From Advertisement to the Consumption of New Technologies: The Introduction of Colour TV Sets in the United Kingdom, 1960-1969

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INTRODUCTION

Besides being the country where John Logie Baird invented the TV set in 1923,[1] the United Kingdom is also the place where the first regular television transmissions of the world began in 1936 (Van Dulken, 2002: 86). Since these early transmissions -carried out by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)- the act of watching TV became the focus of attention of the British government for its potential to mould society as well as for this being one of the most accessible sources of recreation (Burnett, 1969: 320). Insomuch that the British system of TV transmissions was kept as a public cultural service by the government up to 1955, when commercial television finally established in that country. This may be a reason why some commentators have suggested that such a system was something in between the unregulated American television and the highly regulated system of the disappeared Soviet Union (Cain, 1992: 10). But, if the most relevant contribution in British

television during the 1950s was its "democratization" (with the creation of private TV stations and a growth in the number of people owning and renting TV sets),[2] the most important achievement of the 1960's was the introduction of new ways of watching TV through the type of artefacts and services then available as well as the incorporation of new technological developments as colour television.

Despite of its recurrent economic crises, the 1960s was the decade when Britain finally entered into the "…high-spending consumer society long familiar from American films." (Marwick, 1982: 114). Within this new scenario, TV sets were in general quite expensive products, especially when relevant technological developments had to be incorporated. Indeed, by the mid of the 20th century a TV set could cost as much as ten times more its price today, around a sixth of the price of a small family car at that time (Emmerson, 2009: 23), even though most TV set models in the British market were manufactured within this country. This latter, together with the poor functional reliability of these artefacts (they

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[1] The technology used to develop television was mostly created at the end of the 19th century, but it was not until the invention of John Logie Baird's artefact that television came to live in practical terms (Williams, 1987: 461).

[2] Indeed, by 1948 only 0.3 % of English homes had TV sets; a number increased to 52% by 1958 (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979: 99).

tended to present frequent breakdowns), turned a significant number of the anxious television viewers of that time to rent instead of buying TV sets from firms offering this kind of service. And when black-and-white TV sets finally became more accessible for their potential buyers, the announcement of the coming of colour transmissions changed the consumption dynamic in a rather unexpected way for their manufacturers, buyers as well as those renting them.

This is a facet of the history of British television rarely undertaken since most of the research has concentrated on broadcasting and people's impressions about TV watching in that period. In this respect, this essay is an attempt to unveil some of the circumstances that helped to shape the way in which TV sets -as objects-were presented to the British society in the 1960's through printed adverts created to sell them. To this aim twenty six printed adverts, of one and two pages of extent, published in *The Sunday Times Magazines* between 1960 and 1969 were taken as case study. The information so provided was confronted with three sources from that period: (1) the ideas used for advertising at that time, (2) the archive about products developed by the Council of Industrial Design of the United Kingdom, and (3) the reports to guide consumers published in *Which?* magazine. This research was carried out by the author during a sabbatical leave at the University of Brighton, England.

1. ADVERTISING IN THE 1960S

In the 1960s the consumption of commodities and services began to be understood as a signifying system derived from the interrelation of four different logics: *use value* or that focused on the practical operations products perform, *exchange value* or that centred in the equivalences that define products as goods,

symbolic exchange or logic of the potentially exchangeability of products from a subjective standpoint (e.g. as happens with gifts), and *sign value* or logic of the commercial differentiation of products through their brand (Baudrillard 1969: 66-67). Similar to consumption, advertising was also envisaged as a signifying practice whose narratives do not only present products but tell something else to legitimate their purchase (Barthes, 1963: 178). These contributions set the basis for a later understanding of advertising as a system comprising opposite, contradictory and implicit values,[3] in which the 'utilitarian' co-exists with the 'existential' (e.g. identity, life, adventure), so as the 'non-existential' (e.g. benefits, quality, price) co-exists with the 'non-utilitarian' (e.g. luxury, refinement, gratuitousness) (Floch, 1990: 117-118) – see figure 1.

