

Communication

Communication and Advertising in the Sphere of Social Imaginary

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Abstract: The hypothesis from which we start is that according to which the simplification function of reality is closely linked to the idea of trust. The image of a product or of an institution is to awaken the client's or consumer's confidence. And trust is a tool of simplifying the reality (Balaban, 2009, p. 52). The success of advertisement depends on the interpretative chemistry of consumer situations plausible imagined, interacting with structures with familiar and accepted values. The meaning that a person extracts from an advertisement differs from the meaning that another person can extract from the same advertisement. These symbols used in advertisements, which are subject to interpretation, understanding, signification, may take the form of words, pictures, music. Due to the fact that the messages task is to change behaviors, and behaviors are most easily changed and oppose the slightest resistance to change are those within the scope of ideals therefore, images must be idealized descriptions (Pitariu & David, 2009 p. 71).

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1. Introduction

The imaginary consists of the assembly of all past possible, images, produced or are to be produced and their means of production, transmission and reception. Currently, people are faced with an explosion of imaginary; the contemporary society is facing an unprecedented production of images. The media, as image providers, is present at all levels of representation of the western or westernized man. "From cradle to grave, the image is present, dictating the intentions to the anonymous or occult manufacturers: starting with the pedagogical awakening of the child, the economic or professional options adolescent, [...], in public or private morals, the media image is present, sometimes aiming at being «information», sometimes hiding the ideology of a «propaganda» or being made as seductive «advertising»..." (Durand, 1999, pp. 145-146). "The individual carries into his

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memory a collection of images about the world under its different aspects. These pictures are combinatorial constructions, analogous with the visual experiences". (Moscovici, 1994, p. 54)

The images resulting from filtering the possessed or received information by the subject in connection with the satisfaction sought or with a required consistency. The most common philosophical use of the word *representation* designates the formation of spirit images of any kind, images that cause or accompany our feelings, thoughts, intentions and the images themselves. Mental representations have, first, *a symbolic substance*, and then *a practice* that generates them (Moscovici, 1994, p. 32). To represent a thing or a condition does not mean to repeat it or to reproduce it, but it means reconstructing, changing its configuration.

The argumentative foundation from which we plan to start analyzing this theme is assuming the fact that advertising is a symbolic field that is suited to the transmission of images / models. Advertisers do not just sell insolated products, ideas and services, but multilayered, integrated systems, embracing, interpreting and projecting interrelated images of products, of corporations that profit from sales. "Advertising is seen as a collection of myths, symbols, archetypes, with which it manages to identify and exploit the consumer's aspirations, intervening at the same time actively in the symbolic construction process" (Dragan, 2007, p. 346). Advertising rhetoric is par excellence a construction that is working with symbols-images. Through its products symbolism we might say that advertising sells lifestyles. "The symbolism strength of image designation is achieved by proper image perception, being accompanied by verbal text." (Dragan, 2007, p. 368)

2. Communicating Messages through Advertising

In 1987, Bernard Cathelat said: "*Advertising [...] offers for free to the whole society a more inventive and richer show in forms and manifestations than the mass-media, the traditional arts and cultural institutions do.*" (apud Troger, 2010, p. 228). The advertising image represents a message that uses the language of shapes, colors and movements and it exerts an influence on the public at commercial, aesthetic and symbolic level.

The more it takes from communication, the more the advertisement claims to give to its messages more than a simple and a persuasive function. Chathelat supports

this idea saying: “*The advertising language is presented as a show of fantasy, destroying the common codes of social discourse and of technical demonstration to transpose the object or service in the illusion that the consumer wants to find it*” (apud Troger, 2010, p. 232). In other words, the advertiser does not just sell a product’s qualities, it brings to the fore also its related imagery.

The potential consumers are encouraged to engage with commercial products and personalities through the contexts of imagination – the physical scenes, the emotional circumstances and real situations in which they can use the product. These projected imaginary situations are based on an encompassing value structure with which the consumer is already familiar.

Success depends on the interpretative chemistry of the consumption situations plausible imagined interacting with the structures of familiar and accepted values. According to Jean-Jacques Boutaud “*the advertising mythology could not develop without this complex alchemy that encompasses at the same time, the highfalutin speech (expression), the graphic seduction (creation) and the psychological manipulation (persuasion)*” (2005, p. 50).

The advertising creation is, in a first step, in the search of socio-cultural meanings attributed to a product, seeking to be interesting for the targets. The next stage involves organizing sensory elements of the scenario. Each sensory element is text, sound, images or part of an image: color, form, motion placed in relation to other sensory elements, they should contribute to the emergence of meanings given in the first part of developing an advertisement.

