

Values in Crisis: The Reflection of Human Values in COVID-19 Advertising

Sigal Segev^a, Juliana Fernandes^{b*}, and Regina Ahn^c

^a*School of Communication, Florida International University, North Miami, United States;*

^b*Department of Advertising, University of Florida, Gainesville, United States;* ^c*Department of Strategic Communication, University of Miami, Coral Gables, United States*

Abstract

Drawing on Schwartz's theory of basic values, this content analysis explores COVID-19 pandemic-themed advertising published globally between March 2020 and July 2021. Given the magnitude of this health crisis, this study analyzes the extent to which the themes of pandemic ads reflected distinct values categorized in the four value clusters (conservation, self-transcendence, openness to change, self-enhancement). An analysis of 870 pandemic ads revealed that the majority of ads reflected conservation and self-transcendence values rather than self-enhancement and openness to change values. Specifically, security and benevolence were the most dominant values throughout the entire period under study with an uptick of hedonism as the pandemic evolved. Similarly, findings reveal distinct value-appeal combinations, so ads with conservation values employed rational appeals and ads with self-transcendence values employed emotional appeals. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed in terms of the institutional role of advertising in reflecting prevalent societal values or leading a change.

Key words: Pandemic advertising; COVID-19 advertising; Schwartz's values, content analysis.

*Corresponding Author

Juliana Fernandes, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of Advertising

College of Journalism and Communications

University of Florida

Weimer Hall 3056

E-mail: juliana@jou.ufl.edu