



ADVERTISING AND CREATIVITY IN AWARD CEREMONIES: THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSPARENT EVALUATION

Victoria TUR-VIÑES ¹, Araceli CASTELLÓ-MARTÍNEZ², Marina RAMOS-SERRANO³,
Ingrid ZACIPA-INFANTE⁴

^{1, 2, 4}*Department of Communication and Social Psychology, Faculty of Economic and Business Sciences, University of Alicante, Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n., 03690 San Vicente del Raspeig, Province of Alicante, Spain*

³*Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising, Faculty of Communication, University of Seville, C/Américo Vespucio s/n., 41092 Seville, Andalusia, Spain*

Article History:

- received 1 March 2023
- accepted 18 August 2023

Abstract. Award ceremonies value and highlight the best pieces of communication, reflecting the innovative trends of advertising practice, and are also on the rise as places for meeting and exchanging experiences, points of reflection on the challenges facing the industry and events to showcase the high value of the industry. The aim of this study is to evaluate the methodology of advertising festivals and identify the criteria for their operation. A content analysis of the official websites of 85 international award ceremonies with 20 indicators was carried out. The results show the non-specialized, general nature of most of the annual events. Five major award category types are identified: media and actions, digital, differential feature of the endeavour, resources used and results obtained. The jury selection criteria are only made public for one in ten award ceremonies, while the criteria for the assessment of the pieces are not known for 40% of the award ceremonies. This study has theoretical-practical implications, and expands upon previous knowledge regarding award, the selection of people and pieces, and the criteria for both. It concludes by underlining transparency as a potential area for improvement.

Keywords: advertising, award ceremonies, awards, communication, events, industry, marketing.

✉Corresponding author. E-mail: victoria.tur@gcloud.ua.es

1. Introduction

Advertising differentiates products using persuasive communication. Likewise, advertising agencies – and their new derivatives – need to differentiate themselves from each other. In response to this reality, advertising award ceremonies allow for the evaluation and classification of each agency's work in a comparative way.

It is difficult to calculate the financial turnover of advertising award ceremonies at the international level. The existence of consultancies (*Boost Awards*) (Boost, 2024; Wikreate, 2022) that help to manage the procedures of both advertisers and agencies alike provides important evidence that their turnover is truly substantial. As a reference, *The Cannes Lions Awards* (Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, CLIFC) in 2022 had 25 464 registrations from 87 countries, with an average fee of approximately 600 euros, representing 15 278 400 euros (LIA: Global Sponsor, 2005–2023).

Since the 1960s, companies have preselected agencies by ranking them according to one of the following criteria: revenue figures, number of awards won at award ceremonies, cumulative

media volume or subjective classifications of agencies produced by the marketing directors of leading brands (Ogilvy, 2012; Butkys & Herpel, 1992; Helgesen, 1994; Kübler & Proppe, 2012).

However, Polonsky and Waller (1995) concluded that the revenue or turnover of advertising agencies is not affected by the number of prizes won. Regarding the effects of such awards on the creators themselves, Tippins and Kunkel (2006) state that winning one or more *Clio Awards* can lead to an increase in profits, although they recognize the difficulty in determining the actual benefit obtained from specific advertising activities.

However, the awards received at such ceremonies gained further importance in the face of the change in turnover declarations since The Sarbanes Oxley Act (2002), which sanctioned the publication of inaccurate or false revenue figures. Advertising is a highly globalized industry, and the best-known agencies often belong to multinational networks of large international communication groups. According to Kübler and Proppe (2012), in the United States (US), the available turnover figures have been aggregated at the holding level since the introduction of this law. It thus becomes almost impossible to determine national income figures, thereby altering the rankings based on that data. For this reason, the number of awards received at award ceremonies became established as an essential indicator, providing a mechanism for classifying and organizing the quality of agencies around the world, from that time until the present.

