

(Phillips and McQuarrie 2002). It is no coincidence that the appeal for enjoyment and adventure, which are directly linked to the intention to use humor, emerged as the dominant implicit content variables in the overall sample of the advertisements under examination. Furthermore, the widespread use of entertainment content is embedded in structurally and conceptually integrated narratives, at the heart of which is not the product, but the story itself. However, the concept of entertainment is expanding, especially in popular digital ads, to include both hedonic and non-hedonic elements. In other words, the advertising content is not limited to just pleasure incorporated with humor, action, and love stories but also meaning for the audience (Tamborini et al. 2010). Consumption of entertainment in advertising involves not only hedonic but also eudaimonic motives for personal expression, growth, and fulfillment (Oliver and Raney 2011; Vorderer and Ritterfeld 2009). Typical examples of this dual dimension of entertainment within the advertising context are the spots with social content found in the sample (Ad Council, Fan Page, IRC), which aim at satisfying different, deeper individual needs beyond superficial pleasure. Even more representative are the campaigns by Nike, Duracell, Gatorade, Pokemon, Always, Adidas, and League of Legends, which utilize appeals for independence, status, and productivity (Table 4).

Table 4. Most popular advertising appeals in terms of frequency (%) of popular foreign ads.

Popular Foreign Ads		
Advertising Appeal	Number of Ads	%
Enjoyment	57	16
Productivity	43	12
Adventure	43	12
Independence	43	12
Sexuality	29	8
Affiliation	29	8
Modern	22	6
Status	14	4
Technological	14	4
Community	14	4
Magic	14	4

“Stand up (Nike). . . you have to keep going and do what you want. . . face your fears (Always). . . don’t give up on your dreams (Gatorade). . . there are no crazy dreams (Nike). . . nothing can stop you (Always). . . nothing is impossible (Duracell). . . prove what you’re worth (League of Legends). . . you can do it (Pokemon). . . be the best (Nike)”, are some of the most characteristic slogans in the sample of most popular advertisement that together form a representative narrative of the broader conceptualization of entertainment.

In any case, the use of quality entertainment content, often comparable to other narrative genres, is considered imperative in the context of the online skip ad culture as a means of engaging and, above all, retaining audiences. The rapid penetration of mobile devices has led to entertainment content based on user interaction through contests and games within the advertising context (e.g., Oreo, Knorr). More than that, global campaigns, such as the award-winning Nike and Apple campaigns, are traditionally entrusted to well-known and experienced creators in the television and film industries, such as Spike Jonze and Guy Richie. Indeed, the further integration of these ads into long-running campaigns makes them timeless, with YouTube becoming a nostalgic space for the reproduction of entertainment content. In this way, digital advertising gradually becomes independent of TV advertising, considered as sponsored entertainment, oriented not so much to increasing sales as to building brand image and consumer engagement.

Next to that, online showbiz has developed, consisting of celebrities who have emerged and are active on social media, which operates in parallel with television. The idea of using celebrities is a well-known marketing strategy on TV (Knoll and Matthes 2017). So-called social media micro-influencers are influencers who are not as well-known as celebrities, but who have a strong and targeted follower base (Appel et al. 2020) and are often seen as experts on what they post and share on social media.

To sum up, the identity of digital video advertising, as it has recently begun to take shape and as it emerges from the sample under consideration in the present research, brings together the following characteristics: digital video ads are usually of long duration, with their narrative capacity a key defining factor that differentiates the two genres in contrast to the corresponding shorter form of television advertising. In this regard, combining the use of storytelling with the production of organic, and sometimes interactive, long-form and highly artistic entertainment content has become an effective strategy for brands that want to connect with their audience in the digital realm. In the context of cross-media synergies, this strategy also serves the objective of transmedia storytelling, as the process whereby ads are distributed across different media to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience that, depending on the medium, targets different audiences and serves different marketing objectives through different messaging.

