ROMANIAN ADVERTISING IN THE INTER-WAR AND COMMUNIST PERIOD

Doctoral Candidate:
Pop (Dan-Pop) Mădălina-Ruxandra
„Lucian Blaga" Sibiu University

Abstract: *This paper carries out research about the first advertisements that appears in Romania. For most Romanian historians, the interwar period was by far the best period in the whole Romanian history. The range of advertised products included drugs, devices, cosmetics, cars, cigarettes, famous stores etc. (Vlad, 2015:8). An important space was reserved for promoting medicine as 'the most advertised products', these products "reflecting knowledge, fears and habits of the population between the wars" (as qtd. in Vlad, 2015:12). 'Miracle' drugs prevailed, advertising through written and visual presentations wondrous cures for headaches, tooth pain, impotence, fertility, including contraceptives, condoms, and all sorts of treatments for venereal diseases, etc. Other products advertised included varied offers of skin cream, such as the Nivea cream, most cosmetic products being 75% targeted for women. Male products were also advertised, with a registered predominance of 80% for razor blades. Ample advertising space was allotted to cars and luxury goods, as well as to the famous clothing stores of the interwar period such as Gallia and the Lafayette Galleries. The interwar advertising welled up naturally with the economic growth and the relative political stability of the Romanian society. It was soon to change following the enforcement of the communist regime in Romania and its ensuing nationalization, which brought about major changes in the promoting practice of products and services.*

Communism was one of the most powerful social philosophies of the past century. In Eastern-European countries, it established a different type of globalization based on similar lifestyles and political systems (Petre & Nicola, 2009; Moraru, 2015; Sigmirean, 2015). Based on the same regulations and factory-like, the economy became increasingly estranged from the capitalist world that meant at the time freedom of choice, variety, autonomy, media diversity and business growth.

Keywords: Romanian advertising; Inter-War, Communism, advertisements

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The first advertisements appeared in Romania in a local paper *Curierul românesc*/*The Romanian Courier* in 1829. The newspaper advertised a book entitled *The Philosophy of Words and Vices* that was published in Pest and which was written in the Romanian language. After 1840, text advertisements became more common in the Romanian periodicals of the time and starting 1886 ads included images as well. It was not until 1906 that more attractive company-specific advertisements began to appear[434].

For most Romanian historians, the interwar period was by far the best period in the whole Romanian history. The term Greater Romania (*România Mare*) refers to the borders of the Kingdom of Romania in the interwar period as well as to the pan-nationalist idea, the main goal of which being that of re-creating a nation-state, inclusive of Transylvania, Bucovina and Basarabia (1918 -1940).

"From a country that numbered only 7 million inhabitants in 1912, Romania reached 18 million inhabitants in 1930" (Constantiniu, 2010:4) and was characterized by a strong economic stability and growth that were nevertheless reflected in the development of advertising as well.

Much of the period is documented, advertising-wise, by a number of serious studies[435], however for the purposes of my study and with reference to the specificity of the Romanian interwar advertising, two studies will be mentioned: Corneliu Cezar Sigmirean's study entitled: "*Din interbelic la regimul comunist: publicitatea în presa românească/ From the Interwar Period to the Communist Regime: Advertising in the Romanian Press* "[436] and Fănel Teodoraşcu's article "*The Shortcomings of the Interwar Romanian Advertising*"[437].

1. Publicity and Advertising

According to Sigmirean (2017:30), particularly relevant for the interwar period was *The Universe* newspaper that had the largest circulation of all newspapers. In the 1930's it circulated in well over 100,000 copies, being the most widely read newspaper in Romania, due its very low price, political neutrality and the introduction of sections of interest, such as *Fact* or *Miscellaneous Small ads* (advertisements). Each issue abounded in advertisements: some small size, others larger spaced, yet all richly illustrated with key words on the basis of which the readers could clearly identify their message. The range of advertised products included drugs, devices, cosmetics, cars, cigarettes, famous stores etc. (Vlad, 2015:8). An important space was reserved for promoting medicine as 'the most advertised