The aforementioned literature focuses on the effects that award ceremonies provoke in agencies and professionals as well as in manufacturing companies. However, award ceremonies as events, and how they function, their structure and their characteristics, have received less research attention, as Kilgour et al. (2013) state.

Given the scarcity of studies on this subject and the fact that more information exists regarding their consequences rather than how they function, we formulated our first preliminary research question as follows: What formal and structural characteristics can be used to describe advertising award ceremonies? (RQ1).

Award ceremonies allow the registration of pieces or campaigns in different categories that usually correspond to different media or formats. Determining and comparing the categories offered at award ceremonies allows one to obtain data to answer our second research question: What are the significant differences in the volume of advertising activity between different media or formats? (RQ2).

Moreover, various studies have highlighted gender imbalances in the professional practice of advertising communication. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations: General Assembly, 2015), signed by the member states of the United Nations (United Nations Development Programme, 2024), set the Sustainable Development Goals, which include gender equality (Goal 5). The presence of women in creative departments in the US is less than 30% on average (Grow & Deng, 2021). *The 3% Movement* (2022) in 2022 declares its mission as follows:

“Until we came along, only 3% of Creative Directors were women. And very few were people of colour. We’re changing the ratio because the more varied the people who come up with ideas, the better the ideas will be”.

In Spain, the industry has promoted initiatives to enhance the presence of women in the specific field of advertising creative. Among these, we emphasize *MoreCreativeWomen* (orig. *MásMujeresCreativas*) (*Más Mujeres Creativas*, 2022), which works in favour of the visibility of

and equal opportunities for female talent, and *Unadedos* (2024), which collects endorsements for the collective commitment that drives the leadership of creative women.

Roca Correa et al. (2012) calculate a meagre 16.67% of women among the jury members of *El Sol*, i.e. *Festival Iberoamericano de la Comunicación Publicitaria*, in the period from 2004 to 2008. Women have a greater presence in accounts than in planning or creative and are more widely employed in the communication departments of manufacturers than in agencies (Alvarado-López & Martín-García, 2020).

It thus becomes relevant to investigate the composition of the juries that evaluate the pieces presented from this gender perspective. A third research question can be formulated: What criteria are considered in the selection of jury members? (RQ3).

Finally, focussing on what is evaluated at award ceremonies and the criteria applied in their evaluations, we find that creativity is the most admired characteristic in the advertising industry and also the most important criterion for determining the success of an agency (Helgesen, 1994). Although there are awards for advertising effectiveness, most award ceremonies are designed to measure some form of creativity (Polonsky & Waller, 1995). Effectiveness is inherent to the very definition of creativity and should not be considered as a separate dimension, since it is illogical to say that adverts are more effective because they are creative; if they are creative, in part, it is because they are more effective (Mackenzie et al., 1986; Smith & Yang, 2004).

Kilgour et al. (2013) revealed that the campaigns with potential to win awards for creativity were very original and rarely considered to be highly strategic. Kübler and Proppe (2012) identified the capacity for innovation and the integration of multiple channels as the main drivers of success in awards for creativity.

The complexity of creative evaluation does not make it impossible or invalid to use objective elements or indicators that systematize the process and allow for the selection of what is potentially perceived as decidedly creative (Tur-Viñes, 2018). Therefore, a fourth and final research question can be formulated as follows: Are the evaluation criteria of the pieces clear, public, objective, and coincident? (RQ4).

The aim of this study is to evaluate the methodology of advertising festivals and identify the criteria for their operation. From the point of view of branding and positioning theories, the award ceremonies highlight the work of the agencies and project the image of the professionals themselves, as well as the remarkable communicative level of the pieces of some brands. For the scientific field, this study uncovers the potential of festivals as an object of study and exposes the opportunities and difficulties. For professional practice, the study identifies areas for improvement in the definition and publication of criteria.

