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Publicity, Advertising and Spirituality

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Abstract: Advertising industry is more and more often associated to brilliant minds in areas such as: psychology, sociology, anthropology, who turned a job into a full time task of “penetrating the collective public mind, (...) its manipulation, exploitation and control”. That is why, ever since its beginnings, the advertising industry was admonished by social critics for taking materialism to the highest levels; to replace inner happiness and intrinsic motivation with the wish to be productive in society only to the extent of consuming and buying happiness. Therefore, over time, advertising and publicity have raised pros and cons; while some voices describe advertising as a motor of society, driving economic development, there are others that strongly criticise advertising creations, blaming it of manipulation. Conversely, reality proves that a number of other factors exercise a major influence on the customers: experience, price, traditions, age, fashion, religion, etc thus, the fight between advertising pros and cons has led to the emergence of theories regarding its efficiency. Controversy related to the relationship between the rational and the emotional is still ongoing, the more so as the conventional alternative states that we should not let ourselves be affected by emotion when we make decisions, also, religious doctrines state that the mind and the body are two separate entities.

Keywords: advertising industry; advertising effect; consumer psychology; emotional advertising; faith and spirituality.

JEL classification: A13, M37, D87, Z12

1. Introduction

Consciousness gives people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself. B. Franklin

Often, “advertising calls on what is missing in society” [Mooij, 2010] as that “distorting mirror” [Pollay, 1986] that only reflects certain values and lifestyles. Professor Guy Cook [1992], in *The Discourse of Advertising* goes along similar lines: “advertising radically

reflects the changes in technology and the media, in the economic and social relationships, reflects our inner ego and our group identity”.

In other words, a first rule for successful advertising is nothing but a requirement for the copywriters to have a grasp of basic psychology and psycho-sociology (see Table 1, *A psychological approach versus a psycho-sociological approach to advertising*), and to turn the “advertiser - artistic director” dyad into a triad: “psycho-sociologist-advertiser-artistic director” [Chelcea, 2012].

Table 1: *A psychological approach versus a psycho-sociological approach to advertising*

<i>A psychological approach to advertising</i>	<i>A psycho-sociological approach to advertising</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ before 1925, advertising was first informative, focusing on the description of product characteristics and use; ▪ then, up until the end of World War II, a period referred to by William Leiss [Leiss et al., 2006] as the iconographic age, advertising revealed the symbolic value of the products, with the core of advertising shifting from the object to the person, picturing the elites and their success due to the use of the advertised products; ▪ the third stage, from 1945 to 1965, was referred to as narcissist, with the consumers being encouraged to consider the products as part of their own personality, and the advertising discourse predominantly emotional, charged with sensuality and metaphor; ▪ advertising is not omnipotent, it does not change human nature, but contributes to the development of higher level needs and proposes new ways of satisfying biological requirements; “ads cannot create new needs, they may especially revive them, awaken them, discover them, and to a lesser extent fabricate them” [Drăgan, 2007]; <i>Primum vivere, deinde philosophari</i> (O. Klineberg); ▪ to claim that advertising manipulates, using subliminal stimuli, is to raise questions, as subliminal advertising relies on a kernel of truth: we can be influenced without being aware of it, when people have less involvement in their behavioural decision, in their consumer behaviour; <i>subliminal perception</i> relies on the existence of a sensitivity threshold in every one of us, a threshold that varies not only from one person to another, but also based on the concrete state of the respective person; as William James said: <i>we are aware of what draws our attention and are not aware of what does not</i>; ▪ subliminal advertising, combined with eroticism and pornography, still fascinates certain categories of the public; ads that contain sexual information manage to draw attention and retain it for longer, in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it shows how belonging to a group leads to a certain buying behaviour, to a specific way of perceiving and evaluating ads, advertising messages becoming a force in their own right, and providing social cohesion; • Harry Hollingworth, the creator of a theory according to which human figures used in advertising increase the effectiveness of the advertising message, concluded, in his experiments, that the images of a female faces (especially of actresses) or of children are more strongly committed to the memory than male faces; • the Dutch psycho-sociologists Bob M. Fennis and Wolfgang Stroebe consider, as a response model to the issue of information acquisition and processing, as provided by advertising, the four stages: <i>subconscious analysis</i>, which assumes a generic supervision of the environment, without a specific aim; <i>focused attention</i>, a conscientious focusing on the stimulus and its classification; <i>understanding</i>, consisting of the shaping of semantic interferences; <i>reasoning</i>, a process where semantic representation of the stimuli is related to previously stored buyer’s knowledge; • subconscious information processing results in its storage into the implicit memory, only retaining the perceivable characteristics of the advertising message, and not its meaning; • Robert G. Heath proposed a model of processing advertising messages at the low level of attention, based on the following assumptions: at the low level of attention we process the advertising messages almost continuously; this processing is performed at a subconscious level; it results in sensory associations that define the brands in our minds and are transferred to the long-term memory; the sets of sensory associations strongly influence the buying decision, without us being aware of it [Pringle & Field,]. Effortless processing of information is experienced by the consumers as a positive emotion, leading to a positive evaluation of the stimulus; • in the process of focusing attention, short-term memory plays a very important role, thus helping identify two categories of factors that determine attention focusing: stimuli-related factors (characteristics of the products and of their image)

