

From Advertisement to TV Series: The Adaptation of Ted Lasso

De anuncio a serie de televisión: La adaptación de Ted Lasso

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ABSTRACT: Purpose. Adapting and retelling stories has been a common cultural practice since the origins of civilization, growing increasingly prevalent across contemporary media. Yet rarer forms of adaptation, such as television series based on advertising campaigns, remain largely unexplored. This study aims to offer an interdisciplinary approach to this phenomenon, combining the frameworks of advertising, adaptation studies, television studies, and screenwriting theory. **Methodology.** To better understand the intricacies of this specific type of adaptation process, a case study has been selected: the series *Ted Lasso* (2020–present), which originated from an NBC Sports marketing campaign featuring the branded short films *An American Coach in London* (2013) and *The Return of Coach Lasso* (2014). A comparative textual analysis has been conducted, focusing on two narrative categories drawn from screenwriting practice: premise and character development. **Results and conclusions.** The findings of this study reveal that, conditioned by their much shorter length, characters in advertisements need to be easily recognizable, based on distinct archetypal traits. On the other hand, long-form serialized storytelling provides more time to develop characters, their arcs, and their conflicts, hence necessarily requiring more complex characterization, as well as a wider tapestry of storylines. **Original contribution.** This research offers key insights into a type of adaptation that has been overlooked, filling a gap in the literature and effectively widening the scope of adaptation studies. The article has also identified notable preexisting adaptations based on advertisements, shedding light on common traits that tend to characterize these retellings, and opening promising new avenues for future research.

Keywords: adaptation; intertextuality; television series; advertising; screenwriting; character development; *Ted Lasso*.

RESUMEN: Propósito. La adaptación de historias, práctica habitual desde los orígenes de la civilización, es cada vez más prevalente en la cultura mediática contemporánea. Sin embargo, formas de adaptación menos habituales, como las series de televisión basadas en campañas publicitarias, permanecen en gran medida inexploradas. Este artículo ofrece un enfoque interdisciplinar para abordar este fenómeno, combinando las perspectivas de los estudios sobre adaptación, publicidad, televisión y guion audiovisual. **Metodología.** Para comprender las complejidades de este proceso de adaptación, se ha seleccionado un caso de estudio: *Ted Lasso* (2020–presente), serie basada en una campaña de marketing que incluía los cortometrajes de marca *An American Coach in London* (2013) y *The Return of Coach Lasso* (2014). El caso se examina mediante un análisis textual comparativo centrado en dos categorías derivadas de la práctica del guion: la premisa y el desarrollo de personajes. **Resultados y Conclusiones.** Los hallazgos revelan que, condicionados por una extensión más limitada, los personajes de campañas publicitarias deben ser fácil y rápidamente

reconocibles, basados en rasgos arquetípicos distintivos. En cambio, las narrativas de ficción seriada proporcionan más tiempo para desarrollar personajes, sus arcos y sus conflictos, lo que necesariamente requiere una caracterización más compleja, así como un tapiz más amplio de tramas. **Aportes originales.** Esta investigación aporta conocimientos clave sobre un tipo de adaptación sin explorar, cubriendo una laguna en la disciplina de los *adaptation studies*. El artículo también identifica otras adaptaciones preexistentes basadas en anuncios, arrojando luz sobre algunos rasgos de estos productos culturales y abriendo vías prometedoras para futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave: adaptación; intertextualidad; series de televisión; publicidad; guion; desarrollo de personajes; *Ted Lasso*.

1. Introduction

Ted Lasso (2020–present) is one of the key pillars of Apple TV’s original programming. This dramedy was first released in 2020 and, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, it became an unexpected hit, acclaimed by critics and beloved by viewers. Anchored in a fish-out-of-water premise, the series’ main plot is set in motion when two American football coaches –Ted Lasso and his trusty sidekick, Coach Beard– move to the United Kingdom to train AFC Richmond, a (fictional) English Premier League football team. In the current television landscape, where dark antiheroes, true crime docuseries, and reality shows reign supreme, this feel-good, uplifting series has had a substantial impact on audiences and the industry alike.

Among the unlimited offer of serialized content that characterizes the “post-network era” (Lotz, 2014, 2018), *Ted Lasso* emerges as a fresh and multilayered televisual narrative, one that fits the markers of complex storytelling (Mittell, 2006, 2015) and what is generally referred to as “peak” or “prestige TV” (Friedman and Keeler, 2022). It has also garnered wide recognition within the television industry, having won a total of 13 Emmy Awards, including Outstanding Comedy Series in 2021 and 2022 (Television Academy, n.d.). Although the third season of *Ted Lasso* was initially supposed to be its last, a fourth season started its production during the summer of 2025 (Porter, 2025) and is set to be released on the 5th of August, 2026 (Yossman, 2026)¹. It appears that neither Apple TV nor its viewers are quite ready to bid farewell to these characters and their world, at least not yet.

Despite being a relatively recent production, *Ted Lasso* has already sparked considerable scholarly interest. Both the narrative and thematic elements of the series, as well as its social impact, have been analyzed by various authors across different disciplines. The growing list of academic publications on this series include a special edition issue of the *Journal of Popular Television* (2024, volume 12, issue 2), and an essay collection titled *Ted Lasso and Philosophy: No Question Is Into Touch* (edited by Baggett and Baggett, 2024). Some of the specific topics that have been examined so far feature in-depth analyses of different intertextual references interwoven in this serial narrative, from the *romcom* genre (Mittermeier, 2024b) to *The Wizard of Oz* (Tripp, 2023; Mittermeier, 2024c). The role of the journalist and the portrayal of journalistic practice has also been studied through the character of Trent Crimm (Kirschner, 2022), with other contributions focusing, for instance, on the way in which music heightens emotions in the series (Belluomini, 2024).

While the show has been generally praised by the public for questioning toxic masculinity and offering an uplifting portrayal of sports changing rooms, some academics have raised concerns in this regard. For these critics, *Ted Lasso* presents a utopian, idealized locker room, without truly engaging with systemic issues that plague professional sports in the real world, like racial discrimination, *sportswashing*, toxic masculinity, and homophobia (Bantle, 2024; Pande, 2024; Beare & Boucaut, 2025). In contrast, the depiction of mental health in this series is widely perceived as positive, both publicly and within academic discourse. Scholars have conducted

¹ Please note: At the time of final review of this manuscript, the fourth season was yet to be released.

different studies on this topic: from textual analyses on the way in which characters process personal trauma (Abbott, 2024), to research on the impact of mental health advocacy through fictional narratives and public celebrity support (Becker, 2025).

Ted Lasso and its significance during the COVID-19 pandemic has also been examined in academia, not only as a cornerstone of comfort viewing and privileged escapism (Sweeney, 2025), but also as a non-escapist “cathartic narrative” for audiences to process their trauma, providing “the tools to negotiate the complexities of a COVID-world” (Abbott, 2024, p. 178). As Mittermeier points out, it “remains to be seen if the series will ever fully escape its status as a pandemic-era text. What remains true, however, is that *Ted Lasso* left its mark in the television landscape of the twenty-first century” (2024a, p. 130).

The impact of this series –and, by extent, of the “Lasso way”– has even generated interest beyond the fields of media studies and cultural studies, with some scholars applying Ted Lasso’s leadership principles and outlook on life across very different disciplines, ranging from nursing (Stewart *et al.*, 2024) and law (Golden, 2024) to education research (Driscoll, 2025). However, in spite of all of these notable, multidisciplinary outputs, *Ted Lasso* has not been properly examined as an adaptation yet.

