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Peace for Sale: An Analysis of IKEA's *Efectos Colaterales* Advertising Campaign in Spain

Abstract

This study examines how an IKEA advertising campaign in Spain titled *Efectos Colaterales* ("Collateral Effects") interacts with structural violence and socio-cultural peace in the country. For this investigation, we conduct a visual analysis on all four advertisements comprising *Efectos Colaterales*. While the campaign was found to effectively utilize humor and several other narrative techniques to portray a lifestyle adhering to the brand's identity, its storyline implicitly makes the customer solely responsible for attaining this aspirational lifestyle, thereby ignoring the institutional and socio-political realities that currently limit a substantial portion of the population's ability to obtain affordable housing. This article draws attention to the importance of studying truth claims embedded in everyday advertising and the ways in which these shape our construction and understanding of what a peace culture—or a lack thereof—could potentially look like.

Keywords: peace culture; structural violence; IKEA; advertising; housing crisis; Spain

Peace for Sale: An Analysis of IKEA's *Efectos Colaterales* Advertising Campaign in Spain

Peace, in today's world, is increasingly couched in terms of ceasefires, treaties, and negotiations. This leads to an understanding of peace as merely the absence of conflict. But what are the pre-existing conditions of these wars? What are the latent structural and social tensions at play before bullets are fired? What are the messages circulating in society prior to the escalation of conflicts? More importantly, what are the values attached to these messages, and how are these presented in the media? These are the kinds of broad questions, we suggest, that need to be raised for understanding peace as an ideology, one which has been largely absent from mainstream Western media ever since the conception of capitalism 400 years ago. As Smoker and Groff (1996) note, peace exists across many layers, and the deeper it is ingrained, the more sustainable it becomes. This article draws on the work of scholars such as Smoker and Groff to qualitatively examine the construction of a "peace culture" (or a lack thereof) in advertising. It presents a case study of the Spanish IKEA campaign *Efectos Colaterales* ("Collateral Effects") against the backdrop of the prevailing housing crisis in Spain (Romero, 2022). Our objective is not to demonize advertising or the corporations behind it, but rather to offer a moral critique by drawing attention to the messages, values, and truth claims disseminated through and embedded in the media.

One of the dimensions of peace, according to Smoker and Groff (1996), is the notion of "positive peace" as the absence of "structural violence" (p. 4). Structural violence corresponds to avoidable deaths, suffering, or injustice that occur due to a lack of structural systems and opportunities that ensure minimum quality-of-life requirements for all members of society (Smoker and Groff). As such, this type of violence could be argued to take place in countries where citizens still die because of a lack of accessible healthcare, but also in societies where access to housing, education,

and nourishment is in any way falling short of what it should be due to institutional failures in addressing these structural weaknesses. Under this rubric, a lack of affordable housing in Spain exemplifies “structural violence,” one that has profound implications for the promotion of positive peace.

As a multinational conglomerate designing and selling furniture, household goods, and related services, IKEA launched its *Efectos Colaterales* campaign in Spain in September 2023 (IKEA, 2024). The brand positions itself as one offering “well-designed, functional, durable, affordable, and sustainable home furnishing solutions to people with big dreams and thin wallets” (IKEA, 2025). The *Efectos Colaterales* campaign consists of four advertisements, or “spots” (Serra and González, 2024, p. 110), which, in a humoristic vein, depict the “side effects” of purchasing IKEA furniture: having guests at home who overstay, overuse, or take advantage of this furniture. This campaign is studied within the context of the lack of affordable housing in major city centers of Spain (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2022; Romero, 2022). We conduct a visual analysis of the spots to suggest that, while the campaign effectively utilizes humor and several other narrative techniques to showcase a lifestyle that adheres to the brand’s identity, its storyline implicitly positions the consumer as solely responsible for attaining the aspirational lifestyle portrayed in the campaign. In this way, the campaign fails to consider the institutional and socio-political realities that currently limit Spaniards’ ability to obtain affordable housing. Through this failure, we argue, the *Efectos Colaterales* campaign hinders positive peace advocacy in favor of a narrative which potentially enables private, capitalistic gains.

Peace Culture and Theory

A growing body of literature has explored the communicative aspects of peace (e.g., Bratich, 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2020; Lynch, 2014). Much of this scholarship,

however, tends to conceptualize peace as merely an antithesis of war. For example, peace and conflict studies scholar Johan Galtung (2006) focuses on the news media to define “peace journalism” in contrast to “war journalism,” noting that the former explores “conflict formation” with a “win-win” orientation and the latter focuses on “conflict arena” with a “us-them” representation (p. 1). While such conceptions of peace are undeniably relevant, they elide the finer dimensions of peace, whose absence can, at its worst, gradually invert the broader category of peace into war. We therefore suggest that it is instructive to study the constituting elements of peace—a theoretical maneuver enabled by Smoker and Groff’s (1996) interpretation of peace culture.