Due to the fact that the ads are designed to boost sales, a visitor from another planet might think that people are sold, since the images with people are constantly most of the time covering the advertising space compared to the images of goods, notes Fowles (apud Pitariu & David, 2009, p. 71). It is interesting that the commercials generally do not progress dominant themes of class or social status differences. Still Fowles notes that the individuals from advertisements are prototypes of masculinity and femininity.

Those who create the advertisements are sure that “images of people exactly as they are in today’s society” will not attract more attention than the “average” people do in the real world, while highly stylized characters will attract the same fascinated eyes that they would get in case they would be detected walking on any street in America (apud Pitariu & David, 2009, p. 73).

The imagery in this area is that of idealized human beings. There is no rule saying that it should be that way (the commercials could present abstract images and colors, or even show no images at all) but the creators in this area have found, over time that this is what consumers want to see. The people who appear in commercials “are free” of any job, social status, family or other community. It expresses the desire of the public to see in the advertisements projections of the self.

These images show young people because youth is the stage where the self-identity is formed. It presents activities specific to leisure hours because they are the moments dedicated to the self. It is related to gender because it is the essence of self-identity. In general the advertisement imagery is set on what the individual is set, converting his needs in its forms of expression in the hope that the acceptance of these figurations will lead to the acceptance of the offered goods (Pitariu & David, 2009, p. 74).

The symbols appearing in commercials reflect the result of a communication effort. These symbols must be understood by the majority, therefore it must contain familiar elements. However it should not be too familiar or commonplace in order to determine indifference or even rejection by the consumers.

Although production of advertising images can be innovative in terms of techniques and visual forms, it remains, however, most of the time, conservative and repetitive in its contents. The advertising image conveys usually in its messages stereotypes intended to be quickly recognized by the public.

3. Stereotypes and Advertising

Stereotypes are formed starting from different life experiences, as well as rules, they can be transmitted by some members of the group to other members. Although stereotypes are defined as mental representations of individuals, their negative effects are caused mostly by the fact that at the same time they are widespread beliefs among the members of a society. “*A better understanding of the formation of stereotypes and predicting their contents require taking into consideration the interpersonal processes by which social consensus beliefs are communicated between people*” (Cernat, 2005, p. 137). Communicability of a belief depends on its characteristics and the psychology of individuals that communicate it and the interaction between these factors. The more a trait is communicable, the greater

will be its chances to be part of stereotyping content and the stereotypes based on it will be more persistent over time.

In *Mit și publicitate/Myth and advertising volume*, Madalina Moraru highlights the advantages, but also the disadvantages of maintaining of the stereotypes in advertising. Among the desirable aspects of activating stereotypes, we can mention the following (Moraru, 2009, pp. 172-174):

(A) *mobilizing the social thought*; advertising stereotypes frequently develop certain lifestyles by the psychographic qualities of consumers. They offer the opportunity of social identification with the offered models or the social awareness of self-image. Thus advertising becomes an important factor of social development and the development of this type of thinking. For example, the advertising for wine Zaraza “Zaraza cherishes those gentlemen who know who is on the banknote, even when they do not have much. Zaraza greets those who do not believe that on the bill of 5 lei is drawn the new mall and those who value the greatest historian, even if he is on paper of 1 leu. From Zaraza, for the true gentlemen from Romania: Only RESPECT.” Therefore by optioning this drink there are transmitted qualities such interest in culture and history.

(B) *placing the product*; the positioning phenomenon binds consumer to the product and it keeps him faithful; stereotyping is an option to retain mental representations established with effort, by keeping the most important attribute of the product: Coca-Cola-tradition; Pepsi - youth; Avon - femininity.

(C) *the impact on consumers*; Consumer expectations helps him to find himself under the aspect of his desires, by promoting images; stereotypes give the feeling of familiarity and psychological comfort.

(D) *the accuracy of the message*; the advertisement text must be extremely concise; the message must reach the public by using minimum resources with maximum efficiency.

(E) *the retrieval feature of the message*. The shorter the message is, the easier is to remember. Often, the titles are often built in rhymed and rhythmic key, to remember them involuntarily;

(F) *persuasion*; promoting stereotypes creates a certain dependency on products, as they are enabled stimuli of pleasure, of self-gratification; individuals aspire to lifestyles that can be met by consuming; the product’s image greatly influences the ideal self-image and it becomes the main gear for purchase.

4. Human Needs and Advertising

The advertising says to the man frustrated in his desires that he can find something better, more functional, that here is the solution to his problem. Moreover, not only that he can, but that he must find it.

In advertising there are mainly exploited the following unconscious “motives” of the individual:

(1) the need to identify a receptor with the source; the identification mechanism consist in the use in people advertising of context, of images, of lifestyles similar to those encoded in consumer culture to enable them to identify with them; This mechanism is one of the strongest and most often responsible for the acknowledgment of cultural models and adoption at the individual or group level;

(2) the need for the project; projection is the mechanism by which the consumer reduces the inner tensions by considering the advertising protagonists own projections, aspirational or similar; in this way, the consumer experiences a sense of liberation and emotional discharge, that leads to a euphoric effect and social security.