The understanding of advertising as a signifying practice also helped to consolidate during the sixties a rhetoric trend which began after the 1940s. Known as the **concept approach**, this way of doing advertising was focused on the rhetoric manipulation of verbal concepts in a simple and unified way with images (Hulburt, 1982: 40). As such, it was a means to overcome those old advertising practices revolving around the generation of visual impact in consumers -to make them remember products- as well as those practices articulated around particular ways of reflecting the consumers' needs and wants to generate empathy (Péninou, 1976: 25-26). By 1960 the conceptual approach

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[3] *Opposite values* are those that when compared cannot be true at once. *Contradictory values* are those that when compared one of them is true and the other is false. And *implicit values* are those naturally derived from other values by complementarity.
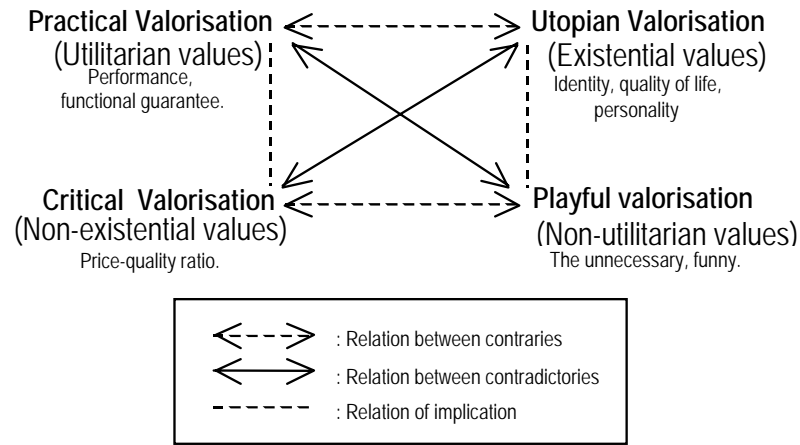
Figure 1 – Logic of value in advertising according to Jean-Marie Floch (1990).

had become the way par excellence in advertising to convey clear and thoughtful visual messages beyond the mere sensitivity and sensibility of consumers. To this aim different advertising strategies were used. Among them we ought to mention (Hulburt, 1982: 48-65): (1) *recognition* or the creation of familiarity with a brand through exposure to it, (2) *demonstration* or the promotion of the advantages of a product through trials or proofs, (3) *declaration* or the self-assertion of a product's virtues (based on ratings, for instance), (4) *inference* or the provision of information to allow readers to infer the virtues of a product, (5) *endorsement* or the motivation of consumers to emulate celebrities who own or use the product, (6) *narrative* or storytelling, (7) *association* or linkage of products to pleasurable experiences, (8) *inversion* or the twisting of an idea around to present a product in a totally unexpected way, and (9) *emotional appeal* or use of people natural sentimental attraction toward other beings in terms of self-interest, sex appeal, concern and compassion, fantasy (dream-like situations) and fear (to the consequences of failing to do what the advert suggests).

This way of creating advertising messages was to a certain extent based on discoveries of the depth psychology and motivational research, especially in the way in which this was applied for marketing purposes in USA during the 1950s (Packard,1960: 27-37). These findings were particularly useful in helping advertisers to understand the consumers' hidden needs and hidden aversions, as well as the intrinsic capacity of products to reflect the identity of their potential users. Another quite important aspect of the 1960s adverts is the conscious use of format. At that time the intended effect of advertising messages was not only relying on good concepts but also on the perceptual differences derived from the use of drawings or photographs; black-and-white or colour images; close-up (image involving people's head and neck only), medium distance (image from people's waist or chest up) and long distance images (those including surroundings); adverts of one or two pages of extent; the visual angle (high, level and low angles),[4] and the inclusion or not of people and contexts as part of the message. Indeed, it is well known that photographs are normally used as evidence of advertising claims whereas drawings are either used to highlight essential features of complex objects or for creating aesthetic effects (Messaris, 1997:

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[4] For the *level angle view* the camera shut is taken at eye level, for the *high angle view* the camera shut is taken from above things, and for the *low angle view* the camera shut is taken from below things.

130 and 132). Similarly, it is known, for instance, that close-up views "...convey emotion and concentrate attention on the individual", whereas medium and long distance views emphasize the beholder's attention in the action performed with products or their context (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 2007: 64).