As such, the term “culture” carries a freight of meanings in different fields such as anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Parsons, 1972; Williams, 1976; Narayan, 2017). In this article, we follow Smoker and Groff’s (1996) interpretation of culture as “common symbols, rituals, and hero figures shared by a group of people, based on a set of values and underlying assumptions about reality” (p. 3). When prefixed with “peace,” the phrase points to the myriad articulations and manifestations of peace. Notably, Smoker and Groff propose a typology to unpack the term “peace.” In their framework, peace is divided into six layers: Absence of War, Balance of Forces in the International System, Negative and Positive Peace, Feminist Peace, Holistic Gaia-Peace, and Holistic Inner-Outer Peace (see Table 1). A “peace culture” is created through the successful pursuit of peace across all six layers.

[Table 1 about here]

As shown in Table 1, Negative and Positive Peace (the most relevant dimension in our investigation) is the first layer in the framework that departs from observable, state-related dynamics, delving into deeper layers of peace. Smoker and Groff (1996) invoke Galtung’s notion of “structural violence” to operationalize peace at this layer.

Galtung (1969) proposes that “negative peace” is the absence of war and “positive peace” is the absence of structural violence. Under Galtung’s assumption that violence is present when an environment hinders people’s ability to fulfill their somatic and mental realizations, structural violence refers to the processes by which these limitations persist due to structural factors (Galtung, 1969). In this layer, peace is thus present both in its negative and positive valences. In addition, when structural violence, such as a lack of affordable housing, only seems to affect a particular segment of the population (such as lower-class or racial minority groups), it may be intertwined with what Galtung (1990) refers to as cultural violence: the ways in which symbolic, linguistic, religious, and ideological elements of a culture are used to justify and legitimize structural violence. As a mode of symbolic communication, advertising may latently and patently serve as a vehicle for both these forms of violence, as we show later in this article through the case study of *Efectos Colaterales*. In this sense, a peace-oriented study of advertising pushes previous consumer ideology discussions into a peace-building continuum framework in which media’s role can be further explored.

Cultural Hegemony and Moral Economy in the Context of Advertising

If culture is understood through Smoker and Groff’s (1996) framework, any form of influence that media have on shaping attitudes toward socio-political issues, including those related to the formation of a hypothetical peace culture, could therefore be seen in terms of the construction of *culture* in general. This warrants an examination of the “set of values and underlying assumptions about reality” (Smoker and Groff, p. 3) that undergird culture. To that end, we contend that the concept of “cultural hegemony,” originally coined by Antonio Gramsci, is useful.¹ Cultural hegemony refers to “when an ideology becomes so normalized that it is difficult or even impossible to reflect on it” (Hickel, 2020, p. 176). In the case of advertising, if we deem its primary objective to

encourage the purchase of products and services, then the dominant ideology that exists within advertising is that of consumerism, which is necessary for the existence of capitalism—the leading economic system worldwide—as we know it.

According to Hickel (2020), consumerism in modern society is closely related to the growth principle, the idea that an economy needs to constantly grow and expand to be considered successful. This principle of growth has become so natural in public discourse that it seems unfathomable to propose reducing growth, a dynamic that positions “growth” under the influence of cultural hegemony. The problem, Hickel (2020) argues, resides in the fact that nothing in nature is made to grow endlessly. He cites the example of cancer as a condition that results from the uncontrolled reproduction of cells in organisms. Similarly, he points out that the growth imperative under capitalism means that the economy needs to grow by two to three percent annually for companies to record profits, which result in the global economy duplicating its size every 23 years—a process that has put severe pressure on Earth’s natural resources and raw materials needed to sustain this level of production (Hickel, 2020).

Under capitalism, advertising has a foundational role to play, whether by generating the need or satisfying the demand for commercial products. As Ewen (2022) would have it, according to the logic of advertising, “people are what they own” and “one’s quality as a person is directly proportional to one’s ability to buy” (p. 82). Hesmondhalgh (2017) offers the concept of “moral economy” as a vantage point to assess advertising within capitalism. Building on Sayer’s (1999) work, Hesmondhalgh defines moral economy as the way in which economies are permeated by values and ideals “regarding the rights and responsibilities of individuals and institutions, and qualities of goods, services, and environment” (p. 206). In this regard, Hesmondhalgh suggests, even the economy nowadays could be considered a moral economy. A moral

economy *approach* considers “the moral values informing particular economic arrangements and institutions and providing reasoned evaluation of them” (p. 206).

While Hesmondhalgh’s research points to economists Amartya Sen’s (1999) and Martha Nussbaum’s (2006) notion of “capabilities” as a means of infusing the moral economy approach, our study aims to show that Smoker and Groff’s (1996) ideas on peace culture, despite being nearly three decades old, can fulfill a similar role.

Taken together, the insights from scholars such as Smoker and Groff (1996), Hickel (2020), and Hesmondhalgh (2017) are relevant to our study by highlighting the important role that advertising plays in implementing collective desires and ideals into the social psyche. These ideas put into perspective the extent to which consumerist pillars such as growth have taken hold of mainstream societal narratives. While this process is likely composed of a delicate interaction between political, economic, and social factors, our study focuses on how the symbolism and messages communicated in advertising interact with issues directly related to the lack of peace at its structural level, in this case, the housing crisis in Spain.