As stated in its opening credits, this TV series is actually “based on pre-existing format / characters from NBC Sports” (Lawrence, Sudeikis, Kelly & Hunt, 2020–present). This refers to an advertising campaign that NBC Sports commissioned in 2013 and 2014, in order to promote the broadcast of English Premier League football matches for their American viewers. The first installment of this campaign, titled *An American Coach in London* (2013), is a sketch-based mockumentary with the same initial premise as the Apple TV series (although, in this ad, Ted Lasso and his sidekick Coach Beard are hired to train a real Premier League team: Tottenham Hotspur F.C.). Following its success, which led to the character of Ted becoming “a cult figure overnight” (Baxter, 2020), the story was expanded a year later with *The Return of Coach Lasso* (2014). These two branded digital films were posted online, with shorter TV promos being shown “across NBC’s family of networks, especially during sports broadcasts” (Cooke, 2017, p. 86). Along with this, the marketing campaign incorporated a website, which is no longer available, where fans were encouraged to learn British slang and English football chants. This campaign also included further additional content, such as quizzes, outtake compilations and a short *making of documentary* (Kassing, 2022).

While many of the scholarly studies referenced earlier do mention that the series is based on a preexisting advertising campaign, this adaptation process (from advertisement to TV series) has not yet been explored in detail. The fact that one of the most acclaimed and successful scripted series of the past five years is based on branded content raises some compelling questions, making this topic worthy of academic research. For instance, why – and how– can commercials be adapted to other media, whether to film or television? What is the process of adapting advertisements into TV formats actually like? Does it differ from other, more common forms of adaptation, such as cinematic adaptations of literary works? And what happens to the narrative components of a story when an advertising campaign becomes a TV series?

In order to provide answers to these questions, this paper has first established an interdisciplinary theoretical framework to observe the connections between adaptations and the realm of advertising, bringing together concepts from adaptation studies, television studies, screenwriting, and advertising theory. Then, taking *Ted Lasso* as a case study, a comparative analysis of both the campaign and the Apple TV series has been conducted, mainly focusing on two key textual categories: premise and character development (although their connection to other narrative components, such as conflict, genre, or plot, has also been examined). Ultimately, this has shed some light on how a premise and a protagonist initially developed for an advertising campaign were turned into the engine of a very successful television series.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Adaptations seem to be becoming more and more prominent across all media, yet they cannot be considered a new phenomenon. In fact, adaptation has been an ever-constant process in cultural production since the origins of civilization (Bazin, 1990; Cascajosa, 2006). Taking into consideration that, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “storytelling is always the art of repeating stories” (2002, p. 149), adaptations actually manifest a pattern that is intrinsically rooted in the very fabric of human nature.

Before proceeding any further, it should be clarified that, following Hutcheon, one of the most widely accepted definitions of “adaptation” is “an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art” (2006, p. 170). That reinterpretation necessarily requires change and transformation, in order to adjust the story to a new medium, a new place, and/or a new audience. Furthermore, this creative process usually entails the acquisition of the rights to adapt a specific work or intellectual property (IP) through a license agreement, unless the work in question is in the public domain.

Hutcheon, however, is also aware that her definition poses certain limitations. While the quote above is both specific enough and broad enough to include different types of adaptation, it leaves out numerous adaptation-adjacent phenomena, such as *spin-offs*, prequels, and other expansions. Because of this, Hutcheon also proposes a more inclusive view of the world of adaptations, one that understands these processes as “a continuum of fluid relationships, between prior works and later—and lateral—revisitations of them” (2006, p. 171).

This continuum model takes into account those stories that, while not being adaptations of a specific work of art in its most strict sense, can certainly be placed somewhere along the complex spectrum of different types of adaptation. For instance, this would include the film *Barbie* (Gerwig, 2023), which is based on the Mattel toy of the same name; or tie-in novels like the Nikki Heat book series, which spun from the TV series *Castle* (ABC, 2009-2016). Fictionalized retellings of historical events can also be considered a form of adaptation. Furthermore, borrowings that do not disclose the fact that they are adaptations, or that do not follow the legal proceedings of rights-acquisition established by cultural industries, could be placed on another end of this spectrum as well.

Since *Ted Lasso* is, as noted above, “based on pre-existing format / characters from NBC Sports”, it could reasonably be argued that this serialized story—even when it is not a “revisitation of a particular work of art” *per se*—certainly falls somewhere along the rich continuum of “types of adaptation”. Core narrative elements like the premise of the story, the characters of Ted and Coach Beard, and even specific scenes from the branded short films (such as Ted’s first press conference) were expanded to fit the TV series format. This warrants deeper textual analysis, to better understand the creative process that this specific form of adaptation entails.

Along with being a type of retelling within Hutcheon’s adaptation continuum, *Ted Lasso* can also be considered an example of what Mittermeier calls “palimpsestic transmediality” (2024c, pp. 377-381). This is due to the fact that its narrative draws from (and builds on) what Genette referred to as “palimpsests” (1997) of other texts. That is to say, *Ted Lasso* borrows from other stories and storyworlds prominent in popular culture, which have a presence that has “snowballed” (Ryan, 2013, p. 363) across different media. Most notably, the narrative framework of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum, first published in 1900) and its subsequent adaptations and expansions, particularly the MGM classic film *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939), have been identified by Tripp (2023) and Mittermeier (2024c) as quintessential to *Ted Lasso*.

This underscores the existence of a multiplicity of references in a text that can be considered an adaptation, extending far beyond its “source material” (i.e., the intellectual property on which the TV series is based). In the words of Kristeva, who first formulated the concept of intertextuality, “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (1986, p. 37). According to Leitch’s overview of the evolution of adaptation studies as

an academic discipline², and during what this author calls “Adaptation Studies 2.0” (2017), intertextuality emerged as the key leading viewpoint from which to examine adaptations. Yet Leitch also points out that this paradigm has now slightly shifted, since one of the defining traits that characterizes “Adaptation Studies 3.0” is “an increasingly pervasive suspicion of the limits of intertextuality as a methodological framework because it makes it difficult to distinguish adaptations from other intertexts and threatens to dissolve adaptation studies into intertextual studies” (2017, p. 5).

The challenges posed by intertextuality had already been observed by authors such as Agger, for whom this concept “appears to be infinitely expandable” (1999, p. 19). In its purest, most abstract form, intertextuality is indeed endless and thus wholly unattainable. This tends to lead scholars, as Agger (1999) also notes, to apply the concept in a more practical manner so as to narrow its scope, something that is commonly achieved through the development of typologies. For instance, Genette (1997) identifies five different types of intertextuality, and also suggests the broader term of “transtextuality” to refer to “the textual transcendence of the text, (...) all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (1997, p. 1).

All of this points to the pervasive threads that, despite their constraints, connect intertextuality and adaptation processes. Most types of adaptations are retellings that –generally, though not always– declare they are adapting an existing text or IP. At the same time, these adaptations establish many references (whether explicit or implicit) to other texts. Therefore, *Ted Lasso* can be regarded as a type of adaptation within Hutcheon’s “adaptation continuum” and, simultaneously, as a rich case study for intertextual analysis, or as a specific instance of “palimpsestic transmediality”, following Mittermeier’s earlier observations. Due to the inherently complex nature of this phenomenon, these realities may coexist and should not be deemed mutually exclusive.

Nevertheless, while being aware of the many palimpsests and intertextual references that are interwoven throughout the first three seasons of *Ted Lasso*, the focus of this analysis will remain on the process of turning an advertising campaign into a serialized form of storytelling. In order to approach this object of study, two relevant topics should be taken into account. Firstly, the still unexplored history of adaptations in the field of advertising, from the perspective of adaptation studies; and secondly, the nature of advertising and its evolution during the past twenty-five years, to better contextualize and understand the significance of the campaign commissioned by NBC Sports.