From the standpoint of product design, this decade also inherited from the previous ones its awareness of the product's sales appeal and the role played by designers in its construction, as suggested by the writings of authors like Raymond Loewy (1951), Henry Dreyfuss (1955) and Roland Barthes (1957). Indeed, the advertising power of products was already acknowledged in the United Kingdom through the use of British designers' creations in exhibitions such as *Britain can make it* (1946) and *The Festival of Britain* (1951), as well as through the public presentations of their new products in the *showroom* especially created for this end in 1956 at the offices of UK's Council of Industrial Design. Furthermore, it was in the 1960s when design products began to be understood as carriers of advertising as well as self-advertising values (Dorfles, 1968: 73-74). The *advertising value* refers to the general visibility of a product in the market place in relation to other products competing with it; whereas the *self-advertising value* has to do with the way in which particular features or attributes of the product contribute to its positioning in the minds of its potential consumers.

In the particular case of Britain, these ideas were cautiously approached during the sixties since the values promoted by consumer societies like the American were seen with great suspicion (Crisell, 2002: 85). Therefore, the products' *advertising and self-advertising values* were conceived as a mere part of the equation for good design (Archer, 1960: 30). That is to say, as part of the conglomerate of key aspects involved in the designers' job (Moggridge, 1961: 28-29).

2. THE REALM OF CONCEALED INFORMATION

One characteristic of the *concept approach* to advertising is the formulation of messages to highlight only those aspects of the product related to the advertising concepts in use. As such it bring along more clarity and coherence to advertising messages by obliterating or making less obvious those pieces of information capable of producing 'semantic noise' in the interpretation of an advertising concept. A sign of this was the omission or use of relatively small lettering for the commercial and technical information that was relevant for TV-set buyers in the adverts printed in Britain during the 1960s.

Another kind of omission in the adverts about TV sets published in the *Sunday Times Magazine* was that of giving the reader the impression that such artefacts were manufactured by many different companies, with an equivalent variety of approaches to the design of TV sets. Indeed, at that time there were around thirty different brands of TV sets in Britain, each of them with different models simultaneously placed in the market. This number of brands, however, was manufactured by as many as five corporations and a handful of small independent firms (Sharp, 1962: 34). Thus, for instance, TV sets from brands such as Ferguson, Philco, Ultra and HMV were produced by the Thorn Corporation (British Radio Corporation); brands such as Pye, Ekco and Ferranti were produced by Pye-Ekco (British Electronic Industries); and brands like GEC, McMichael and Sobell by the General Electric Co. (also known in UK as Radio and Allied Industries). There were also TV sets whose brands were directly associated to the name of their manufacturers such as Decca, Murphy,

Philips, Alba, Rediffussion, and Ace; as well as TV-set brands that did not reflect their manufacturers such as K-B (produced by Standard Telephones and Cables), Bush (produced by Rank), and Baird (produced by Radio Rentals). There were even companies like Ace producing low cost TV-set designs to be marketed under the name of their retailers (e.g. John Lewis, GUS, and Gamages). By 1970 the number of brands and manufacturers in the British market dropped from thirty four brands present during the 1960s to seventeen brands, whose TV sets were mainly produced by seven manufacturers (Which? 1970a: 198). But even then, the impression generated in the consumers (buyers and people renting TV sets) was always that of having more choices of TV-set brands and manufacturers than there actually were.

Nevertheless, the above number of brands and companies manufacturing TV sets did not stand for the presence of many distinctive approaches to TV-set design in Britain. Indeed, during the sixties, only two schools or ways of thinking about television design were envisaged by British manufacturers: one understanding TV sets as pieces of furniture, and another visualizing them as instruments with a character of their own (Moggridge, 1961: 28). The first view revolved around the idea that TV sets were normally kept in the living room, therefore their design should fit with the pieces of furniture there (e.g. sideboards, tables) -see figure 2. The second view focused on the idea that TV sets were essentially refined electronic artefacts which should not be disguised as something else (Sharp, 1962: 36). This way of understanding television design did not stop manufacturers from searching other ways to differentiate their products from their competitors. Differences were indeed visually worked at the level of materials (e.g. cabinets made of wood or plastic), of colours and finishes (teak, rosewood, and walnut veneer, or polyester paint finish in

quite white, "dramatic" black, "revolution" red, "outrageous" orange, "smooth" blue, and "serene" green),[5] of details (perforated grilles, satin trims, panorama frames, etc.) and controls (their location and distribution within a panel as well as the design of press buttons, knobs and selectors) (CoID, 1960-1970: n.p.). This superficial differentiation went as far as to try the use of pattern camouflage in the surface (cabinet) of some TV sets around 1968; this being a strategy that in the eyes of critics was catalogued as a "joke in bad taste" (CoID, 1968: 22) – see figure 3. However, this appearance-based strategy for TV-set differentiation (see figures 4 and 5) would end up sharing the advertising spaces with strategies concerned with the functional reliability of TV sets at the end of 1960s.

