



SOCIAL MARKETING APPLIED TO THE STRATEGY OF THE SPANISH TRAFFIC AUTHORITY

A case study in the fight against drink driving

GEMA LOPEZ (GLOPEZM@UCM.ES)¹

MARÍA HERNÁNDEZ-HERRERA (HERNANDEZHMARIA@UNIOVI.ES)²

, AITOR GONZÁLEZ-BENGOECHEA (AITOR.GONZALEZ@UV.ES)³

¹ Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain.

² Universidad de Oviedo, Spain.

³ Universidad de Valencia, Spain.

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ABSTRACT

Navigating or driving through our cities is a right for all citizens, but it can only be exercised safely. To achieve this, the Spanish Traffic Authority (DGT) uses its resources to prevent drink driving. This management has yielded positive results, but it could be improved, and social marketing can assist in this effort.

Applying a qualitative methodology of interviews with experts, the results indicate that while the DGT has achieved awareness, the incorporation of more rigorously planned strategies along with deeper analysis would maximise the outcomes.

In conclusion, collaboration with social marketing experts and the use of advanced technologies can significantly enhance the effectiveness of prevention campaigns. These improvements are transferable to other transportation policies and public services within the city, seeking greater efficiency and a real impact on citizen behaviour for the common good.

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1. Introduction

Social marketing has evolved from being a public health tool to becoming an instrument applied in various social contexts. Recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of social marketing in changing behaviour when it incorporates audience segmentation and clear behavioural objectives (Kubacki *et al.*, 2015). This approach, applied both to road safety and in the campaigns of the DGT (Spanish Traffic Authority), highlights the need to monitor and evaluate its impact in order to measure the effectiveness of long-term behavioural change (Rothschild *et al.*, 2006), regardless of the improvement in the results achieved in recent years, which has undoubtedly been boosted by the communicative weight that these campaigns have acquired as part of the urban landscape.

A review of the literature indicates a lack of research on social marketing specifically in the context of alcohol consumption and road safety in Spain. The DGT's strategy in alcohol and driving campaigns represents a case in which social marketing must be evaluated within a broader framework that considers the cultural and social context of Spain (Segura, 2017). In this sense, it is relevant to frame it within the literature on urban governance, which emphasises that the institutional management of social problems in the city requires inter-institutional coordination and long-term strategic planning (da Cruz *et al.*, 2019). This study makes a significant contribution by addressing the gap in the literature and highlights how the application of social marketing in Spain still lacks a consolidated methodology.

The document is structured as follows: The current section, section 1, provides a review of the concept of social marketing, followed by an explanation of the chosen topic: alcohol consumption and the focal organisation of the case study, the DGT. Section 2 summarises the research objectives. Section 3 details the methodology used, specifically the qualitative framework (in-depth interviews). Section 4 presents the empirical results, including the findings from the data, the analysis performed, and the identification of possible answers to our objectives. Finally, section 5 concludes the article, summarising the key findings and offering comments and suggestions on how the DGT could apply the principles of social marketing.

1.1. Social Marketing

There are various definitions of social marketing (Lee & Kotler, 2022), but with few differences between them. Andreasen (1995), one of the first to define it, described it as a programme planning process that applies commercial marketing concepts and techniques to promote voluntary behavioural change. This definition is very similar to that of Dann (2010), who refers to the adaptation of commercial marketing, whether activities, institutions or processes, to achieve a social objective and bring about behavioural change, whether temporary or permanent. Another popular definition in use is that used by the *International Social Marketing Association* (n.d.): "Social marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good." All of them point to the use of marketing techniques and activities as essential to achieving behavioural change.

If we focus on the area of application of social marketing, we can refer to the explanation provided by the *National Social Marketing Centre* (n.d.), which describes it as a strategic process for understanding the people we want to help by planning activities, aid programmes, campaigns, etc. In this description, we can find similarities and differences with commercial marketing, summarised in Table 1.

In this regard, we find that commercial marketing is a strategic and methodologically planned discipline that contributes to the effective investment of resources, while social marketing, which would require the same methodology and strategy, is not usually applied with the same rigour of analysis and resource management in order to use public funds more efficiently.

One of the important differences between social marketing and commercial marketing is the product, since in most cases the aim is to change behaviour and no physical product is offered.

Behavioural changes can be of different kinds: reducing smoking, drug abuse, obesity, protecting nature, clean air, conservation, recycling, family planning, personal safety, human rights or racial equality. The characteristics of society, culture and environment will cause some to vary or be more important than others.

Table 1. Differences and similarities between social and commercial marketing

	Social marketing	Commercial marketing
Objective	To influence positive behavioural change for the individual and society.	To offer something distinctive and of value to the consumer.
Pre-analysis	Understand the behaviours and needs of the people you want to help.	Understand the behaviours and needs of the people you want to sell to.
Product	Not applicable	Product design.
Price	The effort required by the population to make the change.	Correct setting.
Distribution	The place where behavioural change takes place.	Places where the product can be purchased.
Promotion	The most important and sometimes the only one that is worked on.	Information and persuasion about the offer to the target audience.
Post-analysis	Impact measurement and evaluation. Different from measuring the number of views.	Impact measurement and evaluation.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

It would also be appropriate to differentiate between social marketing and corporate or business social responsibility, as the latter constitutes a type of cross-cutting management, applied to all departments and driven by management on a voluntary basis (Luque *et al.*, 2021), which seeks to make relationships with business stakeholders increasingly better, more lasting and reliable, while mitigating the social impact of their activities (Durán *et al.*, 2021). Social marketing, on the other hand, is planned and developed in the marketing department, at a more specific and subordinate level. However, both strategies share the usefulness as a business tool for legitimising these companies in the territory and society of which they are a part (Richez-Battesti & Itçaina, 2021).

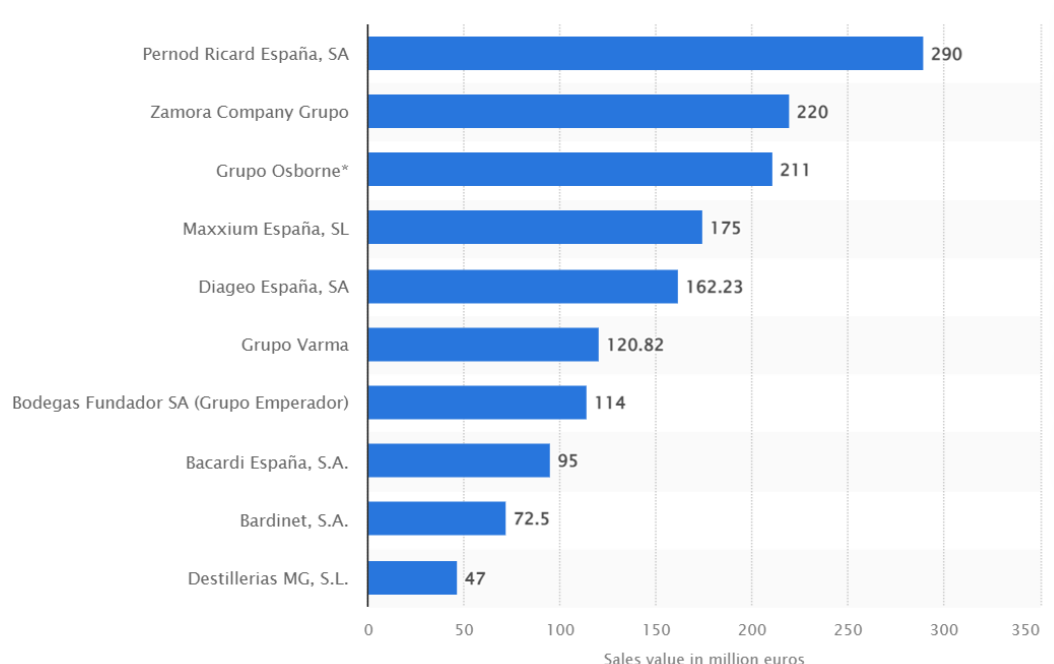
In this sense, social marketing can be interpreted as a form of institutional innovation geared towards urban change, given that such innovations are key to the transformation and resilience of cities as they involve changes in the way they plan, function and adapt (Hamdouch & Nyseth, 2023).