consumer's memory, than those that do not contain such information. However, there are not sufficient data on record to support the idea that exposure to sexual information leads to an increase in sales. Cultural and religious constraints come into play here; a veritable commandment might be: *Never produce an ad you would not wish your family to see* [Ogilvy, 2009];

- advertising exploits the human tendency to draw quick conclusions in the absence of a strong enough factual support: a veritable generalisation, encouraged by the ***credo consolans*** philosophy: people believe because they enjoy it, Gardner says;
- advertising asks us to choose between two complete opposites, a reasoning considered fallacious in the very presentation of one facet of the issue only - ***the red herring*** reasoning consists of an attempt on the part of ad creators to divert attention from the arguments in favour of the product or brand.

and factors related to the personality features and the concrete situation in which the consumer is placed;

- specialist literature refers to ***three characteristics of the stimuli*** that attract our attention involuntarily: prominence, absolute prominence, and novelty;
- unlike *prominent stimuli*, drawing attention by contrast with the context, *absolute prominent stimuli*, are remarkable in themselves, being: strongly emotional, concrete and generating living images, close in time and space to the field of perception. Equally suggestive to ad creators are the results of research of *advertising tricks, with novelty features*: the travelling speed of a light spot vertically and horizontally. The light spot, moving at the same speed, seems to descend or ascend faster if it is actually perceived as moving horizontally. The "Ebbinghaus illusion", a visual illusion, like the "human face – vase" illusion or the "Rubin faces", taking their name from the Dutch psychologist Edgar Rubin, are tricks frequently used in advertising [Ebbinghaus, 2012].

Source: own elaboration

Advertising, the most expressive form of mass culture, that "cultural industry", that "spearhead of mass culture models" becomes, according to Brune [1996], the promoter of middle class-specific consumerism. The effects of advertising are not limited to people themselves, as a complex phenomenon, they are reflected in culture, in the volume of knowledge, values and rules of a given society. In order to seduce the consumers, advertising resorts to sensorial images and show material and erotic stimuli, while the characters and communication situations are sketchy ad stereotypical. Thus, advertising provides stereotypes of thinking and behaviour, sets of images, ideas and evaluations, that the receiver uses in defining his own behaviour.

In Pollay's opinion, in juggling with emotions, stereotypes and manipulation of ideas taken from real-life situations, advertising has reduced us to a state of "irrational consumer". The value, the benefits of a product, in Scott's understanding [Scott, 1904], may be suggested by the creator of the advertising message, by associating information strictly related to the human personality and the typology of the target audience behaviour, with product-specific objective elements, in a pictorial representation. In explaining human behaviour, Lewin [1951] used the concept of a psycho-social field. In his approach, the behavioural response is based on the mental processes of the individual and on its physical and social environment.