Figure 2 – Advert of Decca TV set designed as a piece of furniture.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 16 February 1964, p. 31 (author's collection).

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[5] The characterisation (adjectives) of these colours has been taken from the way in which the Council of Industrial Design described them in their photographic records.
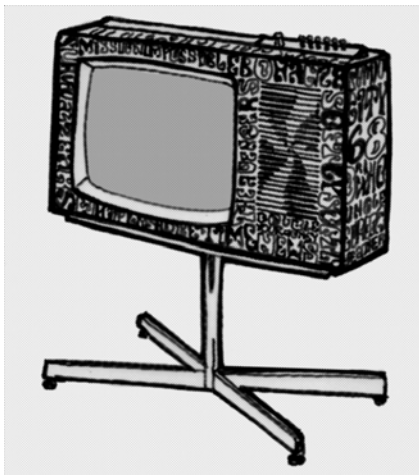
Figure 3 - TV set with camouflage pattern manufactured in 1968 by Rank Bush Murphy.

Source: Author's drawing.

Figure 5 - Advert for the 'Deep Scene' TV set manufactured by KB which revolved around the artefact's look.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 12 November 1967, p. 45 (author's collection) .

Figure 4 - Advert of TV sets manufactured by Pye-Ekco, in which they are introduced as celebrities based on their appearance.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 1 November 1964, p. 32 (author's collection).

Another characteristic of most of the printed adverts about TV sets of that time was the provision of little or no information about their technical specifications at the most elemental level. To the extent of not telling consumers whether the advertised TV set was able to receive colour transmissions or only black-and-white ones. In this respect, it should be noted that the 1960s was a decade of transitions and consecutive innovations in TV technology. Therefore, it is hard to believe that such adverts were created for consumers with up-to-date knowledge about the technicalities present in these artefacts; this being a situation with further complications provided the terminology associated to it. Indeed, the resolution of images in black-and-white TV sets was -for instance- described in terms of the 405 horizontal lines crossing the screen from top to bottom

and the transmission of such images through a very-high-frequency band (VHF). Likewise, the resolution of images in colour TV sets was generally expressed as comprised of 625 horizontal lines and their transmission through an ultra-high-frequency band (UHF). The variations of frequency –in particular- brought about delays in the introduction of colour transmissions in UK due to the need of updating the existent infrastructure as well as deciding what transmission system to be adopted (the American or the European) and the course of action to be taken after these decisions were made.

These delays caused uncertainty in TV-set manufacturers since colour transmissions required receivers capable of handling a resolution of no less than 525 lines (like that in use for colour television in the USA since 1953). There was also the idea of taking the introduction of colour transmissions as an opportunity for the government to unify the standards of British TV transmissions with those of the rest of Europe, whose prevailing resolution was 625 lines (i.e. an image definition 50% better than the one offered by TV sets of 405 lines). As a matter of fact, changes like this latter would bring along the need of migrating the 625-line transmissions to a less populated band, provided that the extra lines of resolution in TV screen would also demand more bandwidth (Lax, 2009: 75 and 120).

For the companies manufacturing TV sets this situation was neither easy since their decisions were waiting for government decisions and research carried out by organizations related to it about the nature of transmissions and its supporting technology (Cain, 1992: 97).[6] This is why

during the sixties four different kinds of TV sets were manufactured in Britain to ease adaptation to the changes taking place. In this sense, there were: (1) those artefacts known as 'ordinary' TV sets, which were black-and-white with a resolution of 405 lines and therefore unable to receive any colour transmissions; (2) those TV sets called 'dual-standards', which were capable of receiving both black-and-white and colour transmissions by pressing some buttons and switching to either the VHF or UHF bands; (3) there were also 'convertible' TV sets, which operated on a 405-line system but were capable of being updated to receive either black-and-white and colour transmissions (like a dual-standard one) or only colour transmissions; and finally (4) there were the actual colour TV sets or 'single-standard', which only operated on 625 lines (Which? 1961a: 301). This latter type of TV set, however, only became available to British consumers in the very late sixties, since it was not until November 1969 that colour transmissions were extended to the three existing channels in that country (Crisell, 2002: 122).