Social marketing also faces the challenge of involving citizens, since without their involvement and commitment, it runs the risk of remaining a unilateral effort that may not achieve lasting or relevant changes in society. In this regard, research such as that by Espina *et al.* (2021) presents community self-management as an alternative model based on citizen participation and solidarity that can enrich and complement social marketing strategies, promoting more equitable and sustainable development.

1.2. Alcohol consumption

We have chosen the topic of alcohol consumption and driving for several reasons. The first is that the alcohol industry in Spain exceeds €1.5 billion in sales in 2021 (Figure 1).

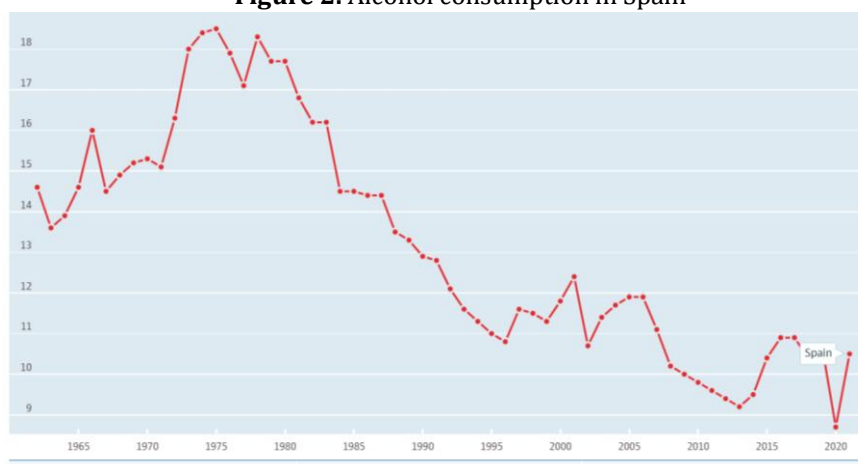
Figure 1. Sales value of the main Spanish companies in the spirits sector in 2021 (in millions of euros)



(*) These data include figures from business lines in other sectors.
Source: Trender, 2022.

Looking at consumption trends over the last 55 years, according to OECD data (2022), we find that in 1962 the figure was 14,600 litres per capita and rose gradually to 18,500 in 1975, while in 2021 it was 10,500 litres per capita. This shows a gradual decline over 46 years. The lowest consumption figures were in 2013 with 9,200 litres per capita and in 2020 (COVID-19) with 8,700 litres per capita, although it recovered to pre-pandemic figures the following year (10,500 in 2021), as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Alcohol consumption in Spain

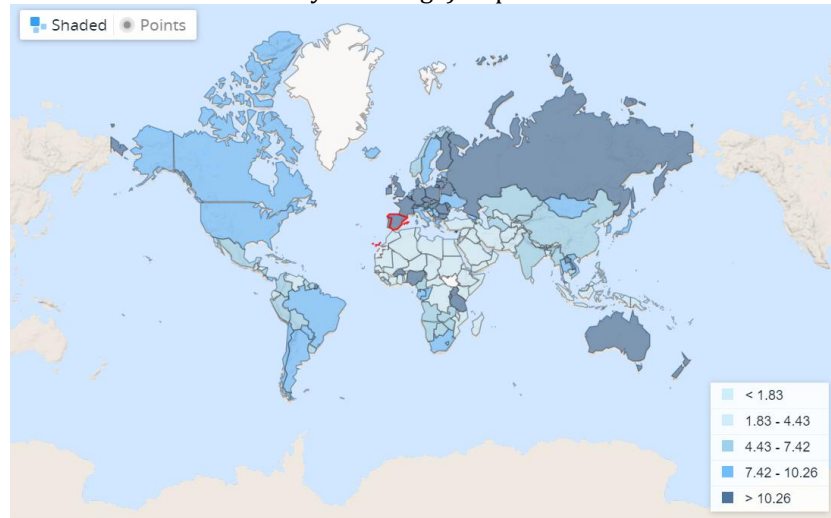


Source: OECD, 2022.

Compared to consumption levels in other countries (Figure 3), Spain had a total per capita alcohol consumption index of 12.72 in 2018, ranking 9th in the world after countries such as Seychelles, Uganda, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Germany, Ireland and Latvia. According to data published in Eurostat (2021), it can be seen that in Spain alcohol consumption is daily and more continuous than in other European Union countries, while it is also less intense,

with a very low position in the ranking of countries with episodes of high consumption at least once a month.

Figure 3. Total alcohol consumption per capita (litres of pure alcohol, projected estimates, over 15 years of age) – Spain



Source: The Global Health Observatory, World Health Organisation, n.d.

The second reason for addressing the issue of alcohol consumption is the consequences of this consumption, mainly in relation to the issue at hand: traffic accidents. According to the Spanish report by the National Road Safety Observatory (n.d.), alcohol consumption is one of the leading causes of disability and mortality worldwide. In 2016, three million people died for this reason, of which almost 400,000 were due to traffic accidents involving alcohol consumption; and in Europe, alcohol was related to around 20 to 25% of all road deaths. Focusing on Spain, in 2017 there were 276 deaths from traffic accidents in which one of the drivers involved was driving with a blood alcohol level above the legal limit. In 2022, traffic accidents were the third leading cause of violent death in Spain (Nicolás, 2023). Of the 854 drivers who died that year, 443 tested positive for substance use, with 35% for alcohol (303), of which 70% were twice the permitted level of 0.5 grams of alcohol per litre of blood (220); Compared to the number of victims due to alcohol consumption in 2017 (276), this represents an increase of 9.8%.