Housing Crisis in Spain as a Form of Structural Violence

Lately, Spain’s housing crisis has been a topic of discussion in national news media (e.g., Jones and Burgen, 2025; Villa, 2025). It has also led to public protests across major cities in the country. According to Idealista (2023), housing prices per square meter in Spain have increased by almost 50 percent since 2016, reaching 2,016 euros per square meter in October 2023—a number almost as high as that of 2007, right before the global financial crisis and the plummeting of the market. While this figure is significant, what makes the situation more delicate is the fact that the average salary of Spaniards has only increased by 16 percent in the same period (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2022). This indicates that the purchasing power of many Spaniards is

growing at a much slower rate than the prices in the housing market. Renting a dwelling requires between 73 and 109 percent of the salaries of young people aged 16-29 (Romero, 2022).

The youth are not the only population segment affected by this crisis. Since 2012, the number of people admitted into homeless shelters has gone up by nearly 25 percent (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2022). Most people in these shelters are aged between 45 and 64, of whom about 42 percent attribute losing their job or home eviction as causes for homelessness (Instituto Nacional de Estadística). These numbers only refer to people taken into designated shelters, indicating that the problem of homelessness likely persists beyond these shelters and into undocumented cases of people struggling to find residence.

The lack of affordable housing is interpreted as a form of structural violence because it is a systemic impediment to people's right to safe, dignified housing—one that is mentioned in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals Agenda and Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution (Markousis and Ragusa, 2024; Spanish Constitution, 1978). The “structural” aspect stems from the idea that it is an issue that should be the government's responsibility to address (Pareja-Eastaway, 2025), whereas the “violence” derives from the consequences of neglecting the issue: homelessness and inadequate living conditions. Once structural violence is understood as part of the peace-building framework, Spain's housing crisis and its interaction with media can be studied as an issue not only in political and economic terms, but also along social and ideological axes.

Literature on this issue is not limited in quantity (at least in Spanish-language scholarship), but in theoretical scope, with a noticeable lack of sociological approaches. According to Markousis and Ragusa (2024), research focused on the systemic issues

underlying media-influenced social issues augments perspectives that economic or historical analyses may overlook, as the latter tend to focus on “individual characteristics and conditions rather than social systems” (p. 2). This perspective resonates with the aims of our investigation, as it is expected that by shedding light on the interconnections between housing, media, and positive peace, we contribute to the development of a more robust theoretical framework for inquiry. Informed by these perspectives, we posit the following research question: How does the IKEA advertisement campaign *Efectos Colaterales* interact with structural violence and socio-cultural peace in Spain?

Using Smoker and Groff’s (1996) peace-culture six-layered framework as a reference, this study will explore the aforementioned research question focusing on the third layer of peace; specifically on Positive Peace as “No Structural Violence.” Drawing on Hesmondhalgh’s (2017) discussion on the moral economy, as well as Gramsci’s (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, we suggest that contemporary advertising and media operate mainly within this layer of peace given their power as a carrier of cultural values and ideals. Conducting this study under the lens of the peace-culture framework intends to incorporate a potentially useful yet currently underutilized tool to assess the impact of these forms of media across layers of interest.

Sample and Method

Present in around 63 countries worldwide, products in IKEA stores are often available for customers to interact with and test, making the brand known for providing an immersive in-person shopping experience. The products’ design is often minimalist and cohesive with one another, making an IKEA “aesthetic” relatively identifiable after limited exposure to the brand. Under our understanding, the IKEA aesthetic is one which transmits tidiness and organization (visually, through their attention to minimalist

and refined designs; and functionally, through their creative storage solutions) and is often presented in soft, pastel color palettes. This aesthetic is conveyed through ads, catalogues, and other forms of audiovisual media. The campaign explored in this analysis is called *Efectos Colaterales*. This campaign consists of four 20-second spots, which were aired in waves starting from late 2023 (IKEA, 2023). Given that they are videos, the spots were predominantly intended to play on television and digital media platforms. However, customers would have also encountered extracts and references to the campaign in formats adapted to in-store advertising and email (El Publicista, 2023). While the campaign may be considered a very small slice of the Spanish advertising landscape—and therefore a limitation of the study—we argue that, collectively, the four spots are well-suited for a fine-grained qualitative analysis, as we show in the next section. Such analysis prioritizes depth over breadth (Patton, 2015), an emphasis that is appropriate given the space constraints of a journal article. To facilitate easy identification, we have assigned made-up names to each of the four spots: *The One-Night Stand*, *The Shower Singer*, *The Couch Invader*, and *The Cooking Mom* (IKEA, 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d). The storylines of the spots are summarized below as a prelude to the analysis.