In this sense, it is really hard to know the exact reasons why most printed adverts in magazines like *the Sunday Times* were not really telling consumers the technical nature of the TV sets advertised. Nevertheless, among the possible reasons could be mentioned the need to release consumers' decisions from the technological complexities of these products, the development of commercial strategies focusing competition on brand loyalty, the manufacturers' urgency of getting rid of artefacts from old stocks that were becoming obsolete quickly, so as the need of concealing the difficulties experienced by TV-set manufacturers to cope with the

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[6] Among the most important projects of technical research were: (1) Trials to select the colour television system to be used in UK, (2) a better use of frequency-modulation (FM) and very-high-frequency (VHF) bands, (3) the development and

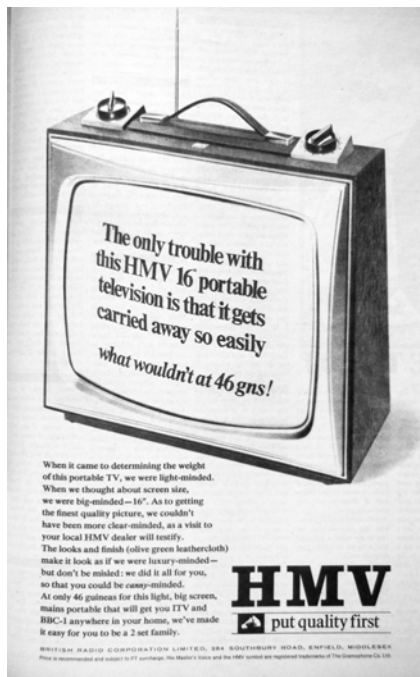use of satellites in broadcasting, and (4) research on the use of transistors (Cain, 1992: 97).

Figure 6 – Advert for 16" black-and-white portable TV in 1967.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 23 April 1967, p.49 (author's collection).

Figure 7 - Ingenious advert to sell black-and-white TV sets in 1967.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 29 October 1967, p. 20 (author's collection).

constant technological updates.[7] Whatever the case, the truth is that the TV-set adverts of that time were quite unspecific in technological terms, while the opposite was more reasonable. One should neither be surprised by the fact that even as late as 1967 there were companies selling "ordinary" black-and-white TV sets, even though since 1964 there was already a British TV channel transmitting programmes in colour (BBC2). The adverts created to sell these particular TV sets were formulated using ingenious concepts, mostly based on strategies such as *recognition* (brand quality), *inference* (portable and low price as desirable pursuits for consumers), *emotional appeal* (diversity of viewing preferences among audiences of different ages), and even *fear* ('Why

wrangle over TV programmes? Be civilized') – see figures 6 and 7.

The adverts of that period show that very few manufacturers were actually concerned with spreading technical information about their TV sets. This lack of information was compensated by the detailed and abundant reviews provided by the Consumer Association through its *Which? Magazine*. Besides these, there were also two types of adverts aiming to explain this new technology published in *the Sunday Times Magazine* during the second half of the 1960s. An example of one of these types of adverts was published the 26 of November 1967, as part of a special section called "Advertising Feature". Within this section, 19" and 25" colour TV sets manufactured by Rank Bush Murphy Ltd. were advertised using the unusual format of brief press articles, subsequently arranged in a set of four. The first of them, entitled "Is Bush colour television the best?", was a statement of the sort of technical minds behind the

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[7] The coming of colour television was already a headache for manufacturers since the size of their picture tubes was much larger than those of monochrome TV sets and the additional circuitry was also more complex (Sharp, 1962: 40).

design of Bush TV sets (The Sunday Times Magazine, 1967a: 16). The second article of this sequence comprised a group of 18 questions commonly asked by people about colour television, concisely replied by personnel from Bush (The Sunday Times Magazine, 1967b: 18-19) – see figure 8. The third article was a brief and well-illustrated presentation of short explanations about "what to look for when buying a colour TV set" using Bush's TV sets as examples (The Sunday Times Magazine, 1967c: 20-21). Finally, the fourth article was a compilation of favourable opinions about people who tried Bush TV sets (The Sunday Times Magazine, 1967d: 22).

Different from Bush, the General Electric Company (GEC) developed during 1968 and 1969 another type of advertising campaign in *the Sunday Times Magazine* in which all adverts were built around praising the technical qualities of its TV sets. Here, the main remarks comprising the advertising concept were written in intelligible terms for the general public and complemented by more precise technological descriptions (in small lettering) quite hard to be understood by most people. Especially when such descriptions referred to transistors with solid-state diodes or to "…the bits and pieces that make sure each electron beam hits the right colour phosphor dot in the screen" (advert in *The Sunday Times*, 30 June 1968: 22 and 23) – see figure 9.