2.1. Advertising and Adaptation

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the academic discipline of adaptation studies has widened its scope, going far beyond retellings of literary works and paving the way for new viewpoints from which to approach this cultural phenomenon. Authors like Stam (2000, 2005), Hutcheon (2006, 2007), Leitch (2008), Murray (2012) or Elliott (2014), among others, have propelled and helped consolidate this change, calling for the need to move away from the obsolete paradigm of ‘fidelity to the original’, as well as from the olden focus on literary film adaptations, in order to find new perspectives to study the complexities of adaptations in innovative ways. These new approaches have made the discipline bloom, expanding its tools and its potential objects of study exponentially.

For instance, both Griggs (2018) and Hogg (2021) have called for the need to examine the increasing presence of adaptations in the current, ever-changing television landscape. The former invites scholars “to rethink questions of authorship (...) and to take into account both the impact of media-specific industrial production contexts, and of sociocultural influences at play in the reconfiguration of pre-loved stories” (Griggs, 2018, p. 2). The latter muses about a potential “golden age of television adaptations” (Hogg, 2021, p. 1) and rightly advocates for research that bridges the gap between theoretical perspectives and the television industry. The works of these

² For a concise yet comprehensive overview of the evolution of adaptation studies, including key conceptual discussions, see Leitch (2017). For an overview that specifically combines the fields of adaptation and television studies, see Worthy and Sheehan (2024).

two authors are actually part of the Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture book series, which has published 41 volumes since 2015 (Springer Nature, n.d.), providing a prolific and multi-faceted space for adaptation scholars to explore new dimensions of this complex topic.

Within this auspicious framework, it also seems necessary to focus on more atypical or rare forms of adaptation, such as TV series based on advertising campaigns, which still remain largely unexplored. Despite the scarcity of research on this specific phenomenon, scholars like Cartmell (2014, 2020) and Zanoni (2018, 2023) have examined other connections between advertising and adaptation, urging broader engagement with this topic in critical discourse. In particular, Cartmell has looked into the way in which Shakespearean adaptations were marketed in the 'Classical Hollywood' era, arguing that the promotion and commercialization of these works is "something to be recognized in adaptation studies, an approach that focuses on the consumer rather than the author; the adaptation not as interpretation but as product" (2020, p. 37). Zanoni, for her part, has analyzed the use of both Shakespeare's plays and his figure in contemporary advertising. This author has pointed out that, when advertisements repurpose an old text (such as *Romeo and Juliet*) for a modern audience, they exhibit one of the essential traits of adaptation processes: the need to recontextualize said text in order to "attune to the contemporary world" (Zanoni, 2023, p. 93). Beyond these valuable scholarly contributions, however, there is still a noticeable gap in the literature regarding adaptations in which an advertisement is actually a *hypotext* that is reinterpreted and expanded, thus generating a new work (*or hypertext*)³.

It must be noted that film and television retellings of advertisements are certainly much more unusual than other types of media adaptations. This may be attributed to several factors, including the stark formal differences between these forms of storytelling, along with the specificities and inner workings of the advertising industry. Regarding the latter, one of the key reasons that could explain why advertising campaigns do not cross over into film and television more often may have to do with the ownership of intellectual property (IP) rights. Even when the creative talent working in an agency is responsible for developing the concept and characters of an advertising campaign, the industry still operates on an old model, by which complete ownership of the IP and its exploitation rights are generally transferred to the brand or client who commissioned the campaign (O'Leary, 2007). There might be specific licensing agreements or exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis, yet the standard practice of clients owning the IP rights still seems to be widely established across the industry⁴. As a consequence, brands are the ones who exert control over the use of the ideas and characters featured in their campaigns, and it could therefore be assumed that they are more reluctant to have that content exploited in other contexts.

Despite the scarcity of adaptations based on advertisements, there have been some notable cases that have left their mark on popular culture. While the aim of this article is not to offer a complete, comprehensive overview of all adaptations based on advertising campaigns that have ever been produced, it does seem necessary to illustrate this phenomenon with some of its most significant examples. In order to do so, a preliminary search has been conducted, broadening the scope of this study to identify advertisements that: 1) were initially broadcasted on television, and/or part of a digital marketing campaign; and 2) presented a narrative which was later adapted to television and/or film. Some cases may even have had additional expansions in other formats (including music albums, toy action figures, and videogames).

³ For readers who might not be familiar with these terms, the concepts of "hypotext" (i.e. the preexisting source text that is adapted) and "hypertext" (i.e. the resulting work, the adaptation itself) were coined by Genette as the two defining components of "hypertextuality" (1997, pp. 5-7). According to this author, hypertextuality is a very specific type of transtextual relationship that takes place in transformative processes, such as adaptations.

⁴ In spite of this, some within the advertising industry have been advocating for change over the past two decades. For instance, Tom Finneran, former Executive Vice President for the Association of American Advertising Agencies (4As), believes that "as advertising has become increasingly about content, agencies are no different from industries like publishing, motion pictures, video games, music, etcetera (...). Yet the structures of idea ownership are different. Agencies need to develop their own content and take it to market as a product or service they would license to advertisers." (Finneran, in O'Leary, 2007).

The research data (García Avis, 2026) gathered from this exploratory investigation has been compiled in Table 1 below, showcasing noteworthy cases of adaptations based on advertising campaigns.

Table 1. Notable adaptations based on advertising campaigns (USA and UK)

TV Ad / Campaign	Agency	Brand / Client	Adaptation(s)	Medium / Format
"Hey Kid, Catch!" (1979)	McCann Erickson	The Coca-Cola Company	<i>The Steeler and the Pittsburgh Kid</i> (NBC, 1981)	TV movie
<i>The California Raisins</i> (1986-1994)	Foote, Cone & Belding	California Raisin Advisory Board (CALRAB)	<i>Meet the Raisins!</i> (CBS, 1988) <i>Raisins: Sold Out!</i> (CBS, 1990)	TV specials (claymation, mockumentary, musical)
			<i>The California Raisin Show</i> (CBS, 1989)	TV series (animation)
			<i>The California Raisins Sing the Hit Songs</i> (1987) and three other music albums released between 1987-1988.	Music albums
			<i>The California Raisins: The Grape Escape</i> (NES)	Videogame (unreleased)
<i>Crash Test Dummies</i> (1985-1999)	Leo Burnett	US Department of Transportation; Ad Council	<i>The Incredible Crash Dummies</i> (FOX Kids, 1993) <i>The Incredible Crash Dummies</i> (Tyco Toys, early 1990s) <i>The Incredible Crash Dummies</i> (Gray Matter Inc., 1993)	TV pilot episode Toy action figures Videogame
			<i>Incredible Crash Dummies: The Series</i> (FOX, 2004) <i>Incredible Crash Dummies</i> (Mattel's Hot Wheels, 2004)	TV series (animation) Toy action figures
Ernest P. Worrell sketch-based ads (1980s and 1990s)	Carden and Cherry	Various local brands in the United States, such as Mello Yello, Braum's Ice Cream & Dairy stores, or Duval Ford car dealership (among many others)	<i>Hey Vern, It's Ernest!</i> (CBS, 1988)	TV sketch show
			<i>Dr. Otto and the Riddle of the Gloom Beam</i> (1985). First cameo appearance of Ernest P. Worrell in a film.	Feature film
			Nine films in which Ernest is the main character, starting with <i>Ernest Goes to Camp</i> (1987) and ending with <i>Ernest in the Army</i> (1998).	Feature films
<i>Hare Jordan</i> (1992) and <i>Aerospace Jordan</i> (1993)	Wieden + Kennedy	Nike	<i>Space Jam</i> (1996), with Michael Jordan. <i>Space Jam: A New Legacy</i> (2021), with LeBron James.	Feature films
<i>Johnny English</i> (UK) (1991-1997)	BMP DDB Needham Worldwide	Barclays Bank PLC (for Barclaycard)	<i>Johnny English</i> (2003), <i>Johnny English Reborn</i> (2011), and <i>Johnny English Strikes Again</i> (2018). There is a fourth film in development.	Feature films
<i>Baby Bob</i> (2000-2005)	Siltanen & Partners (Siltanen/Keehn)	FreeInternet.com, ISP (2000) and Quiznos (2005)	<i>Baby Bob</i> (CBS, 2002-2003)	TV series (sitcom)
<i>Cavemen</i> (first ad in 2004; latest ad in 2024)	The Martin Agency	Geico Insurance	<i>Cavemen</i> (ABC, 2007)	TV series (sitcom)
<i>Uncle Drew</i> , with Kyrie Irving (2012-2015)	Davie Brown Entertainment	PepsiCo (for Pepsi Max Zero)	<i>Uncle Drew</i> (2018)	Feature film
<i>Dear Apple</i> (2017-2025)	TBWA \ Media Arts Lab	Apple (for iPhone and Apple Watch)	"Dear..." (Apple TV+, 2020-2023)	TV docuseries
<i>An American Coach in London</i> and <i>The Return of Coach Lasso</i> (2013-2014)	The Brooklyn Brothers	NBC Sports	<i>Ted Lasso</i> (Apple TV+, 2020-present)	TV series (dramedy)

Source: Research data (García Avis, 2026).