Consequently, the measures adopted on this issue (World Health Organisation, 2019) by governments, including the Spanish government, are:

- Collect data on alcohol consumption and its social and, above all, health consequences.
- Communication and coverage of alcoholism treatment.
- Limit the maximum permissible blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.05% or less to prevent drink driving.
- Limiting the age for purchasing alcohol inside and outside an establishment (to 18 years).
- A licensing system combined with a government monopoly on at least one level of the alcohol market.
- Some form of restriction on beer advertising, with more frequent total bans on national television and radio for high-proof spirits.
- Apply excise duties on alcohol.

As can be seen, reducing or preventing alcohol consumption depends on multiple factors, but the measures can be grouped into two main areas: government policies (which include limits, restrictions and taxes) and social marketing (with research and communication).

1.3. Social marketing as a tool against alcohol consumption

In this regard, Rothschild *et al.* (2006) presented the results of a field experiment using social marketing in three rural communities with a significant change in alcohol-related accidents, especially among people aged 21 to 34, and with a projected decrease of 17% in the first year.

For their part, Janssen *et al.* (2013) investigated whether the application of social marketing influences attitudes or behaviour related to alcohol, concluding that causality between them could not be assessed. Contrary to the conclusions of Dietrich *et al.* (2015), who, after identifying significant subgroups among adolescents aged 14 to 16 who responded differently to the intervention, found preliminary empirical evidence supporting the application of social marketing segmentation in alcohol education programmes.

Finally, Gallegos and Cadena (2020) also concluded that social marketing could influence the behaviour of university students in some way, with the support of social networks, action campaigns, discouragement of vices, and health and life messages.

1.4. The case of the Spanish Traffic Authority

Among other functions, the DGT's mission is to develop "actions aimed at improving the behaviour and training of road users, reducing traffic accidents and the number of victims, and promoting safe mobility and the efficient provision of administrative services" (DGT, 2022a).

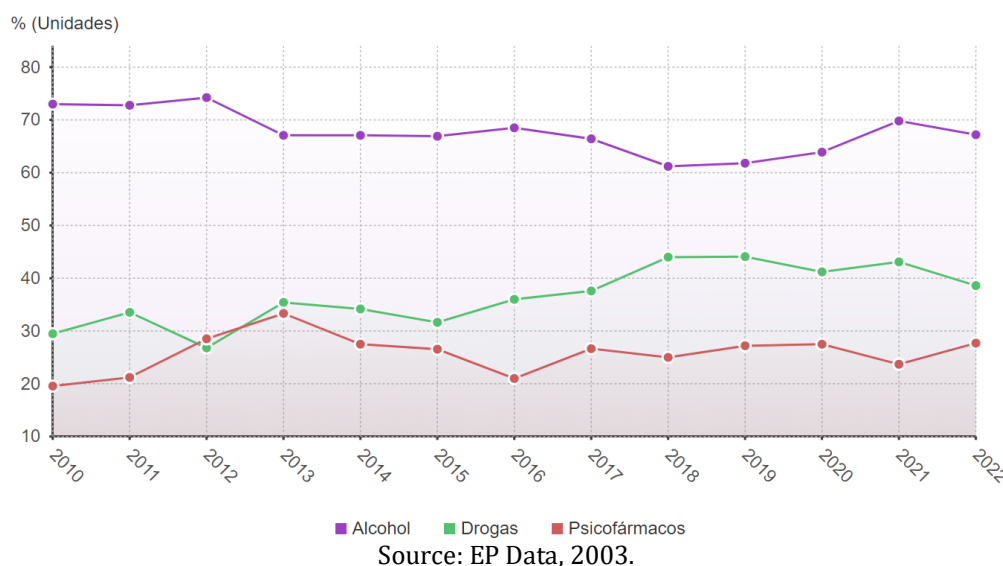
Likewise, among the strategic objectives set by the institution, number four stands out: "To promote responsible and safe road behaviour through education and awareness-raising actions" (DGT, 2022b), as it is directly related to the subject of this article and is one of its pillars: "to maintain and promote the effectiveness of the DGT's communication campaigns, which have proven to be a fundamental tool in raising public awareness over the last few decades" (DGT, 2022b).

Throughout its more than 60 years of activity, the DGT has used awareness campaigns as one of its main ways of pursuing its objectives and raising awareness among its audiences about various issues related to driving risks. There are three main times of the year when the DGT launches its awareness campaign, coinciding with periods of heavy traffic on Spanish roads: Christmas, Easter and the summer holidays. Previous research has sought to analyse issues surrounding the discourse (Montoro & Carbonell, 1994), emotions (Martínez & Segura, 2013, 2014a and 2014b) and even the effectiveness (Segura-García, 2015) of these campaigns. but no attempt has been made to link these campaigns to a more comprehensive and integrated approach that would be (or should be) social marketing.

Since 1977, there have been up to 24 campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Health, the Home Office (Mendoza, 2013; the Home Office, 2017, 2018 and 2021), and the DGT (DGT, 2016, 2019; Pacocostas, 2006; Segura, 2017), whose central theme is the one mentioned above. This message has coexisted with other campaigns on distractions, road safety, etc., with only five campaigns on alcohol since 2014 (DGT, 2024).

The work of the DGT is very necessary and effective. In the data on accidents related to alcohol consumption in Spain (Figure 4), we see that there was a decrease of almost 10 percentage points between 2010 and 2018, when it began to rise slightly again.

Figure 4. Evolution of traffic victims according to the type of substance detected



These figures also depend on various factors, such as the tightening of laws and/or awareness-raising efforts, and their impact must be understood in the context of the historical period in which we find ourselves (García & García, 2021). In a population saturated with messages, the impact today is different from that in 1985, when the DGT coined its famous slogan "if you drink, don't drive" (Figueras, 2021).

The institutional challenge of changing citizens' behaviour is common to different administrations and countries; it is not unique to the DGT and Spain. Some authors advocate the co-production of public services to promote synergies and social innovation (Avelino et al., 2019; Sáez, 2017; Van Wijk *et al.*, 2019) or the need to establish an ideal environment for interaction between actors and agents who develop functional processes in organisations (Perdomo-Charry *et al.*, 2019), without forgetting the fundamental role of communication in achieving social change (Servaes, 2022). All these elements clearly demonstrate the public and social interest of the proposals included in this research.

2. Objectives

As we have seen, a major difficulty in social marketing is assessing its real impact in terms of its effectiveness in raising awareness among the population and thus achieving behavioural change. For this reason, we find it interesting to understand and analyse how social marketing is done in order to be effective. In this regard, the following objectives of the work are presented:

01. To identify and validate the items that define social marketing and differentiate it from commercial marketing.
02. To assess whether the work carried out by the DGT can be considered social marketing in relation to the defined items.
03. To suggest improvements in the DGT's strategies for a more effective application of social marketing.

3. Methodology

The environment defined in the introduction has been used to develop a data collection tool, in the form of interviews with experts, which seeks to obtain relevant information to ultimately determine whether the activity carried out by the DGT in Spain can be considered social marketing or merely social communication campaigns. Table 2 presents the methodology in the form of a technical data sheet.