Figure 8 – Article-like advert created to sell TV sets from the Bush company.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*,
26 November 1967, pp. 18-19 (author's collection).

Figure 9 – Advert of TV set manufactured by GEC focused on its technical components.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*,
2 November 1969, p.8 (author's collection).

3. FOUR IMPLICIT PARADOXES

Any review on how TV sets were advertised in 1960s Britain would be incomplete if the paradoxes present in their advertising strategies as well as in the content of their adverts are not dealt with. Four of these paradoxes are especially evident in the adverts of *The Sunday Times Magazine*. The first one has to do with an almost complete absence of TV-set adverts. Indeed, from 1960 till 1966, only four adverts to sell TV sets were published in this magazine: a situation which contrasts with the high number of adverts about TV rentals published during the same period of time. One possible explanation for this scarce presence of adverts selling TV sets is that manufacturers knew that little could be done to improve the sales of their existing stocks since the rapid growing of TV-set sales during the 1950s had left the beginnings of the sixties with sales falling sharp away (Sharp, 1962: 34). As a matter of fact, by 1958, 52% of British homes already have their own TV sets (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979: 99), and by 1960, 82% of the British population had access to TV receivers in spite of their high prices (O'Sullivan, 1991: 161), partially due to the TV rental services then available. On the other hand, the manufacturers' preoccupation with an apparent need for superficial annual changes in TV-set design (Sharp, 1962: 36), may have also hindered the sales once the public realized that no actual improvements were taking place. To such an extent that, by the early sixties, *Ultra* was the only TV brand claiming to have increased its share of the British market thanks to the impact of its new designs (Moggridge, 1961: 31).

The scanty number of adverts selling TV sets between 1960 and 1966 could also be attributed to the unusual association of TV sets with some alcoholic drinks put in place in some adverts. Such is the case, for instance, of an advert using a refine alcoholic drink like *champagne* as a means to vest with status the purchase of McMichael TV sets. In this respect, a detailed observation of some adverts for other products printed the same year in the same magazine reveals the presence of a carefully conceived strategy to sell TV sets with less investment in advertising. Insomuch that, beyond the obvious associations of status derived from linking nondurable products (drinks) with durable products (TV sets), the number of adverts about refine alcoholic drinks was much higher than that about TV sets, as well as the fact that some of these adverts were presenting the act of watching TV as an attractive occasion to enjoy such drinks. This was an opportunity to reduce the number of adverts that the advertisers of McMichael TV sets took advantage of, using *inversion* as a conceptual strategy to turn the adverts on alcoholic drinks into an indirect way to evoke their TV sets (see figure 10). Such a strategy, clearly inspired by depth psychology, may have produced good results given its re-use to advertise the McMichael's stereograms (furniture-like TV sets). Furthermore, this strategy also became a means to keep consumers distracted from the common technological concerns affecting their purchase of these artefacts.

The second paradox has to do with the use of technological reliability as an issue in TV adverts when no such a thing as a totally reliable TV set was possible during the 1960s. To the extent that: (1) the working lifespan of a TV set was then estimated between five and seven years (Which? 1960: 100), (2) the differences in the reception of transmissions between samples

Figure 10 – Comparison between an advert on SRL Sherry and one on McMichael's TV sets in which the use of inversion as a strategy becomes obvious.

Source:
Top: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 06 October 1963, p. 13.
Right: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 13 de October 1963, p. 40.
Images from the author's collection.

of the same brand and model were as substantial as those between brands (Which? 1966: 245),[8] (3) the comparative high cost of repair parts for TV sets turned the taking of maintenance contracts as a common practice when buying a TV set, and (4) all TV sets of this decade tended to breakdown with incredible regularity regardless of its type (ordinary, dual-standard, single-standard) (Which? 1969: 149 and Which? 1970: 198).[9] In order to deal with this situation, some adverts were designed to hide such a reality using 'metaphoric' *demonstrations* whose images were presented from a medium-distance and a level-angle view to purposely disguise the lack of convincing results from such demonstrations – see figure 11. This is why these adverts always ended up combining the strategy of *demonstration* with that of *recognition* to alternatively trigger brand loyalty in case the alluded demonstration was not convincing enough for the consumers. An alternative advertising strategy was that of creating adverts focused on exacerbating *recognition* (brand royalty) as a way to elude the problems of technical reliability – see figure 12. In this respect, only the adverts of GEC TV sets really attempted to address technical reliability, as it was already mentioned somewhere else in this piece of research.