Table 1 cannot be claimed as a definitive nor absolute list of adaptations based on advertisements, due to two main limitations. Firstly, as it has already been noted, this specific type of adaptation is much rarer –and, therefore, also harder to find– than others, such as cinematic adaptations of literary works. Secondly, this table is heavily US-centric, with the only non-US example being British. While it is true that the US advertising market is the leading global hub in this industry, it is not unreasonable to presume that there may also be similar adaptations in other, non-English speaking countries. In any case, this compilation is just a first approach to adaptations based on advertising campaigns, and should certainly be expanded in further research. For the time being, it provides initial insights into this phenomenon.

At a first glance, some common denominators can be identified in the advertisements listed above. To begin with, many of them rely extensively on humor as a primary means of engaging consumers. It is also relevant to note that a significant number of these campaigns center on sports, and in some cases even feature famous male athletes (Mean Joe Greene, Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Kyrie Irving). Certain commercials use different types of animation, including *claymation* (in the case of *The California Raisins*), and even integrate animation with live-action footage (in the Nike *Jordan ads*). Furthermore, some of these adaptations seem to clearly position children as their main target audience, especially when it comes to the development of animated TV specials, videogames, or toy merchandise (all of which were part of the *Crash Test Dummies* ‘universe’). Lastly, most of the stories presented in these ads have a very compelling and charismatic protagonist(s), whether it’s Ernest P. Worrell, Uncle Drew, or Ted Lasso.

The case of Johnny English is of particular interest from the perspective of intertextuality. The character, played by comedian Rowan Atkinson, is a parody of a Bond-like secret agent, and the Johnny English films “comment on one of the most obvious aspects of Bondian production and marketing strategies: product placement and self-advertisement” (Sargeant, 2012, p. 64). The character of Baby Bob also warrants closer scrutiny on another basis. Before getting his own TV series, this talking baby was featured in campaigns for two different brands (FreeInternet.com and Quiznos), something highly unusual in the advertising industry. This was possible because Rob Siltanen, co-founder and Chief Creative Officer for Siltanen & Partners, not only created the character; he also retained ownership of its IP (O’Leary, 2007), in contrast to the standard industry practices mentioned earlier.

Regarding the adaptations produced for television, it is worth noting that *The California Raisins TV* specials and TV series had quite an impact on American popular culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Smithsonian Channel, 2021). An advertising campaign that was initially designed to increase raisin sales expanded the world of its anthropomorphized singing raisins across different media, including music albums, merchandise, and even a videogame, although this latter adaptation ultimately never reached commercial release. Other examples listed in Table 1, such as the TV sketch show *Hey Vern, It’s Ernest!* (along with the Ernest films), or the various iterations of the *Crash Test Dummies*, attained broad recognition among their primary target audience: children.

However, when it comes to turning advertisements into serialized, live-action, scripted TV formats, the attempts to date have yielded limited success. While the first episodes of the sitcom *Baby Bob* premiered to solid viewer ratings, its critical reception was overwhelmingly negative (Jasik, 2002). After initially delaying the release of its second season, CBS ultimately cancelled the show, having broadcasted a total of 14 episodes. The case of *Cavemen* is even more severe. This sitcom, “widely considered to be one of the worst TV shows ever made” (VanHooker, 2025), was met with both harsh, unfavorable reviews and rapidly declining ratings, which led to a swift cancellation. In fact, *Ted Lasso* seems to be an outlier within this small sample pool of serialized television adaptations, both in terms of popular success and critical acclaim.

2.2. Advertising in the Twenty-First Century

Before moving on to the analysis of *Ted Lasso* as an adaptation, it is also necessary to examine the significance of its preceding marketing campaign within the world of contemporary advertising. Therefore, the conceptual framework must address two notions that are fundamental to the comprehension of this case study: *post-advertising and narrative advertising*.

2.2.1. Post-advertising

Traditional mass media advertising used to be understood as a unidirectional, purely persuasive form of communication, easily distinguishable from information or entertainment, and which had one clear, main goal: to generate short-term engagement with consumers, in order to persuade them to buy a specific product or service (Méndiz and García Avis, 2017). The advertising landscape, however, has changed considerably in the past three decades. Alongside the rapid evolution of new technologies, the blossoming of what Jenkins has called “convergence culture” (2006) has transformed all forms of communication, including advertisements.

To describe contemporary practices in the marketing world, Solana (2010) coined the term “post-advertising” (*postpublicidad*, in Spanish). In this new era, brands now offer bidirectional, liquid content through global and integrated actions, demanding a deeper, proactive engagement from their consumers, with the ultimate goal of establishing a long-term emotional connection with them. In order to achieve this, advertising campaigns are relying more and more on hybrid narrative formats, branded content initiatives, and transmedia storytelling, as opposed to trying to persuade consumers “via argument and explanation” (Kim et al., 2017, p. 284). Commercials are no longer solely focused on explaining why a product is good; in fact, in many cases, the product or brand may not even appear in the advertisement itself.

According to Solana, marketing communication is now rhizomatic and it “goes beyond the deaf monologue of mass media”, aiming instead for “an exchange of opinions or interests, more intimate, personal, and experiential” (2010, p. 76). Post-advertising, then, is about creating memorable experiences by telling a (short-form) story that represents the brand and its values, in order to cultivate meaningful connections with a distinct target audience. In this context, the Internet is the perfect medium for brands not only to build their positioning, but also to foster engagement with their consumers.

With its digital branded shorts and its website, filled with additional content tailored to curious football fans in the United States, the Ted Lasso NBC Sports campaign certainly falls within the realm of post-advertising. Furthermore, as Kassing points out, “NBC launched the campaign at a time when both sports documentaries (...) and mockumentaries (...) had become common genres in US pop culture” (2022, p. 392). This narrative decision illustrates that Ted Lasso’s story was clearly geared towards a very specific target audience, already familiar with those genres, and with whom the network wanted to connect through the use of humor. In addition to this, the website provided more opportunities to engage particularly proactive consumers, which contributed to reinforce the brand’s position and to foster an online community of fans around this campaign.

2.2.2. Narrative advertising

While all of the hallmarks mentioned above define this new era of commercial communication, it must be noted that, even before the dawn of post-advertising, some traditional and unidirectional mass media ads also relied on storytelling to connect with consumers. In reality, narrative ads have always been a part of advertising. This is due to the fact that stories are a fundamental tenet of human communication, and an essential tool for us to understand the world and to connect with others.