(G) *the preservation of the literary topos*, of the cultural values; the persuasive nature of the advertising text that makes the stereotypes to provide an argument from the sphere of the real (facts, truths, assumptions) and the sphere of the preferable (values, hierarchies, topos); the topos are preserved through symbols and archetypes, which are ways to reactivate the myths; imaginary designed situations are based on a structure of self-encompassing value with which consumers are already familiar; the advertising success depends on the interpretative chemistry of consuming situations plausible imagined, in interacting with structures of familiar and accepted values.

The conservation limits of stereotypes in advertising are (Moraru, 2009, p. 175):

(a) *promoting certain discrimination and prejudice*; the constant exposure of profiles and behaviors creates negative attitudes and behaviors for those who did not illustrate them and discriminatory acts; the young women are more beautiful than the older ones, the men are better drivers, black people are good sportsmen; at the root of the stereotypes formation is the social mentality of each company, that fuels discrimination and the social identity theory; not all consumers accept the idealization of commercials and then to adopt the behaviors of them, because that would lead to a much greater uniformity than there is; they often appear resistance

or indifference phenomena in the advertisement texts; on the other hand, the advertisements do not reflect the existing social values, because only a fraction of the social reality is captured in them.

(b) *the perpetuation of harmful behavior*. The ideal of feminine beauty presents a commercial image of beauty, but not a healthy one. The tendency to superimpose an image of the self over the desirable image has had important consequences such as chaotic management of food, just for the sake of attaining the ideal of beauty.

(c) *stereotyped dependency*; it could occur the dependence of image phenomenon of the product for promoting a scheme, which may lead to boredom and disinterest.

(d) *minimizing the characteristics of the product*. Stereotyping can lead to excessive schematization of the product by positioning, which overshadows some of its attributes.

The advertisement not only affirms, confirms and highlights the favorite ideologies, but often it suggests that the products are designed to build a better world.

5. Strategies to Influence through Advertising Images

Messaris (1992) proposed some strategies to influence the consumer responses to advertising images. Among these strategies there are significant the twofold: *the composition* of images and *their juxtaposition* (Pitariu & David, 2009, p. 75). Regarding *the composition*, the cited author argues that the central tool of visual manipulation is positioning of the viewer to the image contents. Regarding *the juxtaposition* of images, it is considered that, apart from the obvious significance of the context in the construction of the advertising, the main source of visual manipulation techniques is that it lacks the explicit conventions characteristic to sentences, having as consequence that the images can be used to implicitly claim that if certain things would be said in words, it might encounter a greater resistance.

Where reference is made to the problem of image *composition*, it distinguishes between two opposing conceptions of the images: on the one hand, the image is seen as a window into another world; on the other hand, the image is seen as a simple two-dimensional arrangement of light and color. In other words, in the first case the focus is on events and situations presented in the image, while in the second case, the emphasis is on how the image is created.

Currently, in achieving products for mass products for the audience (including commercials) it is given high importance both to the product content, chosen symbols and how the product is presented, as in the case of commercials. In connection with the ways of manipulating through images and the issue of the way for achieving the content of images, we can formulate the following interrogations: *How were positioned the people, the places and the actions in the image, related to the point of view of audience?* That is we are referring to what types of relationships is the viewer invited to get involved in relation to the subject of the images. *It brought the audience closer to the subject or is it distanced from him? Is he encouraged to identify with someone in the image or is he adopting the role of a passive spectator? Should they see the people in the image as equals or not?*

In order to speak of *the juxtaposition* of images, we should note that the interpretation of an image can be drastically affected by the context in which it is presented. Using juxtaposition of images to create a spatial proximity between different contents and thus suggesting that there is a causal link between them, it is a strategy often used in general in the visual advertisements, especially in the printed ones. The classic example of this technique is the use of perfume commercials, which typically take the form of juxtapositions between two images: on the one hand the product, and on the other hand, a successful romantic scene or a sexual conquest. The media meanings covered by sensory elements of advertising act primarily on the normative, relational or positioning “contexts” related to the targeted audience.

5. Conclusions

Communication and dissemination system using all media channels and applying various techniques of psychology and sociology for commercial purposes, advertising has become one of the main cultural symbols of industrial society. “Its omnipresence should be linked to the linguistic and aesthetic domains. The first reveals the role of advertising message as a generator of slogans, clichés, intertext of the era, and in the second domain it is assumed the construction of a certain image: femininity, virility, comfort, etc.” (Roventă-Frumușani, 1999 p. 138), for a certain group or a certain society. Advertising responds to two requirements: a material one, based on a certain product and an affective one, of compensating a frustration by reshaping the image of the recipient, positively valued by a brand image.

6. References

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