Table 2. Technical data sheet

Objectives:	Understanding how the DGT is applying social marketing in its activities relating to drink-driving.
Methodology:	Exploratory
Design type:	Phenomenological study.
Technique:	In-depth interviews with experts.
Sample:	Professionals related to the DGT and its work on raising awareness of drink-driving. Also experts in social marketing and its application.
Sampling:	Intentional or judgemental, selecting those experts whose knowledge can contribute to the achievement of the objectives set.
Data analysis programme:	Atlas.ti version 24.
Fieldwork date:	October to December 2023

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

The phenomenological study, which has been contrasted and argued by several authors (Jorrín *et al.*, 2021; Vagle, 2018; among others), has been considered appropriate since the types of objectives set out seek to explain social marketing (the phenomenon) and, specifically, its application to a specific case (in depth). The technique used to collect information was in-depth interviews with experts, which is appropriate for the study of specific phenomena or topics that require in-depth analysis (Høffding *et al.*, 2022). Intentional or judgemental sampling was used to select the experts, with the selection criteria for participants being their experience or knowledge of the subject under study. The aim is for these participants, due to their professional experience, education or practical knowledge, to provide in-depth and specific information on the objectives set (Table 3).

Table 3. List of experts interviewed

Code*	Organisation	Position	Interviewer	Duration (min.)
DGT	Spanish Traffic Authority	Head of department	2 and 3	62
MS1 and MS2	Mediasapiens ¹	Executives	1 and 3	49
UCA	University of Cádiz	Professor, researcher and specialist in social marketing	1 and 3	49
UC3M ²	Consultant / Carlos III University of Madrid	Consultant, specialist in public communication and university professor	1 and 3	62
FEBE1 and FEBE2	Spanish Federation of Spirits (FEBE)	Department managers	1	31

* The names of the experts are coded using acronyms that indicate the organisation they work for. (1) Mediasapiens was the winning agency for the DGT media campaign in the 2020-2022/2023-2025 competitions. (2) This expert has been part of the evaluation committee for agencies competing for the DGT media campaign account.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Finally, Atlas.ti version 24 is used for qualitative analysis, a programme suitable for this content (Deterding & Waters, 2021) which, although relatively new, already has promoters (Friese, 2019; Smit & Scherman, 2021; among others). The programme has helped to connect codes and quantify their use.

The analysis involved deductive coding (Azungah, 2018; Fife & Gossner, 2024; Pandey, 2019;), based on the interview script and questions. Categories and possible codes were chosen, which were confirmed by the participants' responses, and those that had not been initially intuited were

incorporated. Although it was based on an initial categorisation, the coding was adapted to the content of the interviews. Using the Atlas.ti code report, it was possible to compare the application of the codes to ensure consistency using a constant comparison method. There was little co-occurrence of codes, as the interviews were designed to respond to the objective and the answers were specific to those questions, with hardly any mixing of codes.

3.1. Process developed

Below, we explain the process developed using the COREQ guidelines (Tong *et al.*, 2007). There was no prior relationship with any of the interviewees before the start of the research. Contacts were found via LinkedIn or articles related to the topic and contacted by email to explain the research and request their collaboration. All of them were told who the researchers were, the universities where they worked, what was being researched and why, the purpose of the research, why they were being contacted, and how the interview would be conducted. They were able to ask questions and everything they requested was explained to them. Part of this is included in the consent form that each of them accepted in order to participate. The meetings took place at the participants' offices, with the exception of UC3M, which was held at Francisco de Vitoria University, and UCA, which was held via the Zoom platform. Only the five participants were contacted, and none of them refused to collaborate. During the interviews, no one else was present apart from the participants and the researchers. None of the interviews had to be repeated. The interviews were recorded with two devices (mobile phone and computer). Notes were taken during the interview and immediately afterwards they were expanded upon and impressions were exchanged. The interviews were conducted by two researchers to aid in the triangulation of the research and were transcribed using Microsoft Word Online, then checked by researchers 1 and 3. The coding was carried out by researcher 1 and subsequently supervised by researchers 2 and 3. The results obtained from the analysis were not discussed with the participants. As can be seen in the results below, quotes from the participants are included to illustrate the findings and identify the interviewee who made them (e.g., MS1). These quotes highlight the findings and are used as a basis for reaching conclusions and responding to the objectives set. The results are presented according to the categories extracted that refer to the main themes of the analysis (Figure 5). Some secondary themes found in the analysis are also discussed.

In the sampling of participants, response saturation was taken into account in deciding not to conduct further interviews. We considered saturation to have been reached when the response coincided in two interviewees, as this confers significant value on the statement in the expert profile.

A qualitative methodology is used to understand the use of social marketing at the public level and the monitoring carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies. The structured script was adapted to each of the interviewees to take advantage of the potential of their profiles. For example, in the UCA interview, DGT campaigns were not discussed, focusing the questions on social marketing. Participants received a summary of the blocks that made up the questions so that they could understand the approach before the interview. The script was divided into several blocks with a common structure (see Table 4):

Table 4. Structure of the interviews conducted

Block	No. of questions	Topic
Introduction	3	Validation of the interviewee as a valuable subject for the object of study.
Social marketing	8	Questions relating to social marketing to ascertain the interviewees' opinions on the subject and obtain information with which to subsequently evaluate the DGT.
Status of Alcohol and Legislation in Spain	9	Questions relating to the Spanish context regarding legislation on drink-driving, alcohol consumption itself and other related issues.
Work of the DGT	5	Questions regarding opinions on the work carried out by the DGT in general to raise awareness about drink-driving.
DGT campaigns	5	Questions regarding opinions on the campaigns carried out by the DGT to raise awareness about drink-driving.
Effectiveness in combating drink-driving	3	Questions to gauge the degree of effectiveness attributed to DGT campaigns compared to issues such as legislation or the evolution of society itself.
Closing	2	Specific details on open topics and comments or free contributions from the interviewee.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

3.2. Criteria for methodological rigour

The research carried out complies with Calderón's criteria (2002):

- Epistemological adequacy. The phenomenon studied is a well-defined discipline in theory, but one that is not easy to find in practice. This contradiction raises the research objectives, which we aim to address through conversations with experts on the subject. Sections 1 and 2 explain the process that links the research to the theoretical context.
- Relevance. As mentioned in the previous point, we found it necessary to explain how social marketing is applied, explain this discipline from a practical point of view, and provide guidance on how to achieve maximum performance and effectiveness. By studying a specific case, we go beyond theory and explain the practice in order to focus the analysis and conclusions. Section 5 contributes comments and suggestions that improve the case observed and can be transferred to other areas.
- Validity. The practical approach to the real case of the DGT gives the research fidelity to the phenomenon in reality. The study has been designed *ad hoc* for the case, taking into account the context and related data, but the process is adaptable to other cases that may require a similar study. The sections carried out are replicable by adapting the process to the selected cases.
- Reflexivity. At each step, the researchers have self-examined the correct execution of these steps. In fact, the research emerged with an initial approach that compared the effectiveness of social marketing with the legislation applied to the subject, to then focus solely on the application of social marketing and, finally, to delve deeper into its practice. Progress was only made when all three researchers agreed.