6. Discussion

Historically, television has developed in parallel with advertising, forming an economically dependent relationship, with the viability of television being heavily dependent on advertising revenues and television content being financed by advertising (Leiss et al. 2005). Similarly, one of the key business models for digital transactions and revenues on the Internet is based on advertising. In fact, in the last decade, with the rapid penetration of digital technology and the parallel upgrading of the individual parts that make up the digital ecosystem (networks, devices, technological infrastructure, content), digital video advertising has experienced rapid growth, which inevitably places it in a process of correlation and comparison to television advertising due to their apparent 'external' similarity, at least in terms of the common format.

The separation between TV and digital advertising in the digital era is probably of minor importance since we are moving rapidly towards the complete convergence of traditional and digital media, and online and offline media activities. In this context, content flows across multiple media platforms, media industries integrate their businesses, and media audiences migrate online and offline in search of the desired type of entertainment experience, giving rise to new concepts, namely meta-marketing and ultra-mediations (Kotler et al. 2023; Paredes et al. 2024). Indicatively, modern consumers navigate across multiple screens daily, using two or more devices sequentially or simultaneously, something that affects their purchasing behavior, which varies accordingly. For example, it is quite common for a consumer watching a TV commercial to search for further product information on a smartphone and from there to move to a tablet to complete the purchase. In particular, smartphones and tablets are accessible at home and on the go, keeping the individual connected 24/7. Therefore, the more devices one uses, the more and closer to consumption ads one is exposed to and, the more purchases one makes (Laudon and Traver 2014). More than that, since entertainment is the most-consumed content on social media and streaming platforms (Cruz-Silva and López-Paredes 2022), digital advertising content has become more and more entertaining as a means of engaging and retaining audiences and responding to the needs of the same but more demanding consumers, especially in the context of the online skip ad culture. It is no coincidence that the most popular ads from 2014 to 2018 in our sample were online gaming ads, just like video games marked the transition to the digital age back in the 1970s, succeeded by ads on streaming platforms from 2021 onwards, with common ground entertainment in both cases.

Sponsored entertainment or "advertainment" has emerged from the merger of advertising and entertainment, integrating brand communication into entertainment content in

order to reach consumers with more engaging messages and in response to TV advertising saturation (Hudson and Hudson 2006). Advertainment varies according to the degree of brand integration in the entertainment content. At first level is product placement, where the brand is simply added to existing entertainment content. At the other extreme is sponsored entertainment, where the brand substantially determines and guides the creation of the entertainment content so that it develops around the brand. Somewhere in the middle is brand integration into the content, where the product/service plays an active role in the story plot. In the current study, Super Bowl ads fall into the category of typical, classic 15–30s ads broadcast by legacy media that attempt to be entertaining to grab the audience's attention. On the other hand, Nike and Apple mini-movie ads resemble commercials less and short films more; Oreo and Heineken ads are more like TV stand-up comedy shows, while online streaming platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple+, etc) substitute ads with movie trailers. Ultimately, the ads that utilize the social experiment technique (Knorr, Durex, Nestle, Nivea) resemble documentaries, integrating the testimonials of real people into a specific entertainment scenario.

In any case, the aim of sponsored advertising is to intrude into the entertainment content and become an integral part of the entertainment, rather than interrupting it, as traditional advertising does. Popular advertising, as sponsored entertainment, is possibly the most striking example of the convergence of the television advertising code with television fiction and film. In this context, there is no more appropriate media to accommodate the usually more narrative forms of sponsored entertainment than the internet and especially social media. The narrative capacity of digital advertising is the key defining factor that differentiates it from traditional television advertising. It is precisely this narrative capacity that differentiates popular advertising content shown on the Internet from the same content shown in other media. In particular, the combination of the use of storytelling with the production of quality entertainment content, on the one hand, defines and describes popular advertising content on the internet, and on the other hand, constitutes an effective marketing strategy in the digital field.