2. Description of the study area

With the most spectacular role among the classic product promotion types and means, advertising is the message paid for by the sponsor, the owner of the products/ services, through a brokerage relationship between its company and the potential consumer, in most cases through the mass media channels.

The basic function of advertising is to convince a certain segment of the public and ranges from the shaping or change of attitude in the target audience toward a product/ service or

idea, to creating the desire to take action. Ad creators focus on the consumer psychology, while the marketing personnel emphasize the economic coordinate of the market on which the offer is being launched.

2.1. Opinions pros and cons publicity

In our times, people begin to take an interest in a multitude of diverse information, a natural phenomenon, generated by the range of accumulated knowledge and experience over time. In the case of accumulated experience, success begins to wane. Pro and con theories of advertising efficiency (see Table 2, *Opinions pros and cons publicity*) triggered the need for methods to measure their effects; the effects are influenced by many factors including: the kind of message, the age of the market, any rival advertising, the degree of investment.

Table 2: *Opinions pros and cons publicity*

<i>Opinions cons publicity</i>	<i>Opinions pros publicity</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>a manipulative force, that determines customers to perform illogical, senseless acts (Vance Packard);</i> ▪ <i>consumers pay to be persuaded of the need for the product being advertised.</i> ▪ <i>“a formidable form of brutalisation, treating man as the most obtuse of all animals” (Georges Duhamel);</i> ▪ <i>“an insult to our sensed, falsifies epithets, it corrupts all qualities and criticisms” (Paul Valery);</i> ▪ <i>advertising tries to adapt its language to the majority, in order to be better perceived, understood, which makes it, according to some critics, become vulgar;</i> ▪ <i>advertising speeds up product obsolescence, artificially enhances certain production behaviours and provides false economic dimensions;</i> ▪ <i>advertising creates frustration and resentment to the targets who cannot afford to procure the advertised product, thus fuelling social conflicts;</i> ▪ <i>advertising creates fake needs and causes confusion in taking on roles in society;</i> ▪ <i>advertising cultivates euphoria, hedonism. narcissism and individualism;</i> ▪ <i>advertising disturbs the individuals’ relating to their environment, offering an illusive world.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>the purpose of advertising is to create and fuel the wish to be embraced by the community and be as sexually attractive as possible (John K. Galbraith);</i> ✓ <i>the vulgarisation of advertising is described as natural and even rewarded (John Fiske);</i> ✓ <i>“the flower of contemporary life is an assertion of optimism” (Blaise Cendrars);</i> ✓ <i>advertising is an economic process that supports the “flow” of product/service production to the consumers and draws attention to service quality;</i> ✓ <i>advertising presents new ways of life, enabling the diversity of life in the community, thus increasing the integrity of the consumers;</i> ✓ <i>advertising may generate optimism and self trust in the consumers, thus reinforcing the sense of being.</i>

Source: own elaboration

Although there is no perfect method of measuring the effects of advertising, and the lack of standardisation makes it difficult to apply and interpret the results, the specialists refer to at least five evaluation methods, as follows: evaluation of notoriety, campaign balance, the impact of calculated variables, exposure calculation and the barometer.

The advertisement components, such as the title, the text, the slogan, the logo and the illustration determine its classification into one of three types of ads: transformational, purely informative and frequently repeated; these types of ads require a correct adjustment of the promotion strategies, based on the objective of the advertising message corroborated with the product lifecycle, the advertising budget, customers’ preferences, so that some specialist authors refer to the early “Pavlov advertising” age, the “standards” age or the “fiction-based advertising” age.

However, in the field of marketing and advertising, he is still a prisoner of preconceived ideas and stereotypes and perceptibly limits human discretion and capacity to correctly assess other human beings, which may deprive the marketers of the possibility of objectively assessing individuals as consumers, thus leading to erroneous conclusions, at the expense of perception of the specific target groups and of the business as a whole, Marder says [2002].