2. Methodology

2.1. Object of study

It was difficult to define the concept of award ceremony as an object of study, and it is advisable to differentiate the award ceremony brand or franchise from the award concept, since there are several award ceremony franchises that promote different awards. Some companies organize several awards, such as New York Festivals (brand award ceremony), which organizes the following (franchise brands): advertising awards, advertising and marketing effectiveness

awards *AME Awards*, *Bowery Awards*, *Global Awards*, radio awards, and television and film awards. This model coexists with global awards programs such as *The Drum*, *EVCOM*, *Design and Art Direction*, *Digiday*, *Best*, *WARC*, or *The Global*, and awards promoted by magazines or advertising information spaces, such as *Adweek*, *PR Daily*, *Ad Age*, or *Ragan Communications*.

Likewise, each prize highlights pieces in different categories (as well as sub-categories) and can even have several levels within each (for example, gold, silver and bronze tend to be common), allowing a certain degree of hierarchical organization in the evaluation of the pieces that gives rise to rankings.

2.2. Sample

We merged the awards by the specialist consultancy in award ceremonies *Boost Awards* (Boost, 2024), the research company *SCOPEN* (SCOPEN: Agency Scope, 2021), *Adforum* (1999–2020), and *El Publicista* (2003–2024). The result was completed with searches in the *Google Chrome* browser using the search terms: *advertising awards*, *communication awards*, *public relations awards*, and *campaign awards*. A total of 223 awards was obtained and grouped into 170 brands and/or franchises.

By simple random sampling, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 7.5%, 85 international award ceremony franchise brands (50% of the total) were analyzed.

The last instalment available on the web was analyzed: 39 award ceremonies (45.8%) in 2022, 40 (47%) in 2021, 4 (4.7%) in 2020, the 2019 instalment of *eWards* (1.2%), and the 2018 edition of *The EthicMark Awards* (1.2%).

2.3. Organization of the study

Prizes that consider advertising or public relations in different media have long been considered to be generalist, although at the same time, some prizes focus on specific themes (gender, social value, technology, etc.). There are single-prize award ceremonies as well as multi-prize award ceremonies. Where an award ceremony promotes more than one prize, only one of them (the most general in terms of advertising) was analyzed.

A content analysis of the public information found on each award ceremony's official website, in its most recent edition, was carried out. One of the authors undertook the pre-design of the categories and the variables of the content analysis and then, following the recommendations of Krippendorff (1990), did not participate in the data collection. Data collection was carried out using *Microsoft Excel* and *SPSS* by the three other authors, considering intercoder reliability, which was guaranteed via repeated consultations to achieve consensus on the criteria. The variables and their values were selected according to the principles recommended by Berelson (1952): homogeneity, completeness, exclusivity, objectivity, and adequacy in terms of the content studied and the objective of the work.

2.4. Content analysis

Four dimensions were considered, one per research question (structure and functioning, categories/sub-categories of the awards, information regarding the jury, and the evaluation criteria of pieces) that include 20 variables (Table 1).

Table 1. Internal consistency between dimensions, research questions and indicators analyzed (source: created by authors)

Dimension	Research questions	Indicators
Formal and structural characteristics	What formal and structural characteristics can be used to describe advertising award ceremonies? (RQ1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Starting year; ■ Frequency; ■ Descriptor; ■ Promoting entity; ■ Scope of the promoting entity; ■ Scope of the award ceremony; ■ Thematic subject; ■ Cost of registration of pieces; ■ Cost of gala entry; ■ Conference and event offerings; ■ Exclusive women's section.
Award categories	Do the categories awarded reveal significant differences in the volume of advertising activity between different media or formats? (RQ2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Total categories and sub-categories; ■ Awards by category and sub-category; ■ Special awards; ■ Young talent contest.
Information regarding the jury	What criteria are considered in the selection of jury members? (RQ3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Members; ■ Presence of women; ■ Different jury according to category; ■ Selection criteria.
Evaluation of the pieces	Are the evaluation criteria of the pieces clear, public, objective and coincident? (RQ4)	Evaluation criteria

2.5. Data analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out, taking into account the frequency and percentage of the prevalence of each indicator, as well as the standard deviation where appropriate. To analyze the most common terms used to describe the award ceremonies, a semantic analysis was carried out with *NVivo*, differentiating the results by language into award ceremonies in English (79; 92.9%) or Spanish (6; 7.1%). The semantic analysis of the category denominations unified their English translations, along with the elimination of plural and singular words.