In conclusion, just as the overview of the literature highlighted the fact that digital marketing and advertising have not yet reached maturity, the current research confirmed that digital advertising is still in a transitional/adaptation stage regarding its evolution and the shaping of its own identity. Thus, focusing on the impact of the internet and mediating technology, digital video advertising can only be a potential breakthrough in the contemporary media environment, since it has not yet exhausted the possibilities offered by Web 2.0. Currently, online advertising only partially incorporates and exploits the advantages of enriched, multimedia, interactive, and personalized content, features that would potentially differentiate it completely from the advertising shown on traditional media, especially television, highlighting new kinds of digital storytelling. In support of this, the content analysis shows that, at least for now, almost 80% of the most popular ads on YouTube are TV commercials that are digitized and uploaded on social media because of the synergies that have developed between television and the Internet. Nevertheless, the research findings from 2021 onwards show that exclusively digital ads are increasing, accounting for 50% of the total and foreshadowing the trend of the near future.

7. Managerial Implications and Future Research

The current research falls within the field of interest of media and communication studies. In particular, the study contributes to the field of digital marketing, emphasizing the importance of a multi-disciplinary view of digital marketing. Inherent in any study on digital marketing are the content itself and the connectivity tools; both involve multiple disciplines, with computer science studies on the use of digital technologies, interactive marketing and advertising, information management, and business research as the most prominent ones. Similarly, the current research examines the effects of digital technology and digital media on popular culture, with a special focus on advertising content. The mapping of video advertising, especially on social media, can serve on the one hand,

as a research base for similar studies in the digital realm, and on the other hand, as an ‘observatory’ of the evolution and identity formation of digital advertising. Thus, it is essential to continue monitoring the evolution of digital advertising—by expanding the existing sample of popular ads on YouTube after 2022—especially in view of the rapid growth of digital content industries with streaming platforms now producing their own entertainment content. After all, advertising as sponsored entertainment finds on social media an ideal field to exhaust its potential. Furthermore, the selection of appeals for the analysis of implicit advertising content may provide a theoretical basis for future research. In particular, [Albers-Miller and Stafford’s \(1999\)](#) typology of appeals, which is based on Pollay’s theoretical framework, is commonly used as the most tested and reliable methodological tool for the cross-cultural study of advertisements. Possibly, the launch and adaptation of the specific framework in more generic research contexts in the digital realm could contribute to future research.

In addition, and with an eye on the near future, artificial intelligence and augmented reality have already been utilized by the industry for more interactive, low-cost, and mass-produced ads on social media in the context of meta-marketing. Specifically, AR and VR ads are reported to have higher engagement and click-through than traditional commercials, elicit positive brand attitudes, and stimulate purchase intentions. Additionally, these ads often blur the lines between advertising and retailing, since their placement on a variety of media, and especially social media, allows for interactive exploration of products through the provision of information on content, design, and reviews ([Wedel et al. 2020](#)). Thus, it seems pretty clear that social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, intend to carry their existing business model, which is based on using big data to sell targeted advertising, into the metaverse ([Kim 2021](#)). Zuckerberg recently confirmed that “Ads are going to continue being an important part of the strategy across the social media parts of what we do, and it will probably be a meaningful part of the metaverse, too,” along with a user experience that is interactive, immersive, and social ([Associated Press 2021](#)). In conclusion, digital video advertising on social media might currently be in a phase of transition/adaptation, retrieving more than a few capabilities and scope from traditional media; however, when digital technology reaches its limits in the near future, it is expected to constitute a brand-new field of technological and commercial creativity, shaping its own unique and dynamic identity, which is worth studying intensively.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Advertising appeals (Albers-Miller and Stafford 1999).

Rational Appeals		Emotional Appeals			
A/A	Advertising Appeal	A/A	Advertising Appeal	A/A	Advertising Appeal
1	Effective	1	Ornamental	15	Plain
2	Durable	2	Dear	16	Frail
3	Convenient	3	Distinctive	17	Adventure
4	Cheap	4	Popular	18	Untamed
5	Modern	5	Traditional	19	Freedom
6	Natural	6	Magic	20	Casual
7	Technological	7	Relaxation	21	Vain
8	Wisdom	8	Enjoyment	22	Sexuality
9	Productivity	9	Maturity	23	Status
10	Tamed	10	Youth	24	Affiliation
11	Independence	11	Safety	25	Nurturance
12	Health	12	Morality	26	Succorance
13	Security	13	Modesty	27	Family
		14	Humility	28	Community
				29	Neat

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