Figure 11 – Advert of Bush TV sets with emphasis on a metaphorical demonstration.

Source:
The Sunday Times Magazine,
29 October 1967, p. 41 (author's collection).

A third paradox has to do with the presence of advertising with contradictory messages in the same advert, such as in those adverts whose main text says: "rent or buy". Manufacturers and advertisers of the 1960s seemed to have realized that, giving the recurrent technological changes and uncertainties associated to these artefacts, it was easier to lead consumers to rent rather than invest in buying TV sets.[10] Indeed, by 1966, it was deemed that for every three new TV sets bought in the United Kingdom, seven were rented (Which? 1966: 256).

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[8] In this respect, cable services such as those offered by companies like British Relay and Redifussion became one of the ways to guarantee a relatively good reception.

[9] In a study carried out by the Consumer Association with 500 people, for a span of seven months, found that three quarters of the dual-standard sets on trial broke down and needed repair; some sets even broke down after a month of viewing (Which? 1969: 149). On average single-standard colour sets broke down and needed repair as often as black-and-white sets (Which? 1970: 198).

[10] During the mid 1960s, British household spent an average of 8 shillings 6 pennies a week renting TV sets, that is, almost as much as the 11shillings a week they normally spent on bus and train fares (Burnett, 1969: 318).
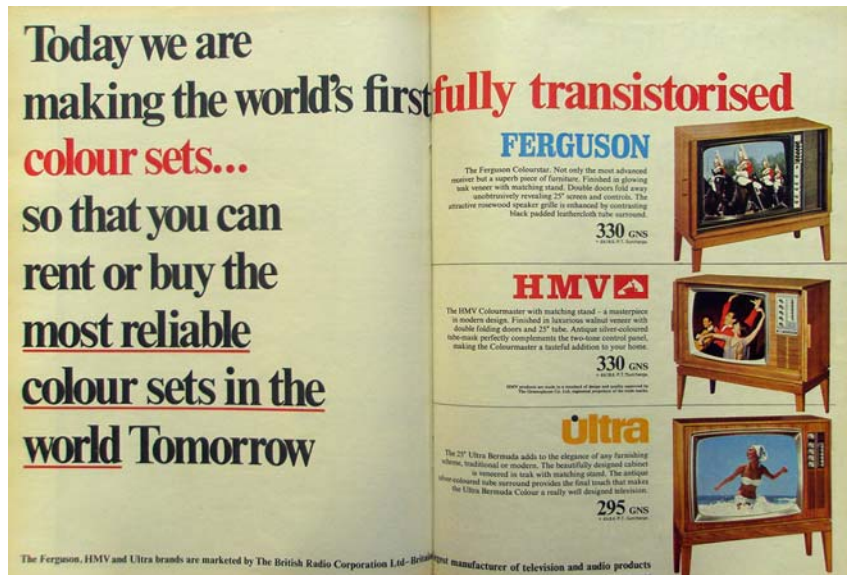
Figure 12 – Group advert of TV sets produced by the Thorn Corporation intentionally using the word "tomorrow" after asserting that such sets are the most reliable.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 3 December 1967, pp. 38-39 (author's collection).

Therefore, many advertising campaigns were developed with the aim of positioning brands in consumers' minds through those TV sets offered for renting. This with the obvious hope of inducing brand loyalty and make people prefer these brands rather than others, once the technology behind TV sets became standard – see figures 12 and 13. To this aim, strategies such as *recognition* (of brands), *association* (linking TV watching to pleasurable experiences), *emotional appeal* towards local traditions and even *sex appeal* were used.