The study database listing all the award ceremonies in the sample is available in the special source (see Tur-Viñes et al., 2022).

3. Results

3.1. Formal and structural characteristics of the award ceremonies

The analysis of the starting years of the ceremonies revealed that the *ADC Annual Awards* are the longest running (since 1920), followed by Association of National Advertisers (ANA) International ECHO Awards (since 1929). The most recent initiatives are the Campaign Brand Leadership and Partnership Awards (debuting in 2022) together with the Davos Communications Awards and Digital Event Awards (that started in 2021). The decade of 2010–2020 witnessed several debuts ($n = 22$; 25.9%), followed by the decades of 1990 (17; 20%) and 2000 (15; 17.6%). The 21st century included 51.7% (44) of the award ceremonies from the sample. The year of creation is used to demonstrate prestige.

Reviewing their frequency, 100% are annual. Most are of non-specialized, general themes (68; 80%). Public relations is represented by a total of four award ceremonies (4.7%), with events such as *Bulldog PR Awards* or Chartered Institute of Public Relations Excellence Awards (CIPREA), while digital strategy has three award ceremonies (3.5%): Internet Advertising Competition Awards (IACA), *AVA Digital Awards*, and Online Media, Marketing and Advertising Awards. Areas such as creative (*Cannes Lions Awards*), design (Marketing and Communication Design Award), and marketing (*B2B Marketing Awards*) have a reduced share. We found seven award ceremonies (8.2%) classified in the "other theme", including events (one), content creation (three), social advertising (two; *Publifestival* and *Caracol de Plata*) and humorous advertising (one; *SMiLE Festival*).

The positioning of each award ceremony is expressed by its descriptor. Award ceremonies in English (79; 93%) tend to position themselves as international events by using the terms *global* (27) or *international* (18), and use the terms *marketing* (49) and *advertising* (40) interchangeably. The term *communication* appears 28 times (35%). Likewise, the words *industry* (30) or *creativity* (16) are used to refer to the advertising industry in a general way. The award ceremonies define their aims with two recurring terms: *best* (33) and *excellence* (21). This means that they seek the best or excellence in professional practice. Verbs such as *celebrate* (15) or *recognize* (9) predominate in describing the intention of the award ceremonies. The awards also serve as meeting places where the latest trends in the industry are debated, with parties or gala ceremonies: *AVA Digital Awards* is an international competition that recognizes excellence by creative professionals responsible for the planning, concept, direction, design, and production of digital communication.

Meanwhile, award ceremonies in Spanish (6; 7.8%) are also described as international events where the best of advertising (9), communication (4), creativity (3), or ideas (3) are recognized. The term *marketing* (2) is used less to describe the industry. Like award ceremonies in English, Spanish-speaking award ceremonies focus on seeking "the best" (5) in the industry and "excellence" (2) in the profession. *Recognize* (5) and *gather* (2) are the verbs most commonly used to describe these professional encounters: recognizing the work, campaigns or ideas, but also bringing the industry together. In addition to the term *international*, terms such as *Ibero-American* or *Latino* were found to describe some of these award ceremonies, highlighting "creativity" or "ideas" in Spanish. For example, *El Sol* (2023) is defined with these three concepts: "a quote from Ibero-American creativity. Of international scope. A multimedia award ceremony".