[434] Based on information available at: http://old.rri.ro/arh-art.shtml?lang=1&sec=170&art=32468
[435] Briggs, Asa and Peter Burke, *Massmedia.O istorie socială de la Gutenberg la Internet*, Iasi, Editura Polirom, 2005; Nicola, Mihaela and Dan Petre, *Publicitate şi reclamă,* Bucureşti, 2001; Petcu, Marian, *Istoria jurnalismului şi a publicităţii în România*, Iaşi, Editura Polirom,2007; Petre, Dan et al.„Valori şi stiluri de viaţă ale tinerilor din România. Also, the results of the "Leo Youth" Study in *Revista română de comunicare şi relaţii publice*, vol.11, nr.1 (15), 2009,pp 161-173 and Dan Vlad, Mihaela „Reclamele din presa interbelică: oglindă a păturii bogate a societăţii", în *Historia.ro,* 12 februarie 2015, p.7/10.
[436] Sigmirean, Corneliu Cezar,"Din interbelic la regimul comunist: publicitatea în presa românească". Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. *Historia* 1:29-39.
[437] Teodoraşcu, Fanel, The Shortcomings of the Interwar Romanian Advertising, Acta Universitatis Danubius Communicatio (AUDC), Vol. 9, nr 2/2015, pp. 49-56.

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products', these products "reflecting knowledge, fears and habits of the population between the wars" (as qtd. in Vlad, 2015:12). 'Miracle' drugs prevailed, advertising through written and visual presentations wondrous cures for headaches, tooth pain, impotence, fertility, including contraceptives, condoms, and alls sorts of treatments for venereal diseases, etc.





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Power grid development in this period brought to the buyers' attention a wide range of 'cold storage' and 'cooling' devices. In such a diversified advertising area, an important place was held by tobacco, hence cigarettes ads were not missing in the picture. During the interwar period, tobacco was not yet considered harmful, quite the reverse, it was clearly pointed out in the ads that tobacco had a beneficial effect on one's health, increasing the individual's power of concentration and capacity for stress fighting. As a result, during the interwar period, 120 cigarettes brands were promoted, such as: *Virginia* and *Doina* for women, *Sport* for sportsmen and the luxury brands *Carol I* and *Sinaia*[438].



[438] Source of pictures: https://www.paginademedia.ro/2012/03/tigari-si-alte-fumuri-din-perioada-interbelica

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Analyzing the target audience of the *Universe* newspaper, Vlad (2015:8) holds that the price and utility of the products promoted by the newspaper point to a small, average-income readership, typical of interwar Romanian population, quoting in this respect, a university professor with a salary range between 25,000 and phone 27,000 lei per month who could easily buy a car in those years. He also considers that interwar advertising could well operate as a CT-scan of the cultural microcosm, representing an important vehicle through which one can investigate how the interwar Romanian society was built at a symbolic level and otherwise.

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1.1. Advertising manuals

Another interesting advertising feature concerned the appearance, in the central or local publications, of several advertisings "manuals" in which several authorities argued how the Romanian advertising and publicity was to be achieved.

Sigmirean (2015:51-53) for example quotes the *Revista economică*/*Economic Review* (1930), that published a large study on how to effectively and more clearly one was to advertise products and services. In it, one particular article, entitled "*Comerciantul şi publicitatea/The Trader and Publicity*" argues that a good many Romanian advertisements were written in 'a breath of inspiration' by people with no formal or informal advertising training, arguing that, playing a much more significant role than many people would be tempted to consider at a first glance, advertising represents both the art of selling a product and that of knowing what to offer. The advertising print categories listed in the article included*: printed, illustrated and illuminated posters, catalogues, newspaper advertisements, brochures and samples* and several samples of ads were provided. The same article discusses the history of the *inserts (advertisements)* in the newspapers which appeared long after the press as well as the appearance of *private inserts* that was determined by the public need for (more) information on services or products (booksellers and printers).