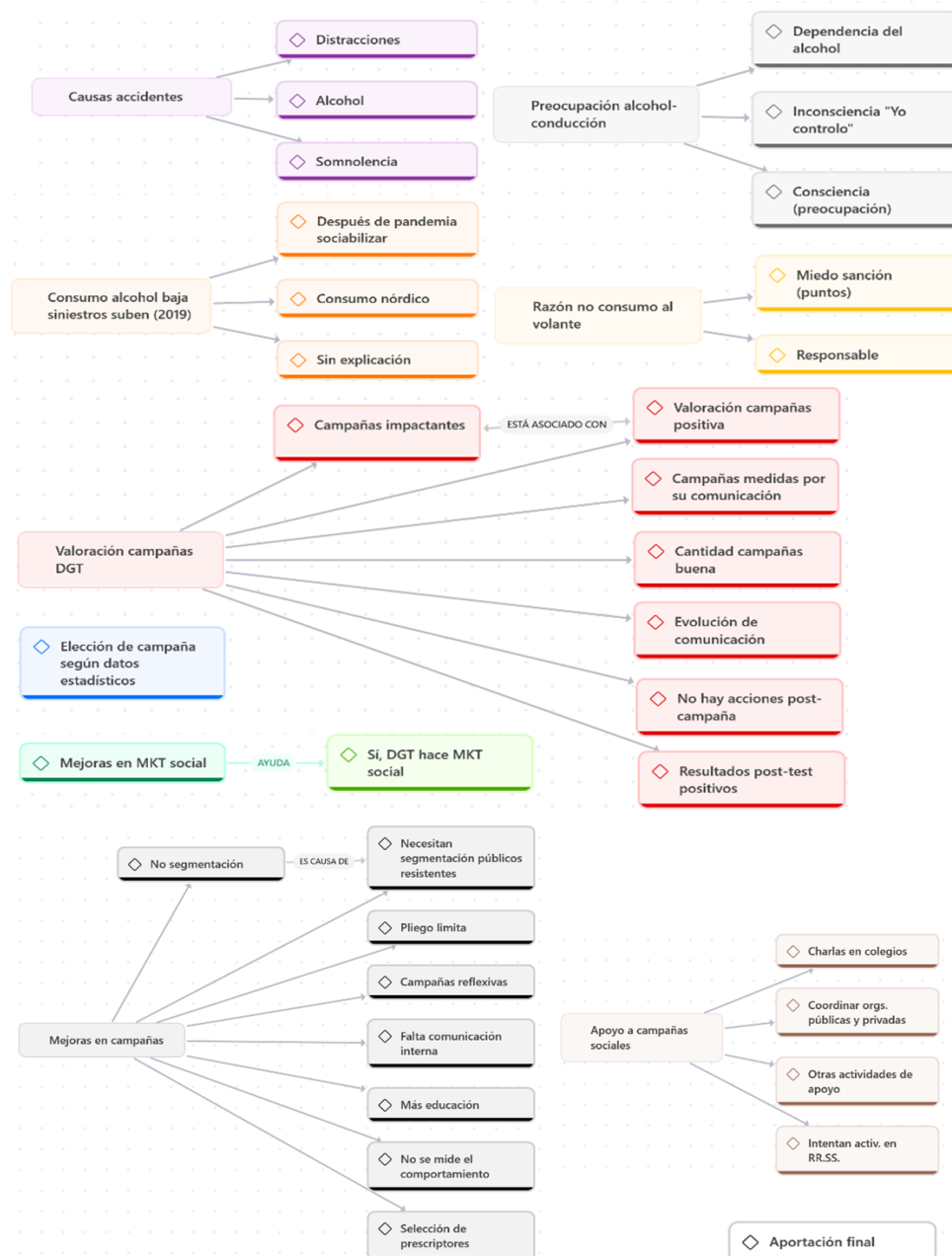
On the other hand, the research also meets the criteria for triangulation (Anderson, 2017; da Silva *et al.*, 2020; Moutinho *et al.*, 2018) in several aspects:

- The research was carried out by three different researchers, who participated in all phases: methodology, preparation, fieldwork and analysis, self-evaluating the research for its objectivity and fulfilment of the objectives set.
- During the research process, the three authors considered and evaluated different approaches or paths in order to choose the most appropriate one, especially in the analysis.
- Data, described in the introduction, were used to understand the starting point and evaluate them in interviews with experts.

4. Empirical results

The interviews conducted were transcribed and analysed using deductive coding, a grid of conclusions and the Atlas.ti programme. The network of codes that we can extract from the Atlas.ti analysis can be seen in Figure 5:

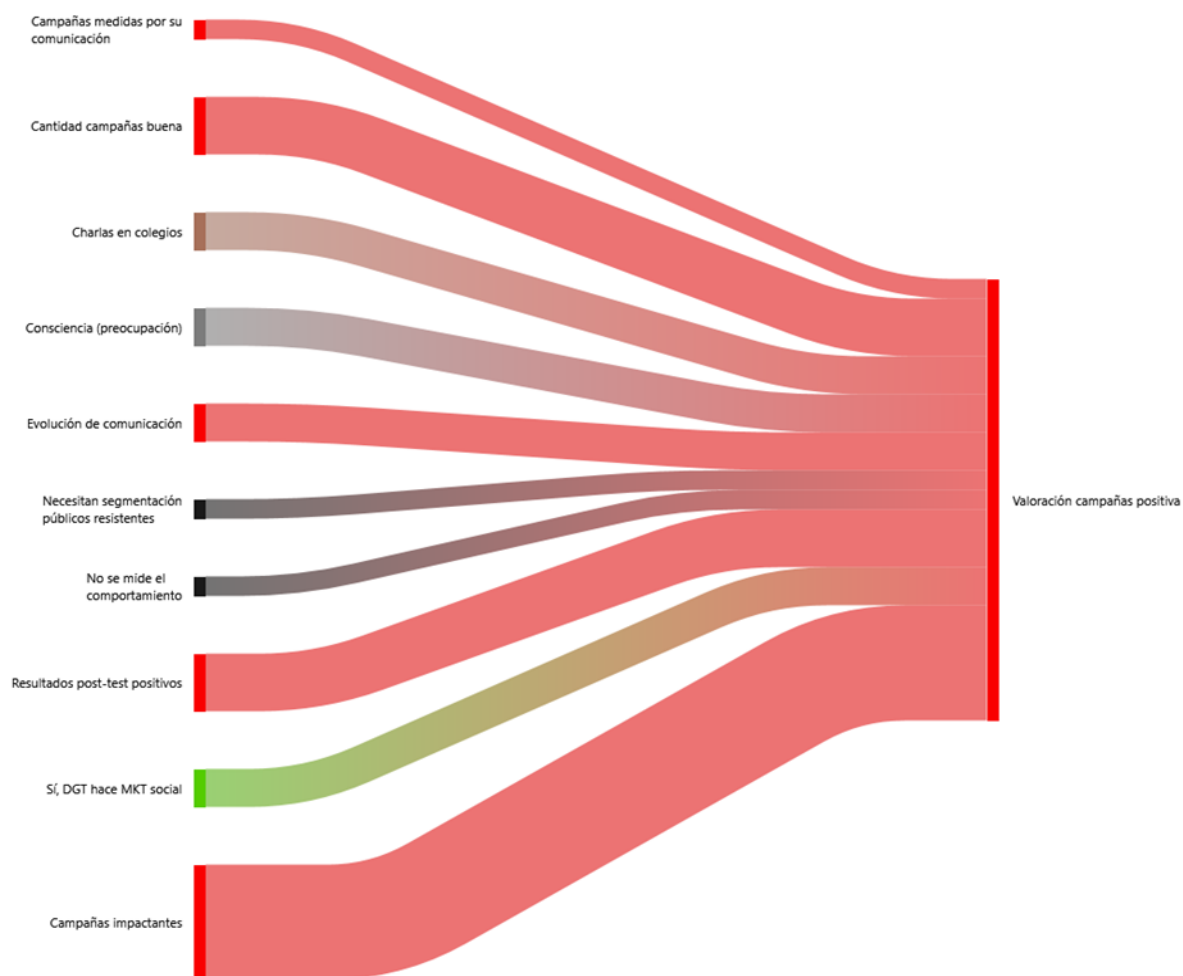
Figure 5. Network of codes for the main themes