This raises the following question: What are the traits that specifically characterize storytelling in advertising? Scholars in the field seem to have widely accepted the concept of “transportation”, initially posited by Green and Brock (2000), as essential to narrative adverts. This term refers to the capability of stories to transport and immerse viewers within a narrative, something that has been proven to elicit enjoyment and positive feelings about the brand in consumers (Green et al. 2004). In order to ‘transport’ viewers, it is believed that stories should have a series of basic components. According to a thorough lit review conducted by Brechman and Purvis, “traditional definitions propose that narratives include two important elements: chronology (...) and causality” (2015, p. 367). These scholars further point out that “narratives often include, albeit in varying degrees, emotional appeals” (2015, p. 367). Kim et al. (2017) also highlight the importance of other elements in narrative ads, such as protagonists with clear goals, actions, and central themes. In fact, these authors define “a narrative ad in structural

terms as an ad that tells a story with the following necessary elements: who, what, when, where, why, how, and chronology” (2017, p. 284).

Upon reviewing these observations from the perspective of screenwriting, it seems necessary to mention that the “actions” of the protagonist, as well as the “what” of the narrative, are always inextricably connected to the dramatic conflict, which is the engine and driving force of any given tale. According to Robert McKee, “nothing moves forward in a story except through conflict” (1999, p. 210), and this is applicable to advertising narratives as well. Even if they are much shorter, condensed stories, narrative ads must always present a compelling conflict for their protagonist(s). The main conflict of a story, which is always established through its premise, not only sets the plot in motion; it also offers insights into the deeper themes that the story aims to convey. Therefore, dramatic conflict should also be taken into consideration as a fundamental ingredient of narrative advertisements, and should henceforth be added to the list of components detailed above.

While not all of the campaigns listed in Table 1 can be considered examples of post-advertising, they all exhibit the traits of successful narrative ads. More specifically, most of them feature a very charismatic (and, noticeably, almost always male⁵) main character or characters: from the anthropomorphized California Raisins to Johnny English; from world-renowned athletes playing basketball with the Looney Tunes to Ted Lasso. These characters face clear dramatic conflicts, often portrayed through a comedic lens, in a way that unequivocally appeals to the emotions of consumers. As a result, this facilitates the process of viewer transportation.

To conclude, *An American Coach in London* and *The Return of Coach Lasso* are clear examples of both post-advertising and narrative advertising. As such, these stories are made of key narrative ingredients—including a premise and a protagonist with a main conflict—that can certainly be adapted to different forms of storytelling. The main goal of this article, then, is to analyze this process of transformation.

3. Methodology

Taking *Ted Lasso* as a case study, this paper aims to understand how a story primarily conceived for an advertising campaign was then transformed into a long-running TV series. In order to better comprehend this type of adaptation, the most suitable methodology should necessarily be qualitative in nature. More specifically, a **comparative textual analysis** has been conducted to examine the three works listed in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Components of the Ted Lasso case study

Title	Created by / for	Object of study	Total runtime
An American Coach in London (2013)	The Brooklyn Brothers agency, for NBC Sports	branded short film	4:41 minutes
The Return of Coach Lasso (2014)	The Brooklyn Brothers agency, for NBC Sports	branded short film	6:05 minutes
Ted Lasso (2020-present)	Co-creators: Bill Lawrence, Jason Sudeikis, Joe Kelly and Brendan Hunt. Created for Apple TV	Season 1: 10 episodes Season 2: 12 episodes Season 3: 12 episodes TOTAL: 34 episodes	1455 minutes (24 hours and 15 minutes)

Source: Author's own elaboration.

⁵ The gender disparity identified in Table 1 raises additional questions regarding gender representation in advertising and television, as well as the predominance of male characters (and the corresponding lack of female representation) in sports-themed narratives. While these concerns are undeniably significant, examining them properly would require conducting an in-depth analysis with a broader corpus, and within the framework of a different field (i.e., gender studies). Therefore, it would be more appropriate to explore these issues in future research.

As Alan McKee states, there are many different forms of textual analysis, and “academics who do ‘textual analysis’ actually practice a huge range of methodologies – many of which are mutually contradictory and incompatible” (2003, p. 2). That is to say, media texts can be analyzed using a variety of methods, depending on the object and field of study, the research questions that guide the analysis and, ultimately, what the researchers are trying to determine. Since textual analysis can take many different shapes, academics need to establish the most suitable framework and method for each specific study.

The textual analysis conducted in this article is of a comparative nature, as it posits two audiovisual texts (the NBC Sports campaign and *Ted Lasso*) in relation to each other. More specifically, the study is framed within the tradition of hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1997, 1999, 2006), and as such it aims to interpret both texts through a process of recontextualization, in order to reveal their interconnections, as well as new dimensions of their respective contextual realities. Through this interpretive lens, a deeper, dialogic understanding of the texts unfolds. Furthermore, as has been argued elsewhere (García Avis and Narberhaus Martínez, 2023), the viewpoint of hermeneutics is especially significant in the realm of adaptations. Along with providing a framework to analyze adaptations from the perspective of reader or viewer reception, the actual process of adapting a text is also inherently hermeneutical. This is due to the fact that adaptations always imply the need to interpret and recontextualize a text in a new cultural context, for a new medium, and/or for a new audience.

Since this paper strives to better understand how the narrative components of the NBC Sports campaign were adapted and recontextualized in the development of *Ted Lasso*, it is reasonable to examine both texts using an analytical method based on two screenwriting categories: 1) premise and 2) character development. It must be noted that, while there are many other screenwriting components that could have also been examined –such as dialogue, subtext, or the narrative functions of setting– it was necessary to narrow down the number of categories to enable a more nuanced, in-depth analysis. The selection of these specific categories is justified by the fact that, on initial examination, both premise and character development emerged as particularly significant in the case of *Ted Lasso*. Indeed, this adaptation seems to be articulated around a premise and its protagonist crossing over to a new, expanded format, which warrants focusing the research on these two textual components.

It must be noted, though, that premise and characters do not exist in a vacuum; they are organically and cohesively intertwined with all the other narrative ingredients that make up any given story, from genre to plot structure. Because of this, when examining these two specific categories, it will be indispensable –and unavoidable– to refer to their connection to other textual components, as well as to any contextual elements that might inform the narrative development of the text (such as, for example, the average runtimes of different media formats). This is where the dialogic process of hermeneutical interpretation will take place, addressing all of these factors in a holistic manner.

To ensure clarity, a concise and focused explanation of each narrative category is provided below, detailing the different aspects that will be examined in relation to premise (section 3.1) and to character development (section 3.2). The foundations for these two categories are initially grounded in broader screenwriting theory⁶ and then subsequently applied to storytelling in both advertising and serialized scripted formats. In this regard, despite the lack of screenwriting literature in the specific field of advertising, general principles of story design remain applicable to narrative advertisements.

⁶ Although in the past two decades there has been a noticeable increase in scholarly work devoted to the study of screenwriting, many of the ‘theoretical’ principles in this field still stem from instructional screenwriting manuals. That is why the references used in this study combine both types of sources.

3.1. Premise

In the words of Hicks, the premise is “a brief statement of the central conflict of the story” (1999, p. 6), usually condensed in the form of a *logline* (Blum, 1995). This statement, prevalent in screenwriting manuals, points to the premise as the narrative foundation on which a story is built, setting it in motion and generally turning the world of its characters upside down. Moreover, when formulating a premise, it is fundamental to take into account its genre, since genre conventions will determine how an idea is further developed (Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2004). This narrative premise is also connected to –and indivisible from– the main concept or subjacent *thematic premise* (Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2004), which illustrates the deeper, more abstract dimension of the message(s) a story conveys.

In short-form storytelling, like advertisements or short films, stories tend to focus on one clear main conflict, generally developed throughout one main plot. Because of this, the way in which the premise is presented tends to be very direct and straightforward, so that viewers can be immediately immersed in (or transported into) the story. Long-form storytelling combines the main conflict from the premise with additional conflicts, which then lead to additional subplots. More specifically, in the case of serialized scripted formats, the premise is established in the pilot episode and then acts as the underlying guiding thread for the main conflict throughout the whole series. In fact, it could be argued that the distinguishing trait of a premise in television lies in its ability to endure over time, serializing its main conflict season after season, while also showcasing many other storylines.