Virgil Molin's article entitled "*Tiparul şi reclama/Printing and advertising*"[439] was published as early as 1929 in *Almanahul graficei române/Romanian Graphics Almanac*. His article was prescriptive on "the artistic and technical resources necessary to prepare an insert" as well as on the appropriate placement of inserts (which are not to be placed in the wrong body of the advertising, as it contrast with the very creative nature of the designed ad, and, in so doing, it will likely attain none of its initially intended effect). Molin's article's significance resides mostly in the classification of newspapers that he made. According to their readership and political orientation, the Romanian interwar newspapers could fall into one of the following categories:

Daily press These are mainly politically independent newspapers but they may also include newspapers with a certain mild political orientation. Owing to their wide circulation, these newspapers were inclusive of all sorts of advertising, particularly of small advertisements. The space allotted for advertisements in newspapers was nonetheless expensive compared to other publication types.

Weekly publications Whether politically assumed or independently run, the weekly publications of the time included local and provincial newspapers deemed to be suitable for local columnists and wider readership.

Periodicals were targeted for a particular circle of readers and they included: *Viaţa literară*/*Literary Life*, *Revista muzicii/Music Magazine*, *Universul Literar*/*Literary Universe*, *Revista*

[439] Molin, Virgil (1929). Tiparul şi reclama (Inserţia)/Printing and the advertisement (Insertion). *Almanahul graficei române 1929/The Almanac of the Romanian graphics – 1929.* Craiova: Editura Grafica Română, Tiparul Scrisul Românesc.

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teologică/*Theological Review*, *Învăţătorul român*/*The Romanian Teacher*, *Informatorul tehnic*/*Technical Informant*, *Adevărul literar/Literary Truth,* etc. The ads were usually inserted by publishers, bookstores, decorative art specialists, perfumes, cosmetics factories, and/or makers of musical instruments, etc. Inserts were most often than not found in such print categories as books and pamphlets, address directories, calendars and almanacs, theater programs, lists of food, files and packaging, catalogues and books of general interest. Likewise, a great deal of publications dedicated ample room to texts presenting effective ways for using commercial advertisement in Romania. In *Almanah tipografic*/*The Printing Almanac*, G. Filip holds that "*undeniably, the soul of industry and commerce today is advertising. No manufacturing commercial or industrial company can stand any success of its own without advertising*" (Filip, 1897:100). Three years later, in an article published in *Noua Revista Română pentru Politică, Literatură, Ştiinţă şi Artă /The New Romanian Review for Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, Sextil Puşcariu (1900) praises the high quality poster that one could see in the Western cities. Several of them, he claims, could be considered true works of art (328-329). Along the same lines, three decades later, Virgil Molin maintains in an article entitled: "*Afişul artistic/The artistic poster*" published in *Almanahul graficei române*/ *The Almanac of the Romanian graphics*, that the way in which an advertisement is made is largely determined by the level of the cultural development of the society.