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

In addition, we observed that the code with the most co-occurrences was "Positive campaign assessment," from which we extracted a Sankey co-occurrence analysis (Figure 6). The code most closely related to it is "Impactful campaigns," which makes perfect sense since impactful campaigns, especially in this case, are positively evaluated for achieving social marketing objectives.

Figure 6. Sankey co-occurrence analysis (Atlas.ti)



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

When extracting the concept cloud (Figure 7), the most repeated words in the citations associated with the codes are: campaigns (76), people (38), DGT (28), message (25), alcohol (24) and behaviour (22).

Figure 7. Concept cloud of codes (Atlas.ti)

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Regarding the qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted, the most significant results are as follows:

4.1. On social marketing theory

The public administration does engage in social marketing because it seeks to bring about behavioural change. Along these lines, some tips for carrying out social marketing have been found, taken from the interview with UCA, which indicates what should be done to improve social welfare in the long term: "One of the main limitations, a difficulty of social marketing compared to commercial marketing, is, for example, in the generalisation of those results that you may not see".

- There should be planning and strategy in this regard. These should not be one-off or isolated activities. Here we find the difference between social marketing and social campaigns. In this sense, having expert professionals is key.
- Conduct an analysis of the environment (external and internal). Artificial intelligence and data mining help with this part. Also include a specific analysis of segment behaviour (definition of the phase the consumer is in Table 5).

Table 5. Behavioural phases

Phase	Discourse	Situation
1st. Denial of the "problem"	"Nothing's wrong," "it's not that serious", "it has nothing to do with me".	There is no possibility of behavioural change because there is no understanding of the need for it.
2nd. Awakening	"Is something wrong?", "Is it affecting me?" "I notice something, but it's not me."	Citizens listen, but do not identify the problem directly with their situation.
3rd. Just in case	"The thing is, it seems serious," "What if I could...", "Today it would be good for me to do this..."	This is a step up in terms of behavioural involvement.
4th. Awareness	"I have to do something," "I'm going to sign up."	The individual begins to seek information, wants to know the pros and cons.
5th. Involvement	"This is affecting us greatly," "We must do something."	The individual understands the "problem" and the need for change 100%, is committed to it, willing to pay a very high "price" or even becomes an influencer. We will try to maintain this phase.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

- Product. This would be the benefit that the individual obtains by behaving in that specific way. When it is a direct benefit, it will be more motivating or interesting. Find ways to make it easy, accessible, and simple for the population to take action, and be realistic about the behavioural changes requested.
- Price. This is the effort (financial, time, resources, energy, what is lost, etc.) that the individual must make to confront their behaviour. This analysis is taken into account in the behaviour analysis to understand the main barriers, understand the communication approach and overcome them.
- Communication. Describe the benefits of change (product) and the risks of not making the change. There are three levels of communication: informing, conversing and inciting action. Use all of them. Emotional tone helps with persuasion. Local communication tailored to the specific segment is more effective.
- Distribution. Define the places where the change can be made (also linked to local actions).
- If there is an app, develop it on three levels: product, social and mental.
- Finally, measure the results: what works and what does not, and start again.

Along these lines, we find Kubacki *et al.* (2015), who, after reviewing published evaluations of social marketing between 2000 and 2014, found that interventions seeking to minimise the harms of alcohol did not use the six key elements of social marketing: behavioural objective, audience segmentation, formative research, exchange, marketing mix and competition; which makes the intervention largely effective in creating positive effects.

There is a bright future for social marketing due to the 2030 Agenda. All companies should do it and make use of technology. Although there is no more social marketing in companies because it involves resources and preparation, "UCA" explains that "it involves a series of resources or they are not sufficiently prepared (...) No, they do not have that preparation from a strategic point of view". For that, "UCA" proposes that social marketing could be taught at university:

I would like all this to be taught at university (...), as well as trying to teach them more about how to use data mining techniques for the social environment. I don't know, I think it would be quite useful too.

In addition, he adds that data mining applied to segmentation and research results would raise the strategy to a more effective level.

There is unanimity among the experts that social campaigns and the law should be complementary. UCA points out that behavioural change must be voluntary. There is also unanimity that the law is more effective than the social campaign, although "UCA" states that "a law that must be complied with would not be a social marketing campaign". For its part, "FEBE1" considers that "it is still a paternalistic patch because we are really depriving the driver of his responsibility", being a short-term solution.

4.2. The case of the DGT

In another line of results, we find that data on alcohol consumption and accident rates show that there has been awareness since the 1990s of the negative relationship between alcohol and driving, indicating that the campaigns are effective, as explained by the DGT, MS1 and UC3M in their interviews. In fact, their overall assessments of the DGT's campaigns are positive, and they believe they are effective. The "DGT", for its part, points out that "a lot of work has been done historically on the issues of speed and alcohol, and I believe that with the advent of mobile phones, smartphones and so on, the issue of distractions is emerging as another factor". This continues to be a concern and that is why the campaigns continue. Furthermore, according to the DGT, MS1 and FEBE1, there is a population (not young people) that is unaware of the consequences: "I'm in control", "it won't happen to me", and we must continue to insist on this, as they are more irresponsible.

In contrast to the effectiveness mentioned above, we find that consumption is falling, but accidents have been rising since 2019. When we asked experts about this, none of them knew the reason for it, although they did find possible explanations. The "DGT" stated "it seems that the

perception of 'risk' does not exist for some people, they are immune"; representatives from "Mediasapiens" reasoned "after the pandemic, people needed to go out and socialise, and in Spain this is done with alcohol"; "FEBE" representatives put forward a possible explanation "the perception that nothing will happen with low alcohol content", which again coincided with the attitude of "it won't happen to me"; "UC3M" linked it to "a shift towards Nordic consumption patterns (more binge drinking and loss of control and more regular consumption)". All these arguments could have contributed to the rise in accidents, but there is no explicit explanation for the increase in 2019.