Regarding their promoters, the 85 award ceremonies from the sample are organized by 80 different entities. A total of 47.1% (40) of the promoters are professional associations, while 20% (17) are consultants and/or event organizers. Sixteen (18.8%) award ceremonies are promoted by magazines or news blogs. Private companies hold seven award ceremonies (8.2%), while exclusive media companies hold five (5.9%). Companies such as *Produ* and Content Marketing Institute, which manage the *Fiap Awards* and Content Marketing Awards, respectively, are media content providers.

The United States (US) is the country with the most award ceremonies (44; 51.8%), followed by the United Kingdom (26; 30.6%), Spain (4; 4.7%), France (3; 3.5%), and Argentina (2; 2.4%). Belgium, Canada, Slovenia, South Korea, Mexico, and Switzerland hold only one award ceremony.

For 12 of the award ceremonies analyzed (14.1%), the registration of pieces is free. The average registration fee for all 70 award ceremonies is 394 US dollars (USD) per piece. In 88.2%

of cases (75), the price of attendance at the gala ceremony, including conferences and social events, is not provided. When provided, the price ranges from 50 to 500 USD.

Five award ceremonies (5.9%) include a section exclusively for women. In the case of the *ARF David Ogilvy Awards*, the *SeeHer Award* category was created in 2021. *El Ojo de Iberoamérica* created the recognition +Women (+Creative Women and +Women Producers) in 2019. The Awards for Communications Excellence present the following awards: *Top Women in Marketing Awards*, *PR Woman of the Year*, and *Top Women in Communications Awards*. *Cynopsis Digital Model D Awards* honours campaigns that promote diversity and inclusion.

Finally, 27 award ceremonies (31.8%) that endorse specific causes were identified, including training (*Design and Art Direction awards*, *Publifestival* and *SMiLE Festival*), culture (*The Cannes Lions Awards*), support for the advertising industry (*Summit Awards* and *The One Show*) and seven other events (35%) related to COVID-19 pandemic. *Golden Drum* and *AICP Show* do not accept submissions from Russian companies or brands. Ukrainian agencies have free registration at *The Cannes Lions Awards 2022*. *El Sol* and Events Industry Council Global Awards have sustainability and the sustainable development goals as their objective. *Experiential in color* promotes the interracial visibility of young people in the industry. *The One Show* supports the industry through different programs for inclusion and diversity, education, creative development and gender equality.

3.2. Categories, sub-categories, and awards

A total of 2048 categories and 13 708 sub-categories were identified, corresponding to an average of 24.1 categories and 161.3 sub-categories per award ceremony (Table 2). The average number of sub-categories per category is 6.7. The award ceremony with the most categories is *The Cannes Lions Awards* (163), followed by *IACA* (106). The *CIPREA*, *The EthicMark Awards*, and *IACA* have only two categories. There are 36 award ceremonies without sub-categories in the sample (42.3%). The remaining 49 award ceremonies range from four sub-categories (*The EthicMark Awards*) to 4859 sub-categories (*IACA*).

Table 2. Categories and sub-categories of the award ceremonies (source: created by authors)

Award ceremonies	85
Absolute categories	1458 (71.2%)
Special categories	344 (16.8%)
Young talent categories	246 (12%)
Total categories	2048
Sub-categories	13 708
Average categories per event	24.1
Average sub-categories per event	161.3
Average sub-categories by category	6.7
Award ceremonies with absolute categories	85 (100%)
Award ceremonies with special categories	46 (54.1%)
Award ceremonies with young talent categories	27 (31.8%)
Award ceremonies with sub-categories	49 (57.6%)
Award ceremonies with more than one award per category	27 (31.8%)

There are 27 award ceremonies (31.8%) that award more than one prize in each category. Awarding three prizes (gold, silver, and bronze) is the most common practice.

The total number of registered categories (2048) is broken down as shown in Table 2.

Categories for young talent were identified in 27 award ceremonies (31.8%), with a total of 246 categories (representing an average of 9.1 categories for young talent).