The One-Night Stand begins with a man organizing his clothes in an IKEA closet. After the camera zooms out, viewers notice that the room belongs to a young woman. The man has been her date from the night before, and now he refuses to leave and is making himself “too comfortable” thanks to the IKEA furniture, even asking the woman if she wants to “start watching a television series together afterward” toward the end of the spot. We last see the woman visibly annoyed and complaining to IKEA for not specifying this potential “side effect” when buying the closet (IKEA, 2024a).

The Shower Singer features a man sitting on a toilet in a large bathroom while his brother showers behind closed curtains, singing along to the rhythm of a reggaeton playing through IKEA's impermeable speaker. The host tells the audience that ever since the speaker arrived, his brother has started calling himself *Papi Villano* ("Daddy Villain") artistically and cannot stop singing in the shower. Toward the end of the spot, the host reaches for earplugs, complaining to IKEA for not mentioning this potential side effect when purchasing the speaker (IKEA 2024b).

The Couch Invader introduces a man who, after buying an IKEA pillow, is meant to host his nephew for "only a few days." The nephew is shown slouching on the couch, deeply asleep. Meanwhile, the man arranges some of his other IKEA furniture, telling the audience that those "few days" have turned into two weeks, as he complains to IKEA for "not including this in the instructions" (IKEA, 2024c).

In *The Cooking Mom*—the fourth and final spot in *Efectos Colaterales*—a woman is seen cooking lentils in an IKEA cast-iron pot. As the camera zooms out, her daughter sits at the kitchen table, explaining that ever since her mother purchased the pot, she has been making lentils non-stop. Visibly annoyed, she asks IKEA if, by any chance, they provide instructions on what to do with so many lentils, as her mother emerges from the kitchen with yet another serving (IKEA, 2024d).

[Figure 1 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

[Figure 3 about here]

[Figure 4 about here]

We conducted a visual analysis of these spots. According to Pauwels and Manny (2020), visual analysis rests on “the premise that valid and unique insights into culture and society can be acquired by carefully observing, analyzing, and theorizing its [the spot’s] visual dimensions and manifestations: visible behavior of people and aspects of material culture” (p. 15). We therefore attend to how the characters are portrayed in the spots, as well as to the context in which they are embedded. For the latter, we examine “semiotic resources” in design, clothing, and composition to communicate goals (Ledin and Machin, 2019). We particularly focus on design and composition, and to a lesser extent on linguistic aspects. To operationalize this analysis, Ledin and Machin (2019) identify categories under which content can be interpreted: representation, presentation, and truth claims.

Representation concerns the framing of space by objects and shapes, as well as what these suggest about the overall dimensions of the space, and the ways in which objects within it interact—for instance, open curtains and doors suggest a transition into another space (Ledin and Machin, 2019). Insights into how objects and space interact are employed to uncover deeper, underlying meanings about the relationship IKEA expects to establish between its consumers and its furniture, which makes “representation” much more than a purely aesthetic judgment. Presentation refers to the way the advertising appears in the catalogue, as well as the social codes and “lifestyle” it conveys through the speaker’s personality (Ledin and Machin). Lastly, truth claims are the elements of reality that become encoded through the interaction of elements, individuals, and contextual cues in the advertisement (Ledin and Machin). These three elements are analyzed in our investigation with the aim of identifying key interactions and overlaps between them and of examining how they might engage with messages related to structural violence in housing.

This visual analysis allowed us to explore the theoretical application of Smoker and Groff's (1996) ideas, particularly in the ways meaning is constructed in the videos. The spots were extracted from YouTube, where they are publicly available. The first author viewed them individually and organized the raw notes and findings into a chart. The second author validated the findings after reviewing these videos. This entailed the second author watching the videos and exchanging the interpretations made with the first author in writing. In most cases, the interpretations of the two authors aligned with each other. Any discrepancies such as whether the layers of peace or presentation styles in the spots being mutually exclusive were resolved through discussion. This enabled the authors to, among other things, enhance transferability, that is "abstracting similarities" across comparable contexts (Drisko, 2025, p. 103). Each video was thus watched multiple times and at varying speeds, depending on whether the category under analysis relied more on visual, auditory, or narrative cues. Although the sampled content is pertinent to the issue, it by no means constitutes a monopoly of advertising related to housing in Spain. Therefore, the findings are not representative of the totality of the advertising ecosystem. Our investigation is to be understood more as an introduction to the concepts and a new, relevant way to utilize a theoretical and methodological framework to conduct research on important social issues.

Analysis

As stated earlier, we organize our analysis through Ledin and Machin's (2019) categories for interpreting content: representation, presentation, and truth claims. Ledin and Machin, furthermore, note framing as a strategy, one that is concerned with the way objects and spaces on scene are structured and visually presented to the audience. Following this scheme, we analyze and explain concepts such as rhyming and interaction in the following sub-section. Overall, it can be argued that the campaign's

framing is consistently concerned with showing a spacious, highly integrated, IKEA-coded living space.