A frequently asked question regarding the relationship between alcohol and accidents is: why aren't accidents falling further? Or how far could they fall? According to "FEBE1" they affirm that "in 2000, there were 5,000 deaths and now there are 1,000. There comes a point where there is resistance to the data, that is, how much further can we go? (...) I think the increase is insignificant," and the "DGT" agrees that "much progress has been made in convincing people that driving and alcohol are incompatible, but even so, there is still a small group of people who continue to do so."

The DGT, MS1, MS2 and UC3M agree that the main reason for not drinking and driving is fear of punishment (especially the loss of points), rather than responsibility. They agree that the law has an impact on behaviour, but this would not be considered social marketing.

The DGT shared that its measures to prevent drinking and driving include campaigns and, more recently, a zero-alcohol limit for minors. The DGT, MS1, UC3M and FEBE1 added that talks are given in schools. No other types of activities have been found.

The experts agree that there has been an evolution in the message, a change in focus and a change in codes. "MS1" confirm that the campaigns are measured "yes, they do a study, which is the one I asked you for yesterday, on effectiveness, awareness and campaign recall, from a communication point of view, not on whether there is awareness". According to the "DGT" the post-test results are used as "reflection for the next campaign". They are usually positive results, from effective communication campaigns. Although the "DGT" confirms that only one activity is carried out to support the campaigns in order to maintain their attention or influence "at the local level, I understand that initiatives and talks are carried out in schools aimed at older people and young people, which I understand go into greater depth on the problem". Activities on social media and digital channels are few due to the limitations of the specifications, as confirmed by the DGT and UC3M.

4.3. Comments and suggestions for the DGT case

As we have seen, the DGT's social campaigns have an effect on behaviour, little by little and building in the right direction, enabling changes in society that allow us to see big differences when we look back a few decades. This is normally achieved through social campaigns by the public administration, but organisations can also integrate into their transformation process the aim of becoming environments that promote health and sustainability, contributing their grain of sand to these necessary social changes (Ugarte & Díaz, 2021). To this end, different tools can be used, among which *storytelling* has proven to be effective (Galiano & Ravina, 2022).

Among other contributions, we find that the DGT faces the challenge of changing its reputation "DGT":

We have a handicap there. In fact, there are even some misconceptions because there is something that appears repeatedly on social media and too much 'because you take our money'. And 'fixing the roads' and so on, the fact is that road maintenance is not even the responsibility of the DGT. So (...) I believe that behind this, I can say, there is a clear intention in the DGT's policies to safeguard people and their health.

The "DGT" also states that they must communicate who is affected and the serious consequences of accidents, data and messages that can help change behaviour:

It's not that you could go to prison, it's that you might need sleeping pills, it's that your friends might distance themselves from you because you've changed, because... In other words, both from the point of view of the offender, the person who has been involved in that problem, and then the victims, and I tell

you, the victims, for us, have a broad meaning, they are not just the deceased, and this is something that is also a challenge to communicate. Sometimes dying is not the worst thing.

On the other hand, the proposals to improve the DGT's social marketing, mainly focused on supporting its campaigns and reducing drink-driving, are:

1. More education, focused on children and young people (13-20 years old) (DGT, Mediasapiens and FEBE). Yes, talks are being held in schools, mainly organised by the police, but "FEBE1" recognise that more activities of this type are needed "reiterate the idea of education more, invest in education, in road safety education from an early age to raise awareness so that it becomes an accepted standard in adults".
2. Coordinate private and public bodies to combine synergies (FEBE). Currently, isolated actions are being taken that add up, but they are not as effective as a common strategy would be.
3. Segmentation of resistant audiences (DGT). Currently, campaigns are generalist and no segmentation is carried out, which would be more effective. "DGT" acknowledges:
We are usually given a profile of where accidents occur, although I recognise that our campaigns are, in truth, quite generalist. We are not using segmentation much, although we know it is there and that it is something that can be used. I don't know if it is because of the temptation to reach more people, instead of focusing on where the problem probably lies.
4. Thought-provoking campaigns (DGT and UC3M). Regarding this, "UC3M" affirms "I find the final question, the final reflection, very powerful and moving (...) a campaign that is not aggressive, but one that attracts attention and makes you think".
5. Reinforce the cultural and visual dimension of campaigns through creative resources, incorporating actions that integrate impactful messages into the cityscape. For example, collaboration with graphic designers, cultural collectives or even urban artists could enhance communicative effectiveness and strengthen the link between road safety and the symbolic experience of the busy city.
6. Selection of influencers (DGT and Mediasapiens). "MS1" highlights "from involving influencers much more, for example, celebrities. (...) But there could be many special formats that work from that point of view (...) we propose it, but it is not included in the specifications". The "DGT" agrees but warns that "choosing influencers is not easy either, depending on the messages".
7. Regarding the comments made by "MS1" and "MS2" about the limitations of the specifications, "sometimes we are too constrained by a specification that is absurd and they are aware of it." UC3M agrees that it is a challenge and an obstacle in strategic planning that must be considered.
8. The area of internal communication is not being exploited to its full potential, as acknowledged by the "DGT" "not that I am aware of, we are not doing this at the internal communication level."
9. A final essential improvement would be the evaluation and measurement of behavioural change, something that the "DGT" acknowledges is not being carried out "to think that because you have run a campaign, people have changed their consumption habits, is very, very difficult to conclude, very difficult". Mediasapiens and UC3M support this statement.

The findings reveal that, although the DGT's campaigns have had a positive impact on public awareness, there is still room for improvement in the effectiveness of behavioural change. By relating these findings to the literature, it can be inferred that the DGT's effectiveness could be improved through appropriate segmentation and the use of opinion leaders in reflective and emotional campaigns. The practical implications suggest that a rigorous evaluation methodology would contribute to establishing a more accurate measurement system, allowing for real-time adjustments to public awareness strategies, which would also be applicable to other public institutions interested in implementing behaviour change programmes in similar contexts.

5. Conclusions

In the introduction, we said that the definition of social marketing contains two essential concepts: marketing techniques and activities used to bring about behavioural change. Therefore, the DGT's campaigns have this type of objective: to prevent people from driving after consuming alcohol. The results of the analysis of the interviews conducted corroborate that these types of activities are social marketing, as they seek the common good through voluntary change. However, we find that the DGT does not develop its social marketing strategy to its full extent, limiting itself to what we might call social communication. In this section, we will apply the results (Table 6) to improve the DGT's social marketing strategy in line with objective O3.

The first step would be to have professionals who understand the concept and can develop the appropriate strategies for it. In the case of the public administration, the DGT, where marketing is predominantly social, this would mean that the person responsible for communication or branding would need to have this knowledge. As this is a position that is selected through an administrative process, it may not be easy to assign, so initially the collaboration of an external expert could be sought. Managers who do not have this knowledge may set social marketing objectives, but they will not develop the concept to its full extent or make full use of it. In this regard, one of the proposals put forward in the interviews regarding the advisability of teaching this discipline at university in order to properly train future managers gains value.