Award ceremonies such as the John Caples International Awards (JCIA) feature agency-sponsored categories. The categories have their own names in the Annual Markie Awards (*Thinker, Pinnacle, etc.*) and in the *Design and Art Direction* awards for young talent (*BBC, Burger King, The Walt Disney Company, Duolingo, or Tesco*). In the JCIA, there is no limit on the prizes or an obligation to give them.

ADSTARS asks for the type of appeal of each submitted piece (fact presentation, humor, fear, sex, comparison, demonstration, recommendation, soft sell, hard sell, direct response, affection, and nostalgia). The semantic analysis enabled the identification of the most popular words among the names of the categories (Figure 1).

These possible thematic clusters were identified:

- Media and actions: event (31), film (25), radio (21), outdoor (13), commercials (11), sports (11);
- Digital: mobile (25), influencer (22), online (22), technology (20), web (18), virtual (10);
- Differential feature of the endeavor: creative (36), innovation (29), branded (28), production (28), communication (24), direct (20), integrated (20), strategy (16), business (15), creativity (12), experiential (12), b2b (10), effective (10), interactive (10);
- Resources used: date (29), budget (8);
- Results: experience (28), excellence (22), engagement (13), impact (9), sales (8).

Some ceremonies award prizes in identical categories, distinguishing between global campaigns (several pieces) and isolated actions (e.g. spots). Six award ceremonies emphasize their eminently Ibero-American character by keeping the names of 150 categories (10.3%) in Spanish: *Caracol de Plata, El Ojo de Iberoamérica, El Sol, Fiap Awards, Publifestival, and SMiLE Festival*.

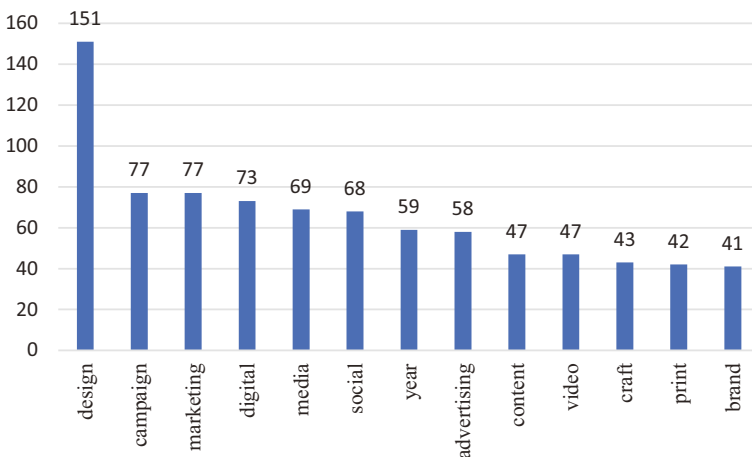


Figure 1. Semantic analysis of category denominations (frequency of occurrence) (source: created by authors (after eliminating stop words and plurals, among others))

3.3. Information regarding the jury

The composition of the jury is public and transparent in 55 cases (64.7%), including full names and, sometimes, a professional profile and photograph. ANA International ECHO Awards, IMC European Awards, and International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Gold Quill Awards only mention the total number of (unnamed) members.

Only 20 (36%) of the awards have different juries by category. The following only report on the procedure (without names): Annual Markie Awards, *The Drum Awards* for content, and *WARC Awards* for Media.

The jury selection criteria appear in 11 cases (13%). It is common to justify their selection based on the length (5–10 years) of their international professional experience or prizes won. Thus, *Cresta International Advertising Awards* speaks of the “world’s most experienced and successful creatives” while *El Ojo de Iberoamérica* simply mentions their professional trajectory. Territorial or country representation is also important. For example, *AME Awards* selects its members divided into five regions: Asia–Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, Africa, and North America. Only in the case of *Cresta International Advertising Awards* is it mentioned that the jury is semi-permanent, which differentiates it from the rest of the award ceremonies.