Representation

All four spots display high levels of “rhyming,” which refers to the way objects “are connected through the use of common elements” (Ledin and Machin, 2019, p. 8). Whereas the first two spots (*The One-Night Stand* and *The Shower Singer*) depict rhyming particularly concerned with the IKEA branding via the predominance of a bright blue and yellow color palette, the third and fourth spots (*The Couch Invader* and *The Cooking Mom*) show a type of rhyming that conveys an aspirational lifestyle environment, as evidenced through the predominant wooden and dark furniture. As a cohesive unit, the rhyming seems to aid a narrative in which the IKEA brand is first introduced for awareness, and then attached to values such as elegance, quality, and professionalism in the last two spots.

The framing of all four spots communicates a spacious living space in relation to the country’s housing context. To expand on this context, we analyzed the renting offerings inside Madrid’s M-30 highway on Spain’s dominant housing platform *Idealista*. The M-30 highway is a reference often used to talk about the capital’s central area. As Spain’s capital and biggest city, Madrid serves as a focal example of cities affected by the housing crisis discussed in the literature. Given that the median income for 25–29-year-olds was found to be around 1949 euros, and for those under 25 years was approximately 1249 euros, we restricted our search to housing offerings for less than 1000 euros a month within the previously established M-30 boundary. (*Idescat. Anuario Estadístico de Cataluña. Salario Bruto Anual. Por Sexo, Grupos de Edad Y Nacionalidad.*, n.d.). Our findings suggest that, out of the cheapest 150 listings from a total of 312 listings under 1000 euros within the designated area, the average housing

size offered was 32 square meters for an average price of approximately 860 euros (see Figure 6). This reference for dimensions is provided as a context within which our following interpretations of sizing and spaciousness in the advertisements should be understood.

In *The One-Night Stand*, the amount of furniture and the separation between each suggest a large room, and the view from the window indicates a high floor. In the case of *The Shower Singer*, the two sinks visible on screen make a similar suggestion. Likewise, in *The Couch Invader*, the setting appears not only spacious and luxurious but also integrated with an adjacent area resembling a workroom, implying that the main room of the house is located elsewhere. Besides the technical advantages of filming in large interiors, the spacious living spaces portrayed in these IKEA advertisements fit a diverse array of product offerings, which are price-tagged toward the end of each spot and introduced into the frame (a technique investigated later in this article). The most compact setting appears in *The Cooking Mom*. Even so, the cabinets and kitchen utensils suggest a bigger kitchen than average. The size of the table and the placement of wall-mounted items indicate a smaller space in comparison to the other three spots.

In terms of “interaction”—the way people communicate, whether verbally or perceptually (Ledin and Machin, 2019)—all four spots share a similar structure. To understand this, it is important to first examine the characters in the campaign. Each spot generally centers its story around two main characters: the host and the invader. The host is a person who, according to the four spots, has bought an IKEA product recently and lives in an already IKEA-coded living space. Conversely, the “invader” is someone (often a family member) who benefits from the host’s purchase and, in a sense, takes advantage of it, whether by overstaying, overusing the item, or otherwise bothering the host. The only exception to this dynamic occurs in *The Cooking Mom*, in

which the “invader” is the mother who bought the pot and now repeatedly cooks lentils for her daughter, the host. Nonetheless, in all spots it is the main protagonist who interacts with the audience, while the “invader” in each storyline appears oblivious to what is happening. Interaction in the campaign is mainly one-directional, because while the audience cannot respond to the hosts, the hosts themselves also ignore their respective “invaders.” In this sense, the audience is made complicit to the “hosts” — which are also IKEA customers—in all spots through privileged access to their thoughts.

Presentation

A close reading of the four spots reveals an “imbalance,” a narrative in which the protagonist attempts to fulfill a need or solve a problem (Ruiz-Collantes and Sanchez-Sanchez, 2019). This is not explicitly stated in any of the four spots, but is inferred from the storyline. In *The Cooking Mom*, for example, the imbalance arises when the mother decides to purchase the pot to cook more pot-based dishes. In connection with the peace culture theory and the concept of moral economy, this is the narrative stage in which an arguably “artificial” need is manufactured and presented by companies to persuade potential customers that they, like the characters on screen, also have a need that can be addressed through the purchase of the advertised products.

Moreover, in all four spots the narrative structure concludes with a “result” that is negative for the “speaker” but positive for the “invader.” In *The Couch Invader*, the nephew’s outcome is positive because he finds a comfortable place to stay, whereas for the uncle it is seemingly negative, as he now must deal with an unsolicited guest for an extended period. Likewise, in *The Cooking Mom*, the mother thoroughly enjoys being able to cook lentils for her daughter at last, thanks to her new pot, but the daughter is irritated by having to eat lentils for several days in a row. While the negative outcomes

for the speakers are explicitly conveyed through dialogue, body language, and narrative cues, the fact that these outcomes end up indirectly bringing the characters “closer” to one another not only renders the protagonists’ annoyance humorous but also positions IKEA as a brand that fosters closeness among loved ones. IKEA products in the spots thus serve as “the cement by which happy family or group bonds will be achieved” (Ewen, 2022, p. 93).