2.2. Effective Advertising

In an objective note, it is obvious that in this whole context, traditional research methods, may not fulfil their mission to really find out what consumers think. All the more so as our irrational mind – assaulted by cultural, educational prejudice, deeply rooted in the tradition we subscribe to by our spatial belonging, the community, the society, the group we belong to, in tandem with a number of other subconscious factors - exercises a strong, but imperceptible influence on our decisions related to acquisition and consumption.

Moreover, marketing and advertising researchers have observed, for decades, the restrictions imposed by the old market research methods, with analysis focusing on finding answers in the post-rational stage. It was only in recent years that science facilitated an efficient device that can help “decode” the customers’ thoughts considering that human thoughts and emotions are the result of this subconscious human activity and the actions it triggers cannot be explained in a conscientious context, which is why most of the market research cannot reveal the true preferences of the targeted subjects.

A new area of study suggests that the consumer’s response to advertising is based on his cognitive efficiency rather than on marketing manipulation. Results show why direct exposure to repeated ads increases consumer preference for the advertised products and, more importantly, for the advertising messages where the consumers are the least aware of repetitiveness (of having seen it before). *Watch out for your brain, watch out for your wallet!*, said Ian Cook, a psychiatry professor with *Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA*, following the discovery of areas of the brain involved in the emotional and decision making process; including Cingular orbital-frontal areas and, previously, the amygdalis and the hippocampus – the area in charge of memory he noticed significant levels of intense activity, whenever the participants in the experiment were watching *logical persuasion ads*.

Joseph LeDoux, one of the well-known neurologists world-wide, conducted extensive research on how emotions affect our brain, memory and decision making. He noticed an emotional and physical response, before engendering a first thought/ rational action, such as the situation where we avoid collision with a bus by taking a step backward, and only seconds later realise why. Furthermore, LeDoux discovered that emotions, especially fear, release chemicals that help induce the building of synapses; the amygdalis – the emotional core of the brain, is responsible for the release of such substances that cause the building of new synaptic links.

In this context, emotions, an important part of the decision-making process in the customer, accounting for about 50% of the decision, determines the emotional experience that may generate a total positive experience in the customer. This explains why anthropomorphism, the endowing of human features to inanimate objects, is a procedure used in advertising, and branding experts know how important it is, this being one of the

secrets of presenting anthropomorphism in children products, where “cuteness” induces a feeling of pleasure and the desire to acquire various items such as cereals, juices, toys, etc.

2.3. Ethics and spirituality in publicity

The Christian doctrine about body, mind and human in general is different from metaphysical theories. Since the beginning of times, the Christian thinking, supported by the revelation, has recognized a certain spirituality of the soul, whilst carefully avoiding to be confused with the heavenly spirituality. Nevertheless, sometimes the Church fathers have had difficulties to clearly and distinctly express the difference between the soul and the divine, difficulties due to philosophical principles which influenced the Christian thinking, and also to the errors of the biblical Exegesis. The Bible explicitly makes the distinction between the soul and the body, whilst arguing just as explicitly their inseparable unity. *Feed your body, without killing it through greed! (Saint John Goldmouth)*

Making its presence more and more felt in the modern organization of life, the advertising, by means of the media, proves to be in the contemporary world a significant force of persuading vigor, which has influence on mentality and behavior. The Church was often in charge of mass-media, their role and responsibilities, considering these tools as *gifts of God* which can unify the people; the reason why the consumer behavior within the advertising messages is studied also through the prism of spirituality is a simple one: within the current society the advertising deeply influences the way people see life, the world and themselves, in particular as regards the values and criteria of judgment and behavior. These are concepts that should raise an honest and profound interest from the part the Church.