Once the appropriate training has been provided, the relevant strategy can be implemented, beginning with a situation analysis. In this phase, the internal and external situation is evaluated, as is also done in commercial marketing, and a new aspect is added: the analysis of the target audience's behaviour phase, mentioned above. Segmentation is key, and as we have seen, the analysis of the irresponsible population "I'm in control," "it won't happen to me" found in phase 1 explained in Table 5. Data from the Road Safety Observatory would help with this stage and the relevant segmentation.

Subsequently, the operational part of the marketing mix must be worked on:

- Define in depth the benefit of not driving when consuming alcohol, including the consequences of doing so. In this part, the contribution made in the interviews on stands out, analysing who is affected and the serious consequences of accidents, data that can help with behavioural change. It is necessary to define the expected behavioural change and, ideally, to look at the easy, direct, accessible and real aspects. For example, if you are at a social or work gathering where alcohol is present, understand the approach to behavioural change, avoid alcohol and replace it with coffee, non-alcoholic drinks, energy drinks, etc.
- The "price" that the individual must "pay" to achieve behavioural change will also guide the message to be conveyed. The results have shown us a society that socially consumes alcohol and that this can be a challenge. We must be aware of this and other aspects that affect the effort that the population must make to change. Obviously, the price is not the same for all segments. According to the 5 stages of behaviour, the price in stage 1 is much higher than in stage 5. The data analysed has shown us that there is a large population between stages 3 and 4, but it is important to address the population in stages 1 and 2.
- The places where change can occur and should be demonstrated, such as social gatherings, work lunches, celebrations, etc. Not only the consequences, but also the place where change should occur.
- The three aspects mentioned above must be reflected in the communication and, depending on the receptivity of the target audience, the message must be conveyed in the appropriate terms and form. In this regard, three types of message are identified: informing, conversing and action/behaviour; and the third level must be reached. How each is addressed will depend on the behavioural stage of the target audience. The work carried out in communication by the DGT (Spanish Traffic Authority) to date has been positive, so progress must continue, taking the above into account, and the emotional tone

and reflective style are considered effective by several experts. Also, the use of influencers in the media and programmes related to cars and motorsports, such as Formula 1 racing, is effective, provided it is done correctly.

- It should also be recognised that these campaigns not only function as prevention tools but also take on a cultural dimension by becoming part of the urban landscape. Their presence in collective media and everyday transit spaces reinforces their capacity for dialogue with citizens and makes road safety part of the symbolic experience of the city.
- Continuing with communication, we must not forget digital communication and its great effectiveness when properly planned. Specifically, within the app, a social and mental component should be developed, as proposed by one of the experts. This could also include the comment made about the effectiveness of rewarding positive behaviour. For example, if you test negative in a breathalyser test, you get a discount on your next driving licence renewal.

On the other hand, let us remember the indication made regarding the limitations of the specifications in terms of application, use of media or formats, an intrinsic condition of public administration. This challenge must be analysed internally by the DGT so that, under the umbrella of transparency, equality and efficiency, the results obtained can meet the objectives set.

It is essential to evaluate the change made with subsequent measurement, which will indicate whether the phase has evolved or remained the same. These are not common tools, but they are possible measurements. In addition, the development of artificial intelligence and data management can help the effectiveness of subsequent decision-making, as noted by the experts. In this regard, it was pointed out that thanks to this discipline, companies can achieve reputation (visibility and credibility), providing internal (employees) and external (suppliers, customers, etc.) benefits, which is necessary for the DGT. As can be understood, this phase is key to starting over and evolving in the correct application of social marketing, a discipline that has a future and complies with the 2030 Agenda.

It seems common to focus on communication and think that this is sufficient, but there are many other actions to be taken that add up: internal marketing, supplier relations, synergies with organisations, etc. Returning to the case of the DGT, the following could be considered:

- Training for the automotive sector, repair shops or alcohol sales outlets to raise awareness and convey this awareness when they sell or repair vehicles or when they detect a drunk person who could be driving.
- Car insurance subsidies that reward customers who test negative in a breathalyser test.
- Activities with driving schools, which train future drivers: talks, videos, simulators, etc.
- Activities with young people aged 13-20, in schools, competitions, sporting events, concerts, etc.
- Synergies with organisations related to the issue, such as drivers' association + victims' association + alcoholics' association + FEBE + Antena 3 and its "Ponle freno" (Put a brake on it) campaign, etc.
- Training DGT employees on how to be influencers in their environment and convey social awareness.

Table 6. Strategy developed by the DGT and summary of suggestions for social marketing

Appearance	Development	Suggestion
Strategic planning. Experts	Nothing	Find an external expert
Analysis. Behavioural segmentation	Nothing	Road Safety Observatory
Product analysis	Nothing	Benefits, ease, direct, simple and real
Price analysis	None	Focus on segments 1 and 2
Location analysis	Something shown in communication	Social and professional gatherings
Communication analysis	Nothing	Level "persuasion" + emotional tone + thoughtful campaign
App development	Product only (not social or mental)	Activities according to segmentation
Measurement and evaluation	Nothing	Social and mental development
Other activities	Talks in schools, DGT magazine and "Los nocturnos" (evening) programme (FEBE)	Internal communication, automotive sector, repair shops, alcohol outlets, car insurance, driving schools, activities with schools: competitions, sporting events, concerts. In addition, synergies with organisations related to the topic

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

As we have seen, social marketing is not an easy task and requires considerable resources. As Kotler (2022) points out, the objectives of commercial marketing, focused on consumption, *and* those of social marketing, concerned with responsible consumption, are sometimes even contradictory, as social marketing advocates the slogan "*less is more*", contrary to commercial marketing.

Precisely these opposing objectives make it difficult for companies to consider social marketing when what they need is commercial marketing to enable them to survive. Only a paradigm shift in business management can awaken this discipline which, although it brings benefits, is not the primary focus of private companies. In this sense, and in line with what was stated in the introduction, corporate social responsibility, understood as management that integrates economic and ethical dimensions, can be enhanced through social marketing, as both approaches converge in the pursuit of social welfare, the promotion of responsible behaviour and the measurement of long-term results (Luque *et al.*, 2021; Richez-Battesti & Itçaina, 2021).

Given the limitations of the study, access to some of the institution's own data has posed a major challenge in the preparation of some sections of the work. Likewise, as in any qualitative research based on in-depth interviews, access to renowned experts willing to give their time to the research was at times a problem, which meant that the number of interviewees had to be limited to five. The type of expert profile could have been broadened, but this would have slowed down the work even further.

Finally, in terms of future lines of research, it would be interesting to continue exploring the case of the DGT and alcohol consumption, conducting a more in-depth study of consumers to see how the institutional message is perceived by the subject/customer of the institution's campaigns. On the other hand, it is also interesting to investigate whether and how social marketing is carried out within public administrations, adapting this research to other case studies such as, for example, the Ministry of Health in relation to reducing tobacco consumption or the Ministry of Consumer Affairs in relation to promoting healthy eating among the population.

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