Beyond the incorporation of aspirational values, these spots stand out for their portrayal of a refined and minimalist taste. In popular culture, this type of visual identity is termed an “aesthetic style” (Westwing, 2025). Although there are many ways of “being aesthetic,” it generally involves meticulous attention to the placement and cohesion of objects and colors, whether in decoration, fashion, or social media usage. Because of its emphasis on refinement, this style may be associated with the upper class and perceived as denoting higher quality. This association could explain why a brand like IKEA might seek to adhere to this type of visual representation. Nonetheless, it raises questions about the extent to which individuals who do not conform to (or are excluded from) the dominant “aesthetic” style, or from the social class in which this aesthetic is validated, can relate to the possibilities presented by the campaign.

Truth Claims

According to Ledin and Machin (2019), truth claims are elements of reality that are coded through visual representations and media narratives. Although each spot engages with a diverse array of truth claims about gender, age, or sex in the Spanish society, our analysis focuses on identifying truth claims related to the housing situation. Many of these truth claims are concerned with identifying resources or elements that mold reality, adapting them into the IKEA agenda for this campaign. The most recurring truth claim is the process by which the lifestyle and spaces portrayed on screen are

presented as a realistically attainable objective via the—allegedly—affordable pricing. The technique consists of allowing the narrative of the spot take its course and displaying the prices of seemingly random pieces of furniture toward the end, all over the screen (see Figure 5).

[Figure 5 about here]

The variety of furniture pieces advertised overwhelms the audience with information regarding the pricing of these products. However, this overload of information also fosters the sentiment that all the items visible on screen are “covered,” inferring that the exact look and furniture (and with it, the aesthetic) of the space portrayed could become “yours” by spending the sum of the prices that appear on screen. This technique of presenting the pricing of many of the items scattered across the advertised living space thus brings the “IKEA reality” closer to the audience. Although this technique is not exclusive to video advertisements as it also appears in other forms of IKEA advertising (i.e. catalogs and billboards), we argue that its “overwhelmingness” is amplified in audiovisual content due to the progressive and cumulative nature with which the prices pop-up on screen. This technique is efficient from a marketing perspective, where it is not a secret that companies benefit from making their customers feel confident that they are paying less for high-quality products, or as IKEA’s brand positioning statement on their website describes it: “...functional, durable, affordable...home furnishing solutions” (IKEA, 2025). The technique, however, has implications when analyzed from a peace culture perspective.

As Ruiz-Collantes and Sanchez-Sanchez (2019) note more broadly, Spanish advertising narratives in times of crises tend to focus on detaching the individual from the context, portraying the “crisis” (economic in nature during the 2008-2017 period explored in their study, and housing-related nowadays) as something external and

circumstantial. The individual is then positioned as responsible for “bearing” the societal challenges stemming from the crisis—a crisis that, when analyzed through a more political or economic lens, offers slim reasons to blame the individual consumer over more responsible entities such as the government or private companies (Ruiz-Collantes and Sanchez-Sanchez). This is also related to Hesmondhalgh’s (2017) take on the moral economy, which scrutinizes the underlying messages and values in the media in relation to what they convey about the rights and responsibilities of individuals and institutions. When considered alongside the work of Ruiz-Collantes and Sanchez-Sanchez, we observe that both their study sample (2008-2017) and ours point to a tacit emphasis on the responsibilities of individual consumers during times of crisis.²

In IKEA’s *Efectos Colaterales*, the consumer is presented with the possibility of acquiring an “aesthetic”—or, at the very least, an IKEA-coded version of such—lifestyle and home decor by buying the objects price-tagged at the end of each spot. The consumer is made responsible for creating an aesthetically pleasing and minimalist home, which implicitly indicates that not having a home with the visual identity presented in the advertisements is the consumer’s choice. What makes this truth claim relevant to this investigation is that the IKEA spots fail to acknowledge one fundamental reason why many customers are unable to replicate the lifestyle being sold to them: the inability to get a home in the first place, let alone one with dimensions like those shown in the spots. Considering that the price per square meter in Spain is currently near historic highs, the rooms that average consumers live in often lack the spatial dimensions necessary to replicate an IKEA-coded aesthetic, even if the decorative articles portrayed in the advertisements are purchased.

In terms of structural violence under peace culture theory, we suggest that although IKEA’s role as a corporation may fundamentally exempt it from the

responsibility of addressing such socio-political issues, the *Efectos Colaterales* campaign can also be interpreted as misrepresenting the possibilities available to the average individual. IKEA's narrative in *Efectos Colaterales* could be considered “violent” in relation to the structural reality of the country, as it sells an idea that neglects the root causes of the crisis and offers an artificial fix as a solution. Similarly, Hickel (2020), following Gramsci (1971), would argue that the problem does not lie in this implication itself, but rather in the lack of questioning or backlash that such a narrative receives. After all, it is in the intrinsic nature of most advertising to present their products as attainable. As such, the “violence” occurs not just in the distorted reality presented by the *Efectos Colaterales* campaign, but also through the process by which the normalization of similar messages in advertising occurs—that is, cultural hegemony.