Premise, main conflict, and plot are not only intertwined; they are articulated through narrative structure. All stories, regardless of the medium in which they are told, require structure, whether adhering to traditional narrative patterns or experimenting with elements like chronology and causality. The way in which a tale is structured, including its key plot points and dramatic acts, is highly conditioned by the extension of the story itself (McKee, 1999). The longer the story, the more complex and intricate its structure may be, since length provides more time to further explore a premise. That is why television series, which may span over a number of seasons, are structured across micro, middle and macro levels (Newman, 2006), presenting a narrative complexity that differs from the more straightforward, condensed dynamic required of narrative advertisements.

In light of these observations, the premises of both the NBC Sports campaign and *Ted Lasso* have been examined and compared in relation to their genre, dramatic conflict, and subsequent plot structure.

3.2. Character development

In this second category, the word “development” refers to the creative writing process through which a character is constructed, encompassing its various components and dimensions (and not just its prospective transformation). In this sense, different factors need to be taken into account when analyzing fictional characters, in any media in which they may be presented. Firstly, the concept of *characterization*, which, according to McKee, is “the sum of all observable qualities of a human being, everything knowable through careful scrutiny” (1999, p. 100). Thus, characterization refers to the physical traits, personality attributes, and other components, such as accents or clothing style, which illustrate how someone presents themselves to the world. Yet this may diverge from their underlying true nature, as true character tends to reveal itself when a person is faced with a high-stakes choice, under considerable pressure (McKee, 1999). Due to their length, television series provide more room to explore the different layers of characters and their characterizations. Their development needs to be multi-dimensional and well-rounded, including personality traits, values, and flaws. This complexity is key for characters to emotionally resonate with viewers (Iglesias, 2005). Advertisements and branded short films, on the other hand, conditioned by their much briefer nature, tend to portray characters based on easily identifiable traits and archetypes, as viewers need to connect with them instantly.

Secondly, characters face different types of conflict. While many authors have offered their own typologies (see, for example, Blacker, 1993; Seger, 1994; or Hicks, 1999), it is generally agreed that all subtypes of conflict usually fall under one of three main categories. Using McKee's (1999) and Sánchez-Escalonilla's (2007) terminologies, these three levels of conflict refer to 1) inner struggles; 2) *personal / relational* adversities; and 3) *extra-personal / basic external* obstacles. In other words, conflict in a character's life might arise from within, from interpersonal clashes with others, or from external circumstances beyond their control. Films and television series present a considerable array of all three types of conflict, which are always intertwined and should inform each other. Storytelling in advertising, on the other hand, is highly condensed and usually tends to focus on the main conflict set by the premise. If there are any additional conflicts, they will be few and secondary, always linked to the central plot. In short-form storytelling, introducing too many challenges would divert attention from the main focus of the story, potentially confusing the viewer.

Thirdly, many (though not all) characters in long-form storytelling usually experience some kind of transformation or arc. This is closely connected to a character's (external) *wants* and (internal) needs, which should be examined with nuance (Cattrysse, 2010). The nature of character evolution is radically different in films and television series, and the debate on whether television characters truly change is still ongoing. For instance, Douglas believes that characters in TV dramas do not undergo a steep, horizontal transformation towards their goal, which is more often seen in cinematic narratives; they change vertically, or internally, instead (2007). In a similar vein, Mittell states that "in television, it's more accurate to talk about character accumulation and depth than it is to talk about character development" (2015, p. 133). While there is truth to this, many characters still undergo some degree of development and may even evolve in television; they simply do so in a different way. As it has already been argued elsewhere, "due to the serial nature of the medium, TV characters—in any genre—usually experience a more subtle and progressive development, while retaining the defining traits that make them recognizable for viewers week after week" (García Avis and Atarama-Rojas, 2025, p. 376).

Furthermore, Ianniello has detected a shift in contemporary TV drama, where "key characters change significantly, more often" (2023, p. 162). This has led this author to propose a new "composition framework", inspired by musical harmonies and the synchronization of melodies, to examine the development of serial drama characters (Ianniello, 2023). Another approach that should be mentioned is the one devised by Innocenti and Pescatore (2018), who understand TV series as narrative ecosystems, and the evolution of their characters as a result of this ecosystemic design. In any case, the fact that characters may experience different degrees of transformation, with some characters even remaining "constant" (Mullins, 2023) or unchanged, must not be *overlooked* ⁷.

Having said this, can characters evolve in narrative advertisements? Despite the lack of literature on this specific topic, it may seem logical to presume that these short-form stories generally do not facilitate transformative character development, at least not as it is understood in either film or serialized fiction. At the same time, on a case-by-case basis, both the length of an advertising campaign and the type of story being told are factors that might enable character change to some degree. While the analysis of the NBC Sports campaign may provide preliminary insights through this study, further research should certainly explore the matter in greater depth.

4. Comparative analysis and discussion

The two categories described above (premise and character development) have guided the following textual analysis, focusing on the *Ted Lasso* case study. This interpretive reading has also

⁷ Authors like Sánchez-Escalonilla (2004) or Mullins (2023) have already addressed this when it comes to film. The latter, in particular, calls for the redefinition of arc analysis in the case of "constant characters" that do not experience emotional transformations. The range of arc possibilities should be further examined in the realm of serialized television as well.

been supplemented with interviews with the co-creators of the TV series, so as to gain a better understanding of their approach to the adaptation process. Three criteria have determined the selection of these supplementary interviews. Firstly, all of them were published between the release dates for both the first and second seasons of *Ted Lasso* (August 2020–July 2021), at the height of its initial, unexpected success during the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, they were published across a variety of press outlets, including mainstream newspapers (like *Los Angeles Times*), industry trades (like *The Hollywood Reporter*), and other publications generally focused on the entertainment sector (such as *Paste Magazine* or *Entertainment Weekly*). Thirdly, and most importantly, the selected texts had to feature interviews in which the co-creators of *Ted Lasso* referred to the NBC Sports advertising campaign and its adaptation process, since that was the aspect most relevant to this specific study. It must also be noted that, in this analysis, interviews and press articles about *Ted Lasso* are considered secondary sources, and as such they have been used, in dialogue with other references, to contextualize the creative process explained below.

4.1. Premise

The concept for *Ted Lasso* actually predates the NBC Sports campaign. Its origins can be traced back to the early 2000s, when co-creators Jason Sudeikis, Brendan Hunt, and Joe Kelly were performing in Amsterdam as part of the Boom Chicago comedy troupe. It was then when they developed an initial version of what would later become the character of Ted Lasso (Baxter, 2020; Fallon, 2021). In 2013, NBC approached Sudeikis with a few ideas for their campaign, including a yelling, drilling coach, similar to one that the comedian had previously played on *Saturday Night Live* (Lawrence, 2020). Yet Sudeikis felt that this new coach should be different, and that was how the NBC version of Ted took shape.

An American Coach in London and *Ted Lasso* are both grounded in the same premise: an American football coach is hired to train an English Premier League team, even though he has no understanding of association football (known in the United States as soccer). Despite sharing this fish-out-of-water concept, the way in which the premise is shaped in each case leads to two very different stories, with very different structures. These variances are informed by narrative choices made regarding genre and conflict, along with being conditioned by the traits that characterize each mode of communication (branded short film versus serialized storytelling).