A fourth paradox is encapsulated in the use of black-and-white formats to advertise colour TV sets. Here, the presentation of what was new through familiar and simple ideas became the strategy *par excellence* to explain the nature of colour transmissions (even though such an explanation was related to particular TV-set brands) and the differences present among the various types of sets.[11] Let us not forget that: (1) by 1964,

14.5 million homes in Britain (i.e. 80% of the total) were already equipped with a television receiver that was incapable of displaying colour pictures (Lax, 2009: 75); (2) once dual-standard TV sets became the common choice of buyers, they remained to be sold up to 1969 (Which? 1969: 148); (3) the black-and-white performance of dual-standard TV sets was generally poorer in brightness and sharpness of focus than the ordinary black-and-white sets (therefore they normally had to be watched in a darkened room for best results) (Which? 1968b: 105); and (4) by 1968 only a few thousand people owned TV sets that could receive colour transmissions, even though it was estimated that seven out of ten people had access to such transmissions (Which? 1968a: 13).[12] In advertising terms this

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[11] It should be noted that it was in the 1960's when the communication theorist Marshall McLuhan

defined as "Negative Feedback" that very human tendency to understand the new through the old (McLuhan, 1966).

[12] The average price of a black-and-white TV set was around £65 and £72 (Which? 1960: 101), whereas a dual-standard TV set came to cost between £250 and £350 (Which? 1969: 148). Therefore, the latter were quite inaccessible to the

Figure 13 – Example of the use of ambiguity and sex appeal to position TV-set brands in consumers' mind.

Source: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 19 October 1969, p. 91 (author's collection)

Figure 14 – Adverts of TV sets introducing the idea of colour transmissions through black-and-white means.

Source:
Top: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 21 July 1968, pp. 36-37.

Right: *The Sunday Times Magazine*,
3 December 1967, p. 72
(Both images from the author's collection).

general public since by 1965 manual workers were earning between £15 and £20 a week, lowest-paid workers and pensioners between £5 and £10 a week, and the higher professional class over £50 a week (Burnett, 1969: 319).

situation was tackled with the creation of particular brand names -as Deccacolour- to highlight the difference between colour and monochrome TV sets as well as through black-and-white adverts with small touches of colour, and the provision of advertising messages about familiar ways of testing the quality (or poor quality) of the images in dual-standard TV sets, presented with images in close-up and high-angle (from above) views to better address the consumer, remarking his/her role in choosing the right artefact –see figure 14. To this aim strategies such as *demonstration* alone and *demonstration* via *inversion* (twisting ideas around) were used.

CONCLUSION

Even though the 1950s was the decade in which the 'democratization' and 'commercialization' of British TV broadcasting took place, and when some technological developments paved the way for richer and varied TV programmes, the 1960s were no less important. Indeed, technologically speaking, this latter decade was more significant than the 1950s for both manufacturers and users of TV sets, since their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances was put to the limit as never before in the history of British television. So much change brought about a culture of consumer awareness based on "trying before buying" TV sets, which turned people's attention more towards these products' performance than their aesthetics.

On the other hand, it has become clear why during the 1960s no British manufacturer took the risk of creating TV sets with a visually challenging configuration such as that of Philco's Predicta receivers (see figure 15), i.e. those "flat" TV sets inspired on the revolutionary ideas of Italian designer Dario Montagni (CoID, 1959: 51). Indeed, British designers' concerns were mostly focused on the development of a pleasing 'instrumental' look (as opposed to

the idea of TV sets as pieces of furniture) with a clear and accessible functionality, as it is testified by the British organisations dealing with design (cf. Moggridge, 1961; Sharp, 1962; CoID, 1965 and 1968). This situation is also reflected in the limited number of TV models from the 1960s reviewed in the photographic archives of UK Council of Industrial Design.

Figure 15 – "Predicta" TV set by Philco. Its design was envisaged as revolutionary by British critics.

Source: Author's drawing.

The above facts, together with all the aspects considered along this piece of research, help us to understand why in a decade with so much change going on in different respects -the rise of British affluent society, sexual revolution, the French May, early space voyages- the design of British TV sets was not visually 'revolutionary' but technologically accessible and pertinent. This approach to design may be one of the reasons why British people's recollections about the TV culture of the 1960s mostly refer to the content of transmissions (TV programmes) than to their TV receivers (O'Sullivan, 1991: 163); given that their memories as users of these artefacts may converge either on their experiences twiddling controls and fixing the position of their aerials to receive a better picture, or in the number of

functioning breakdowns and the rather high price of TV sets.

Under such conditions, the least advertisement could do was to work building the consumers' confidence on the capacity of British manufacturers to produce TV sets "as reliable as the circumstances allowed". To this aim, most advertisers deliberately decided to omit or conceal important technical information in order to introduce the changes taking place in the least traumatic manner, using strategies derived from the conceptual approach to advertising.

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