There exists an alternative way of analyzing the *Efectos Colaterales* campaign dynamics, in which one might argue that IKEA is not necessarily neglecting the socio-political realities of the consumers but is instead offering a solution for those navigating structural hardship. By offering their products at relatively affordable prices, IKEA enables customers to improve their living conditions while also creating a visually appealing living space, regardless of their environment. This interpretation could also be appropriate, given that IKEA has long been a well-recognized presence in the housing market.

However, our rebuttal to this alternative perspective is that the structural and cultural violence ingrained in *Efectos Colaterales* does not emerge only from IKEA's presentation and offering of their products, but rather from the broader socio-economic logic that underpins their acquisition. The *Efectos Colaterales* campaign constructs an “IKEA aesthetic” that is materially unattainable for most of the target audience because

it relies on spatial conditions that are unavailable to many Spanish households. When consumers attempt to replicate this aesthetic by purchasing, for example, the lamp featured in *The One-Night Stand*, they may incorporate elements of the ideal, but the fundamental constraints of their living space remain unchanged. Consequently, consumers face two theoretical options to compensate for this discrepancy: to upgrade their housing dimensions and amenities (unattainable) or continue purchasing additional décor. Gramsci (1971) would argue that this is how advertisements promote hegemony. The logic underpinning the *Efectos Colaterales* campaign suggests continuous market participation as the only viable means by which the IKEA-coded living presented in the campaign can be attained. In this sense, IKEA and the wider market benefit not merely from selling products, but from contributing to a moral economy in which the pursuit of commodities materializes through endless consumption, thereby exerting cultural hegemony.

Truth claims in IKEA's *Efectos Colaterales* constitute the primary site of interaction with structural violence and socio-cultural peace in Spain. It is through such truth claims that the country's social reality is molded and adapted to the needs of IKEA as a corporation, neglecting the consequences associated with individuals' lack of access to housing. Although this finding is based solely on the four brief spots analyzed in this investigation, it is a potentially relevant claim that might well apply to many other advertising campaigns around the world, as it reflects a dynamic that appears to align with how advertising operates under capitalism.

Conclusion

This study focused on the multifaceted nature of "peace," a concept that has traditionally been limited to denote the mere absence of armed conflict but was reinterpreted by Smoker and Groff (1996) as a layered phenomenon. Under their

framework, peace is divided into six layers, ranging from the absence of conflict to holistic-inner peace at the individual level. Our investigation centered only on level three: Negative Peace (no war) and Positive Peace (no structural violence). Following Hesmondhalgh's (2017) work on the moral economy and Gramsci's (1971) idea of cultural hegemony, we note that media are more aligned with this third layer of peace because of the power they wield as transmitters of cultural values and ideals which, one way or another, interact with public understandings of social issues such as the housing crisis.

Due to its focus on a mediated approach, our case study also has implications for level four of the peace culture framework: what Smoker and Groff (1996) term Feminist Peace, which refers to the individual actions and understandings of challenges related to building a peaceful society, including anti-feminism, -racism, and -classism.³ IKEA's Spanish campaign *Efectos Colaterales* exemplifies the case of advertising interacting with an important class-based issue—housing—as it currently exists in Spain. Our study sought to analyze the ways in which consumerism in the media fuels narratives and truth claims that may inadvertently interact with forms of violence within the peace culture framework, in particular structural violence. Although other layers of the peace-culture framework could also be relevant to these or other forms of advertising, layers 3 (No Structural Violence) and 4 (Feminist Peace) are particularly salient in the campaign studied and are therefore the focus of this investigation.

Our analysis revealed that the *Efectos Colaterales* campaign spots utilized a variety of cinematic and storytelling techniques that effectively paired the IKEA brand with a distinct visual identity and aspirational lifestyle, specifically through the use of minimalistic mise-en-scène, rhyming, and the interaction between on-screen objects and coordinated color palettes. Additional visual strategies such as price-tagging toward the

end of the spots, combined with the use of spacious and high-quality framing in the advertised spaces, were found to promote the “IKEA reality” as an attainable goal for the consumers. In other words, the rhetoric in *Efectos Colaterales* positioned the consumer as the one responsible for having—or not—a home with an aesthetic resembling those portrayed in the advertisements. Our finding dovetails with the work of Ruiz-Collantes and Sanchez-Sanchez (2019) who demonstrated that advertising “transferred” the responsibility of solution for the country’s economic crisis onto citizens (p. 3). This is a phenomenon one could think of as “normal” in the advertising world: companies want consumers to buy not only their products but also their lifestyles, an idea that, far from revolutionary, derives from Gramsci’s (1971) work on cultural hegemony (Hickel, 2020) and speaks to the normalization of consumerism as a dominant ideology. The reality, however, collides with this agenda in the sense that access to affordable housing is more difficult than ever for the average Spanish consumer, with prices rising much faster than salaries (Romero, 2022).