An American Coach in London falls under the mockumentary genre and resorts to the comedic devices of “farce and parody” (Kassing, 2022, p. 391) to explore its initial premise. This results in a structure built around dynamic, sketch-like vignettes, featuring key moments of Ted’s tenure as a coach for Tottenham Hotspur F.C., which are then combined with talking heads of Ted reflecting on this experience. On the other hand, *Ted Lasso* frames its premise as a dramedy, which hybridizes comedy with drama. In fact, as Mittermeier observes, the Apple TV series “is particularly skilled at mixing genres” (2024c, p. 385), and this author further argues that *Ted Lasso* also borrows conventions from other genres, such as fantasy and the *romcom* (2024b, 2024c). This new hybrid genre, along with the longer nature of serialized fiction, meant that the premise had to be developed following different conventions and a more traditional serial structure. The main plot set up by the premise (Ted as the new coach for AFC Richmond) is hence intertwined with other subplots, building a complex structure of interconnected threads, including multi-episodic and seasonal arcs. This diverges from the NBC Sports campaign, where the focus fully remains on the conflict established in the premise.

Ultimately, the way in which a narrative premise is framed also conditions the conceit and underlying “thematic premise” (Sánchez-Escalónilla, 2004) that it conveys. The premise of *An American Coach in London* capitalizes on its genre to showcase “a critique of American exceptionalism” (Kassing, 2022, p. 388), and to revel in the contrast generated by cultural clashes (although its sequel, *The Return of Coach Lasso*, provides a more nuanced perspective on this second topic). In *Ted Lasso*, the reframing of the premise within a new genre, for a new medium, and in a new format, enables the series to address very different themes. These

include the importance of self-belief and self-growth; the impact of supportive, healthy leadership; and the transformative power of ‘found family’, among others.

4.2. Character development

After the NBC Sports campaign ended, the TV series project did not crystallize until writer-producer Bill Lawrence joined Sudeikis, Hunt and Kelly as the fourth co-creator. Lawrence initially thought that the ads were just funny sketches, but he saw the potential for a TV series when he understood Sudeikis’s vision to retell the story of Ted “with more pathos and emotion, and have him be a much more grounded character who’s the best version of an American abroad rather than the cartoon version of an American abroad” (Lawrence, in Jackson, 2020). This quote already indicates the relevance of character transformation during the adaptation process. In order to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis, this second category has specifically focused on the development of Ted Lasso as a protagonist in both works. Nonetheless, some observations about other characters will also be noted at the end of this section.

Figure 1. The two Ted Lassos



Sources: Left: *An American Coach in London* (© NBC Sports).
Right: *Ted Lasso* promotional poster (© Apple TV).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the physical characterization of the two Teds is extremely similar. They both have a moustache, wear analogous clothes, and their gel-combed hair is parted on the same side. They both speak with the same Southern drawl. Yet it is possible to infer clear differences between them, thanks to Jason Sudeikis’s facial expressions and overall performance and demeanor. In the branded short films for NBC Sports, Sudeikis plays Ted with “just the right combination of arrogance and ignorance” (Baxter, 2020). This attitude dissipates completely in the Apple TV series: while Ted remains ignorant of everything British, he approaches this new world with honest curiosity and whimsy. Despite the fact that they look alike, these two characters see the world in very different ways.

In *An American Coach in London*, Ted responds to the archetype of “an unknowing fool or a cavalier clown,” and his main personality traits encompass “naivety, ignorance and ill-timed playfulness” (Kassing, 2022, p. 392). Additionally, he is also quite incompetent yet does not seem to be bothered by this fact. Through the use of farce and parody, Ted is portrayed as someone who should not be taken seriously. This foolish archetype, defined by just a few, very specific traits, is easily identifiable for the audience, and perfectly fits the storytelling needs required by this type of sketch-based comedic narrative.

Ted does not change nor evolve throughout the first installment of the campaign, which seems suitable for this short-form story. However, *The Return of Coach Lasso* introduces an interesting possibility regarding character development in advertising. While most of Ted's personality traits remain practically the same in the second branded video, certain small signs indicate that his experience in England has subtly changed him, pointing to latent layers in his true character. Back in the United States after being fired, Ted embraces a love for all things British, and he attempts to implement what he believes he has learned from the Premier League in his new role as a coach for a youth girls' team, even though he still remains misguided in his ways. According to Sudeikis:

We just thought it would be funny if he wasn't cynical or angry about [being fired], that he just loved the experience and he loved London and he loved soccer, and that he brought that home with him. (...) And that eternal optimism and like 'aw-shucks' hopefulness really spoke to me in a way that I was like, 'Okay, there might be something more here.' Because it's (...) a really fun prism to see the world through. (Sudeikis, in Lawrence, 2020)

The portrayal of Ted seen in the advertising campaign, while ideal for short-form, sketch-based stories, would not work in long-form television, where characters need to be more complex to connect to a new audience. As co-creator Brendan Hunt points out, the NBC Sports campaign laid “the footprints that we were walking in, but we had to make it a fuller, different version” (Hunt, in Baxter, 2020). During the brainstorming process, while trying to identify the changes required to turn Ted Lasso into a TV-series protagonist, the creators of the show noted that Ted had to be “dumb like a fox”, and that his ignorance needed to be tempered with humility, instead of arrogance (Lawrence, in Jackson, 2020). The change of format also demanded adding “heart and heft to a character that was gloriously lacking in both” (Baxter, 2020).

Through this adaptation process, a new Ted Lasso was born. In the TV series, the Ted who lands in Richmond is a “(Middle-) American everyman” (Mittermeier, 2024c, p. 383), big-hearted and empathetic, who lives by the words of Walt Whitman: “Be curious, not judgmental” (season 1, episode 8). Despite not knowing much about football, he is a gentle, persevering coach who excels at fostering teamwork and at bringing out the best in each player, no matter how long it takes. Initially despised by fans, footballers, and sports journalists alike, Ted ultimately ends up winning everyone over with his earnest curiosity and his “folksy, relentless positivity” (Baron, 2021). Moreover, borrowing from the words of Fallon, “he’s not shooting off solar flares of optimism and empathy so much as he is a walking supernova” (2021). His genuine energy changes the world –and the lives of those around him– for the better.

Yet this Ted Lasso is by no means perfect. For as many good qualities as he has, Ted also is, in the words of supporting character Sassy, “a mess” (season 3, episode 4). Characters in long-form storytelling must have flaws and contradictions, along with different layers of conflict, to feel three-dimensional (McKee, 1999; Iglesias, 2005). At first, it may seem that the most significant challenge that Ted must face in Richmond is *external*: being a fish-out-of-water in an (initially) hostile new world. Yet, as the story unfolds, viewers realize that this is actually the least of Ted's problems. Not only does he struggle with certain *personal* conflicts, such as the separation and subsequent divorce initiated by his wife; throughout the series, Ted will also need to confront the *internal* struggle of his post-traumatic stress disorder, stemming from his father's suicide when he was a teenager.

Despite these hardships, there is an undeniable “dignity to Ted that allows him to meet pessimism with optimism and despair with hope” (Baxter, 2020), and this underscores his unequivocal, all-too-human vulnerability. Developing complex backstories such as this one, with layered levels of conflict, is fundamental for characters to resonate with viewers in serialized storytelling. Furthermore, all of these layers are intertwined in such a way that they inform each other gradually, propelling Ted's character arc forward.

While *Ted Lasso*'s evolution in the NBC Sports branded short films was truly minimal, and limited to the second installment of the campaign, the Apple TV series provides him with an intricate arc, which is developed over the span of three seasons. Ted's transformation is also interwoven with other character arcs and subplots that influence his own development. As a matter of fact, "it is clear that Ted's journey is one he can only venture on with the help of those around him" (Mittermeier, 2024c, p. 383). Most notably, his proactive decision to start therapy sessions with Dr. Sharon "Doc" Fieldstone, as well as the friendship he develops with Rebecca Welton, have a significant impact on his continuous personal growth. As he admits in a conversation with Rebecca, Ted is aware that he is, in fact, "a work in prog-mess" (season 3, episode 4).