Two award ceremonies that accurately explain the selection criteria of the jury are IABC Gold Quill Awards and IACA. In both cases, 10 years of experience is required, whether you are a professional or university professor. Academic members with 5 years of experience are admitted if they are postgraduates or Doctors of Philosophy. Business owners must be directors or senior executives. The IABC Gold Quill Awards requires online training and availability for 2–10 hours in the first quarter of the year to qualify as a jury member. Meanwhile, the IACA selects jury members through a focus group consisting of consumers with higher education and specialized journalists with 5 years of experience. Summit Awards allow jury members to be nominated.

The average number of members on the jury is 100. However, there is wide divergence in the values, with a standard deviation of 127.74. Data reveal that 38 (69%) award ceremonies have juries with fewer than 100 members. Six prizes (11%) have juries of 100–200 members, five (9%) have 200–300, and another five (9%) have 300–400. Only the *Design and Art Direction* has a larger jury, with 603 members.

The information available makes it possible to analyze gender parity in 53 award ceremonies (62.3%) that total 5,096 members with 2,216 women (43.5%). In 19 award ceremonies (35.8%), a percentage of women greater than or equal to 50% is observed. *Femvertising Awards* and London International Awards are the exception, with an exclusively female jury, while *SMiLE Festival* has a jury made up of only men.

The number of women chairing these juries is very low (in *Clio Awards*, 4 of 17 juries are chaired by women; in *El Ojo de Iberoamérica*, 5 of the 15). In *The Cannes Lions Awards* there is a certain commitment to parity, as 15 of the 28 juries are chaired by women.

Juries are usually organized by category (20; 22%), although sometimes several sections are grouped together (in *ADC Annual Awards*, a jury evaluates packaging, and product design). Geographical regions (*AME Awards*) and student categories entail different juries. Only four award ceremonies (20%) have two different juries (*ANDY Awards*, *El Sol*, *ARF David Ogilvy Awards*, and *Effie Awards*).

3.4. Evaluation of the pieces

The evaluation criteria are made public for 48 award ceremonies (56.5%), with very unequal approaches and with the frequent use of keywords (26; 54%) or defined written criteria (22; 45.8%).

Thus, *El Sol* only indicates the keywords *quality* and *creativity*, and *The Cannes Lions Awards* for films those of *idea* and *execution*. IACA combines these terms: *creativity, innovation, impact, design, copywriting, use of the medium, and memorability*.

Of these 26 award ceremonies, only 5 (19.2%) carry out some kind of weighting (points or percentages). *AME Awards* considers challenge/strategy/objectives (20%), creativity (25%), execution (25%), and results and effectiveness (30%), while *The Cannes Lions Awards* for design considers idea (40%), execution (40%), and results (20%).

When written criteria appear, they guide the jury in making their selections. For example, *Creativepool Annual* (Creativepool, 2023) specifies: “An idea that changes how things are viewed/done forever”. To measure a strategy, the IMC European Awards ceremony asks the following question: “Are the objectives outlined clear, concise, measurable and achievable?” (WARC, 2024). In the case of *El Ojo de Iberoamérica*, the questions are more poetic. To measure creativity, they ask: “Did it make your pupils widen millimetrically? Did it make you want to go on?” (El Ojo de Iberoamérica, 2024). There are award ceremonies that use these evaluation criteria to explain the jury voting process (*ADDY Awards*), the way the pieces are submitted to the contest (*Global Content Awards*) or what to avoid (*The EthicMark Awards*).

Of the 22 award ceremonies with written and defined criteria, 5 (22.7%) carry out a weighting of the evaluation parameters. IABC Gold Quill Awards propose IABC’s global seven-point scale of excellence from 7 – outstanding: an extraordinary or insightful approach or result to 1 – poor: work that is wrong or inappropriate. Conversely, only three (13.6%) of these award ceremonies apply a division of criteria by categories.