In conclusion, one contribution of our article to critical-cultural studies scholarship is to introduce Smoker and Groff’s (1996) ideas on peace culture and to operationalize those to analyze a Spanish advertising campaign. *Efectos Colaterales* was found to mold reality in an unrealistic way to incite consumption—an initiative that, in theory, stands in tension with any attempt to construct a peace culture, as defined by Smoker and Groff. Questions remain regarding what additional, external and internal factors, including linguistic elements, shape the transmission of the truth claims in *Efectos Colaterales* as well as the extent to which other forms of media such as entertainment, social media, and government-sponsored public service messages contribute to or challenge this process. Further research is needed to even begin considering how media can advance the deepest layer of peace in Smoker and Groff’s

typology (Holistic Inner-Outer Peace) particularly at this current juncture, when the need for peace is perhaps more urgent than ever.

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Notes

¹ As Lears (1985) notes, Gramsci's translated writings contain no "precise definition of cultural hegemony" (p. 568). In addition to Hickel (2020), one of the closest characterizations is "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant functional group" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12).

² To be clear, Ruiz-Collantes and Sanchez-Sanchez's (2019) sample was not limited to IKEA, but also included spots from companies such as Coca-Cola, Danone, Repsol, and Telefónica.

³ Despite its name, Feminist Peace refers to all forms of violence that may manifest at both macro and micro levels. Building on Brock-Utne (1989), Smoker and Groff (1996) understand peace not only as systemic or governmental justice, but also as encompassing individual-level instances of violence (for instance, sexual violence during war or within the home) that must be addressed for creating a peaceful world.

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Table 1: Layers of Peace (Smoker and Groff, 1996)

Layers of Peace	Description
1. Absence of War	Lack of violent, explicit conflict between states or within state borders.
2. Balance of Forces in the International System	International organizations regulating emerging potential disparities in peace between states.
3. Negative and Positive Peace	No war and no structural violence.
4. Feminist Peace	Absence of macro- and micro-level (individual) violence.
5. Holistic Gaia-Peace	Peace with the environment including other living organisms.
6. Holistic Inner-Outer Peace	Peace that individuals feel toward themselves.

Figure 1: *The One-Night Stand* (IKEA, 2024a)



Figure 2: *The Shower Singer* (IKEA, 2024b)



Figure 3: *The Couch Invader* (IKEA, 2024c)



Figure 4: *The Cooking Mom* (IKEA, 2024d)



Figure 5: *The One-Night Stand* (IKEA, 2024c)

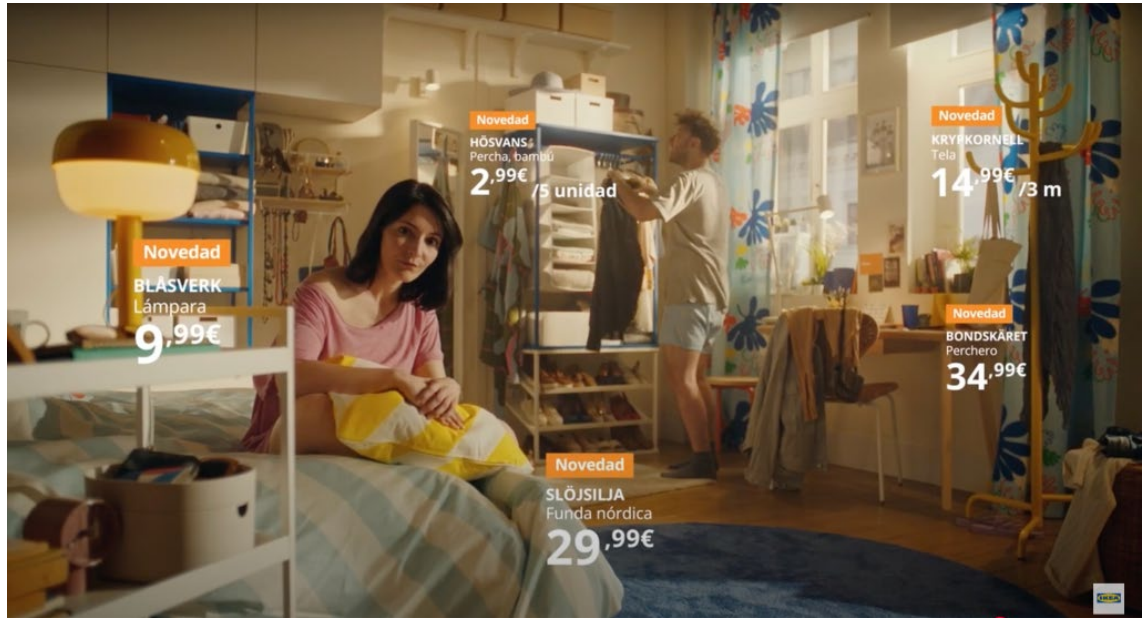


Figure 6: Idealista Search Map