By the third season finale, Ted is still certainly in development, but he has accepted that what he truly needs is to return to his son, Henry. He chooses fatherhood over his successful coaching career, bidding goodbye to everyone in Richmond whose lives he has transformed. As Mittermeier points out, "Ted slowly but surely turns everyone into better people – and leaves as soon as his job is done. While Ted is Dorothy Gale on his own journey, he is also Mary Poppins to AFC Richmond" (2024c, p. 384). Just like Dorothy, Ted returns home to Kansas, and to his son, whose football team he is seen coaching in the very last scene of the last episode (season 3, episode 12). This is also stated in his official X (formerly Twitter) account.

Figure 2. Ted Lasso's short biography on X



Source: @TedLasso official account on X (retrieved 09/03/2026).

Admittedly, Figure 2 presents a screen capture that is both ephemeral and circumstantial. Yet, despite its volatility, Ted's official account on X is a paratext that may enable the articulation of insightful connections, complementary to the analysis of character development conducted in this study. The social media team at Apple TV manages an account that, beyond its clear promotional purposes, also serves to illustrate how Ted portrays himself at a specific point in time within the overarching storyline of the series. For instance, in prior versions of his biography, Ted declared that he was "Coach of @AFCRichmond", while the updated one shown in Figure 2 presents Ted as he stands at the end of season 3, having returned to Kansas. Along with highlighting how much he prioritizes being a father to Henry and coaching his team, Ted's biography also showcases his friendship with the other members of the 'Diamond Dogs' men's support group. Moreover, both the last sentence and the header image display a key element of his life philosophy: the power of self-belief.

It is plausible to assume, then, that certain elements of this biography may change once the fourth season of *Ted Lasso* is released, especially considering that the character is returning to England to train AFC Richmond's women's team, as seen in the first official teaser for the upcoming season (Apple TV, 2026; Yossman, 2026). All of these peripheral observations could certainly open new avenues for research, not only to further examine the evolution of Ted, but also to explore how fictional characters at large are portrayed through the official social media accounts of TV series.

This analysis has mainly focused on the transformation of Ted Lasso as a protagonist. Yet, from the perspective of character development in the adaptation process, it seems also relevant to briefly address the functions of secondary characters. For the purposes of this paper, it should be noted that Coach Beard, Ted's quirky but extremely knowledgeable right-hand man, is the only supporting role that exists in both the advertising campaign and the TV series. Interestingly enough, in the two cases he remains a steady, constant presence besides Ted, although the series does flesh out his character more in detail, even providing an episode fully dedicated to him ("Beard After Hours", season 2 episode 9). Since the production and narrative standards of television formats necessarily require a bigger cast of characters, with their own dramatic conflicts, many secondary and supporting characters were created specifically for the Apple TV series. Most of the AFC Richmond players have smaller roles, whether running or episodic, but some of these new characters (including team owner Rebecca Welton, or footballer Roy Kent) do play a prominent part in the overall story.

Furthermore, *Ted Lasso* writers have excelled at subverting character stereotypes and tropes, like the vengeful, scorned woman whose only apparent goal is to hurt her cheating ex-husband by destroying his football team, as seen in Rebecca Welton; the cocky, selfish star player that Jamie Tartt appears to be, at least initially; or the gifted but extremely insecure underdog who feels constantly slighted and underappreciated, Nathan Shelley. This is something that the creators of the show set out to do from the very beginning:

We said, 'We're going to make our version of a sports movie because how fun will it be to do all the tropes but to examine them?' Yeah, you have the bad owner who just wants to destroy the team, but instead of just doing that trope you go, 'Hey, how'd she get there?' Maybe you empathize for a bit. (Lawrence, in Jackson, 2020)

It could be argued that the execution of these supporting character arcs and subplots has proven more successful in some cases than in others, given the mixed reactions to certain narrative decisions undertaken during the third season, including extended episode runtimes and what some have deemed inconsistent writing (Mittermeier, 2024a). For instance, Nathan's antagonistic arc, meticulously foreshadowed and developed during the first two seasons, reaches an overly sudden, redemptive resolution in season 3. In spite of this, it is undeniable that *Ted Lasso* has created a solid ensemble, full of complex, vulnerable, and ultimately three-dimensional characters. Pending the release of the upcoming fourth season, this should also be studied more in depth in further research.

5. Conclusion

Retelling stories always implies the need for narrative adjustments, and this remains true when the adapted work (or *hypotext*) stems from an advertising campaign. When a premise initially conceived for branded content crosses mediatic boundaries and becomes a television series, it must be transformed to fit the requirements and conventions of this new form of storytelling, in order to resonate with a different audience.

Long-form, serialized fiction in the twenty-first century is defined by its narrative complexity, and this has emerged as one of the determining factors that must be taken into account when

developing this specific type of adaptation process. Conditioned by their length, television series provide more time to develop characters, their arcs, and their conflicts, hence necessarily requiring more complex characterization, as well as a wider tapestry of storylines. Characters in advertisements, on the other hand, need to be easily and instantly recognizable, based on distinct archetypal traits.

The case study examined in this article has clearly illustrated this disparity. The two NBC Sports branded short films, which add up to just 10:46 minutes, present a sketch-based mockumentary, laser-focused on the main plot and structured around a series of vignettes, with an archetypal character as protagonist. In contrast, the first three seasons of *Ted Lasso* have 34 episodes, which span a total running time of over 24 hours. This inevitably requires a series of changes: reframing the premise, adding new characters, creating more conflict, developing new subplots and, paramountly, transforming the cartoonish Ted from *An American Coach* in London into someone complex, with more heart and pathos. This new Ted is a great coach, caring and optimistic, but he is also a flawed, vulnerable “mess”, which makes him a paradigmatic example of a “prestige TV” three-dimensional protagonist. Both the TV series and the marketing campaign start with the same fish-out-of-water premise, yet ultimately develop into completely different stories. Nevertheless, they are both unequivocally successful on their own, perfectly suited for the format and medium for which they were conceived.

Although the sample of adaptations based on advertisements is still scarce, and further research is certainly imperative on this topic, the examples compiled in this article (Table 1) provide some insights that make it possible to infer certain traits seemingly shared by these cultural products. Firstly, advertisements that have been adapted to other media tend to foreground humor and/or sports as driving forces for consumer engagement. Secondly, a notable number of campaigns and their adaptations specifically position children as their main target audience, relying on different types of animation and developing additional expansions (such as merchandise or videogames). Lastly, and most significantly, the stories presented in ads that have been adapted tend to feature very compelling and charismatic protagonists. From Ernest P. Worrell to the California Raisins, from Johnny English to *Ted Lasso*, it seems that adaptations based on advertisements rely on an engaging and well-defined central character. It could thus be argued that having a compelling protagonist, with the potential to be transformed as required by the new medium, is key to fostering this type of adaptation process. At the same time, it must be noted that these main characters are almost always male. This raises additional questions concerning female underrepresentation in both advertising and television, particularly in sports-themed narratives. While these patterns of gender representation (or lack thereof) have long been recognized in media studies, the issues identified in this article may open a new, promising line of inquiry that should be further examined using a broader corpus.

Ultimately, the formal differences between persuasive communication and other modes of storytelling, as well as the fact that brands generally retain the IP rights to their campaigns, might explain why adaptations based on advertisements are considerably less common than other types of retellings. In the specific case of television adaptations, although some are generally considered resounding failures (*Baby Bob*, *Cavemen*), other cases have had a significant positive impact on popular culture (such as *The California Raisins* or *Ted Lasso*). The recent success of *Ted Lasso* in particular might inspire further adaptations of this nature. Moreover, the proliferation of narrative adverts, as well as the development of new forms of storytelling in the post-advertising era, could certainly facilitate this type of cross-media migration in years to come.

6. Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for all aspects of this work: conceptualization and design of the study, data collection and curation, formal analysis and interpretation of the results, and writing and revision of the manuscript.

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