The supporters of spirituality do not share the opinion of those who said that the advertising simply reflects the attitudes and cultural values of the world in which we live. No doubt the advertising, as well as the social communication tools in general, acts as a mirror. Nevertheless, similar to the general media, it also contributes to shaping a reality which sometimes reflects and distorts the real image. At the opposite pole, the specialists in advertising choose between the values and attitudes which should be promoted and encouraged, by promoting some of them and ignoring the others. Such a selection shows how false is the idea that the advertising reflects the culture of the world in which we live. The publicity may contribute, in fact, to the increase of the quality of society through a meaningful and inspiring action, that stimulates people to act in such a way that their actions are for their benefit and that of the others. Advertising may cheer through simple humor, good taste and the type of entertainment which is its main trait. Some of the publicity works represent masterpieces of popular art, having a life force and an enthusiasm which are only their own.

In many cases, social welfare institutions, including those of a religious nature, use advertising to communicate their messages: those of faith, patriotism, tolerance, compassion and altruism, charity towards the needy; messages that relate to health and education, constructive and useful ads, which in various ways, educate and motivate people. Advertising can be of good taste and compliant to the highest moral principles; sometimes even morally uplifting; but they can also be vulgar and morally degrading. They often deliberately appeal to motivations such as envy, status seeking and lust. Moreover, nowadays, some advertisers consciously seek to shock and titillate people by exploiting such morbid, perverse or pornographic issues. Creators of commercial advertising sometimes include religious themes or use religious images or personages to sell their

products. This is something that can be done in a respectful and acceptable way, but the practice is offensive when turning religion into a tool. However, as the rule, the issue of truth in advertising is a little more subtle: it is not that what advertising says is obviously a falsehood, only that it can distort the truth by implying or withholding relevant facts.

As Pope John Paul II noted, truth and freedom, both at the individual and social levels, are inseparable; without truth as the foundation, as the starting point and criteria of acumen, judgment, choice and action, there can be no authentic exercise of freedom. But there is a fundamental principle that the advertising may not deliberately seek to deceive, whether it does so explicitly or implicitly, whether it is done by omission. *The proper exercise of the right to information demands that the statement is true and complete, taking into account the rightfulness and charity. This includes the obligation to prevent, in any circumstance, any manipulation of the truth.* [Pope John Paul II , 1987]

3. Recommendations and conclusions

A first a fortiori conclusion of the study is that the effective advertising is emotional, then it is absolutely *imperative to respect the human person, its right and obligation to make the responsible choice, its inner freedom.* [Paul VI , 1977]

The essential guarantees of ethically correct behavior in the advertising industry are primarily well-formed and responsible consciousness of professional advertisers who know that they should not put themselves exclusively in the service of those who order and finance their work and that they should respect and uphold the rights and interests of their audience and contribute to the common good.

Voluntary codes of ethics, among the external sources of support, however, prove to be effective only where by the willingness of the advertisers offers the possibility to comply strictly with them. It is for the underlying advertisers, advertising operators, and directors and managers to promote, pursue, implement the already properly set ethics codes, so that they can get public involvement.

Representatives of the population should participate in stating, implementing and periodic reviewing of professional ethics codes in the advertising field. These representatives should include people who are concerned with the study of ethics and also preachers, as well as representatives of consumers' organizations. Individuals should organize themselves into groups of such associations, in order to guarantee their interests against the commercial interests.

The regulation of the advertising content and practice, already existing in many countries, can and must be extended beyond the mere prohibition of false advertising, in the strictest of sense the social means of communication used shall not cause material injury to public morality, or to the progress of human society.

Media should be involved in informing the public on the world of advertising. Given the great social impact of the publicity, it is appropriate for the mass-media to regularly monitor and analyze the activities of advertising specialists.

Whilst attempting to reveal the deepest secrets of the human consumption behavior, I have considered the advertising creation in a strategic manner, slightly unusual, by setting a "dialogue" between an imaginary consumer, as an active participant, through his own mind, with the advertising, whose advertising messages can sometimes convince us to let them "seduced" and even "manipulate" us. If this is only a false impression of the

consumer, as a result of the behavior of the human's persuasion skills of marketing, a simple myth, it means that the reality lies in our mind power, those somatic markers, those " human brain bookmarks", which may influence the reasons for which we acquire and consume a product to the disadvantage another. [Lindstrom, 2011]

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