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2. ROMANIAN ADVERTISING IN THE COMMUNIST PERIOD

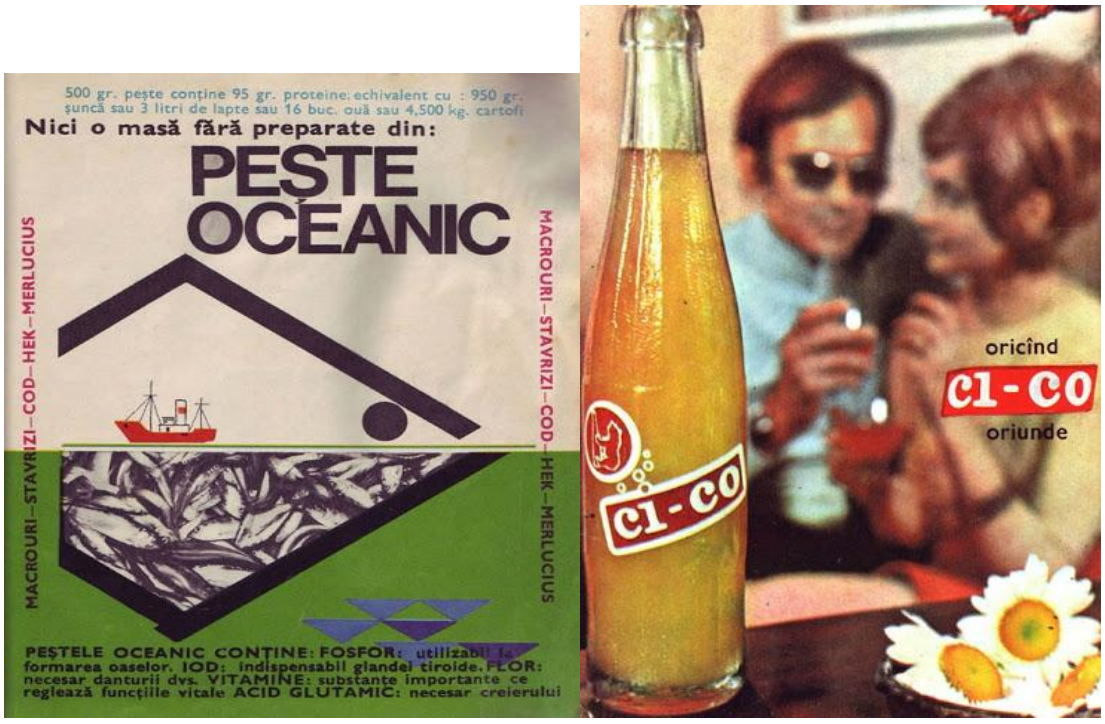
The most flourishing interwar period is considered by many historians as the *Golden Age* of Romanian culture (Petcu, 2002; Petre & Nicola, 2009; Moraru, 2015). The massive urban and economic development, the phenomenon of modernity as well as the expansion of the literacy borders all contributed to the writing of a glorious page in the history of interwar advertising. Such an historical account of advertising is to be traced and recaptured vividly from the pages of the *Universe* newspaper, the most widely circulated newspaper, which illustrates the entire Romanian interwar atmosphere from a cultural, social and economic standpoint.

2.1. Communist "Seasons in the sun" and propaganda

Since advertising had emerged as a phenomenon of economic competition and was to reach its peak during the most flourishing inter-war period, in contrast to this world, the history of advertising was to be written in red ink during the communist period (Sigmirean, 2015). With the economy becoming fully

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owned by the state, communism eliminated competition and factories were no longer in a healthy competitive environment for conquering the economic markets, as they were only "competing" against each other in the so-called "robust" building of the socialist economy. For the Romanian population, alternatives were reduced to a small and largely standardized range of products[440], which, ruling out the concept of advertising, led to the enforcement of the communist propaganda.



The rationalization of goods consumption in the 80s, when Ceauşescu endeavoured, to the detriment of his own people, to pay Romania's foreign debt, led to "the disappearance of the art of advertising" (Sigmirean, 2015:5) and was soon to be replaced by strong ad-embedded travel advice to the Romanians to spend their free time and holidays in various bathing resorts or tourist stops.

[440] Pictures were taken from the following sources: http://only-romania.com/2012/02/communist-ads/; http://a1.ro/news/inedit/imagini-de-colecie-litoralul-romanesc-acum-30-de-ani-cum-arata-distracia-pe-vremea-comunismului-id483457.html

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During those years, Romanian resorts were not very looked-after by foreigners hence a huge number of accommodation facilities were left available to the Romanian population and were heavily advertised and aggressively promoted on the internal tourist market.



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Sensing that the chances of competing with the Western society had been lost, propaganda, in the devious form of communist counter-advertising was minimizing even the least resilient capitalist values and progressively contributed not only to the inevitable isolation of the Romanian people behind the *Iron Curtain* but also to the loss of their critical thinking and freedom of expression.

Communism was one of the most powerful social philosophies of the past century. In Eastern-European countries, it established a different type of globalization based on similar lifestyles and political systems (Petre & Nicola, 2009; Moraru, 2015; Sigmirean, 2015). Based on the same regulations and factory-like, the economy became increasingly estranged from the capitalist world that meant at the time freedom of choice, variety, autonomy, media diversity and business growth. All the ties with the previous "liberal" interwar methods of advertising got disconnected and while only a small fraction of products was allowed to be advertised in the magazines or newspapers, a false, exaggerated patriotism was encouraged so as to minimize the size of imposed restrictions and isolation enforced on the Romanian population. This led shortly to poor business communication with foreign manufacturers, advertising agencies and international relations (Petre & Nicola, 2009: 36)

Online sources:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt9NBtW4sbA.

http://www.romaniisuntdestepti.ro/.

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