Of the 48 award ceremonies that provide public information regarding their evaluation criteria, only 10 (20.8%) apply some kind of weighting that aids the jury members in evaluating the advertising pieces in an objective way.

The semantic analysis performed using the derived words (Figure 2) of all the evaluation criteria reveals a bias depending on the number of design specifications (168), functionality (102) or aesthetic (63) of the IACA ceremony.



Figure 2. Evaluation criteria word cloud (source: created by authors (made with NVivo)

4. Discussion

This study of the award categories coincides with the work of Kübler and Proppe (2012), who identified the capacity for innovation and the integration of multiple channels as the main drivers of success in creativity awards. Both the descriptors and the categories studied confirm the majority presence of both tendencies.

The findings of this study differ from Roca Correa et al. (2012) regarding the presence of women on juries, as they indicated that the juries of *El Sol* included only 16.67% women. In our study, 36 award ceremonies (68%) have juries composed of more than 40% women, demonstrating the change in jury composition to improve the representation of women. In this vein, in 2020, *The Cannes Lions Awards* announced its commitment to gender parity in juries.

Creativity is the main criterion evaluated regarding the pieces, coinciding with the aforementioned studies by Helgesen (1994) and Polonsky and Waller (1995). This omnipresence may result in bias to the detriment of other criteria, as noted by Kilgour et al. (2013). Efficacy is also found as an explicit criterion, in line with what was suggested by MacKenzie et al. (1986) and Smith and Yang (2004). The criteria for evaluating pieces, where indicated, are ambiguous and generic.

5. Conclusions

The award ceremony business is experiencing unrelenting growth. Indeed, as many award ceremonies emerged in the first 22 years of the 21st century as throughout the last century.

Firstly, the thematic specialization (medium, format, technique used, target, geographical or idiomatic area, objective, etc.) arises as an opportunity to differentiate award ceremonies but also carries the risk of obtaining fewer registrations for each event, and thus less overall profitability. This may explain the reduced offering of thematic award ceremonies in the face of the proliferation of more general ones.

In addition, award ceremonies not only value and highlight pieces of communication, but also point to innovative trends in advertising practice, as well as being a meeting place to exchange experiences, learn about the challenges facing the industry and help understand what advertisers expect from the advertising industry and what it can offer.

Five main types of categories are identified: media and actions, digital, differential feature of the endeavor, resources used, and results obtained. The industry is also very sensitive to new generations of professionals as evidenced by the recurring presence of specific categories for young talent.

Moreover, New York Festivals was the first advertising award ceremony that banned "scam ads", that is, advertises that were never published or that were published without the full knowledge and consent of the advertiser. This confirms the existence of occasional unethical practices in the industry.

Finally, transparency represents an area for potential improvement because is, on the one hand, a social demand, and on the other, a shared commitment in responsible corporate policies. In fact, the jury selection criteria are published in very few prizes and the evaluation

criteria are known in less than half award ceremonies. Moreover, although it was possible to confirm the presence of academic professors on the juries, these are mostly made up of industry professionals, who act as both judges and interested parties at the same time. This phenomenon is not desirable because it compromises the ethics of the processes.

The lack of complete information on this subject complicates study of the gender variable. However, women are present on juries in percentages close to 50%, although they only chair 1 in 4 juries. This shows both the existence of a large number of professional women and the lack of confidence in them for the most important tasks. In order to break through the “glass ceiling”, this should be reversed.

This study has theoretical–practical implications, and expands upon previous knowledge regarding award, the selection of people and pieces, and the criteria for both. Moreover, it reveals potential improvements in the management of these award ceremonies from the point of view of expected and due transparency. This study also highlights the importance of complementarity between the academic world (little involved in award ceremonies) and the professional world (which manages the majority).

Acknowledgements

Cambridge Copy and Translation SL for the English translation of the text.

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