Stereotypes in Advertising

Ionela Mihaela GAFENCU-BÂNDIUL
Université de Suceava

Abstract: The advertising speech favours critical spirit (examines the knowledge contents), reinforces individualism (acquirement of personal knowledge) and at the same time develops the analytical capacity (message decoding) and syntheses of imagination (recomposition of the world). By analyzing the text and image, I decoded which are the stereotypes that advertising uses to reach the consumer's souls.

Key-words: advertising speech, stereotypes, social psychology, iconotext.

1. Preliminary

Stereotypes represent a set of shared beliefs and values based on personal characteristics, personality traits and behavior, specific to a group of people.

We can not talk about social psychology without speaking of stereotypes. We remind that the term "stereotype", taken from printing language, was first introduced in the field of psychosocial by Lippmann, in 1922, which considers them "images from the mind", essential for filtering the so complex objective reality. Today, te majority of researchers from the field of psychology agree with the definition of Leyens according to which stereotypes represent implicit theories of personality, common to all

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)

members of a group and that refers to all members of another group and to their own group.

In relation to personality traits, stereotypes evokes very well associated elements, visual and distinctive, thus facilitating the cognitive activity. But, at the same time, the oriented interpretation of informations from the environment reinforces the stereotypes. This probability of sterotypes to perpetuate is because they provide the premises on which we base our behavior. But not only our behaviour, but also the way we express tends to perpetuate stereotypes between groups.

The language we use to describe what we observe – the speech – may differ from the more abstract concept to most concret concept. The speech, therefore, can be also applied to the image, because that becomes writing from the moment it is significant, claiming also, like written language, a vocabulary or lexicon.

Therefore, stereotypes can be perpetuated not only orally, but also through writings or representations: written speech and photography, the film, reportage, sports, concerts, publicity, all may become support of stereotyped utterance.

Of course, the picture is more imperative than writing, imposing the meaning at once, without a prior analysis, without spreading.

The imaginary is the immaterial cover of the images that surround us, could disrupt our relationship with the real world, interposing itsfel between us and it, like a filter screen. This filter may deform, but may also contribute to a better interception, guiding, orientation or better focus. The imaginary-symbolic thinking is not therefore the exclusive appanage of childhood, of the child, of the poet or of the mentally unbalanced, it's inherent in human beings, preceding the language and discursive thought. The image realises the link between us and the world, allowing us not only a simple adjustment to reality, but even more, the entry into resonance and harmonization with it. Stereotypes play a fundamental role in our daily lives, determining, implicitly or explicitly, our behaviors, more or less noticeable. Starting from this

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)

assumption, researchers in the field of social psychology and especially of communication tried to describe communication patterns, as persuasive to effectively "enroll" the consumer. This can only be possible through manipulation of existing stereotypes, creation of new stereotypes or deconstruction of existing ones.

2. The stereotype in Marlboro iconotext

To demonstrate the importance of handling stereotypes in determining consumer behavior, we examine how Marlboro has built a world famous reputation, through advertising campaigns that have consistently aimed at either building or deconstruction of stereotypes.



Marlboro commercials resort to the use of individuals as typical to the created stereotype (all are male, middle aged, handsome, strong etc.), for a quicker processing, and therefore unaware of information congruent with existing stereotype. Stereotypes are kept intact by suficiently strong arguments (freedom, harmony with nature) and always presented in a new, equally or more exciting form. The strongest – albeit after some the most blasted – symbolic picture of the century, "Marlboro man" appears everywhere as the last American cowboy and as masculine trademark, contributing to the situation of Marlboro cigarettes on

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)

the first place for sales in the world. Even those working on the other side of the fence, those involved in social policies for health, recognize that this image of the "Marlboro man", has an unprecedented success, standing at the base of the huge sales of Philip Morris company.

At the beginning, in the '50s, when cigarettes were accepted even in the most refined society, Leo Burnett, the new director of Marlboro's advertising campaign, conceived the image of "macho man" (handsome man) as a way to restore market position of Marlboro cigarettes, from cigarettes "mild as May", to an appealing product which attracts, tempts and persuade as many. Gradually, a new stereotype will be built: Marlboro cigarettes are frequently associated with a middle-aged man, brave, handsome, bursting with health and joy, but mostly, free and mastering a land and nature with which it falls in perfect harmony – the old lost paradise.

The new campaign promoted by Brunett, which bear the slogan "delivers the goods on flavor", made sales explode. Through the brilliantly built campaign, the strong image of the mythical American hero and successful market response to the Marlboro team challenges have created, juggling the stereotypes, an universal image and immediately recognized, representing an idealized American lifestyle and exciting that deconstructs the essence of the only product from the market, except for weapons, which kill and make sick when used as intended to be used.

The phenomenon is amazing. Marlboro, in fact a completely unknown brand until 1955, has steadily increased sales in the last 45 years. Aesthetics, freshness, health and the naturalness of the attitude degaged by advertisings for these cigarettes, has succes to anybody – smoker, nonsmoker, male, female, old or child. Thus, the image of Marlboro has grown in popularity and has put it's imprint in an irrational emotional attraction. Despite the bizzare, the crude cowboy, with or without westerian land or red box, immediately remembers about the Marlboro company and became a symbol for many generations, maintaining Marlboro in the top sales. The advertising shows three characters in a dinamic and

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)

natural framing. It is about a young man and two horses, moving in the territorial "expansion". The horse from the left of the poster is a young foal, and the opposite one, is a mature one, already bearing the signs of domestication, of taming – reins.

a) The support

The support for the advertising is glossy paper, vellum, large format, a single page and sends to the action of promoting commercial movies that we are accustomed to find in large urban centers. The announcement size, layout, font type used, indicate that the visual message is an advertisement. There is a kind of respect for advertising tradition that requires the advertising to be what it is.

b) The framework

The picture is not surrounded by a frame but seems cut, interrupted by the page margins: if we don't see more of the photo is because the page is too small. This process to make the framing confound with media image has some specific consequences on the viewer's imagination. Indeed, this cuting put more on the behalf of the support than on the layout, is causing the spectator to imaginary construct that which does not appear in the visual field of the representation, but which however completes it: the space outside the field.

c) The framing

The framing must not be confused with the framework. The framing is the limit of visual representation, the framing corresponds to the image size, presumably a result of the distance between the subject and camera lens.

In the framework of the advertising the framing is horizontal, very closely, giving the impression of great closeness, intimacy.

d) Photographic angle and lens choice

Their choice is critical, because it is the one that reinforces or contradicts the impression of reality related to the photographic medium. The look angle is from the front, at characters level, a procedure which enables the transposition of the viewer into the world of characters using the illusion of suppressing the distance.

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)

Being a sequential advertising, the chosen lens clearly shows only the image of the three characters, while leaving the background, very poorly differentiated, reducing its function to a simple coloured decorator. You can still see glimpses of the natural environment, in which the three characters are caught.

e) Image composition, layout

The look falls on the top left corner of the image, on the left horse's head (the top portion – the ears), is then translated on the right up to the face of the human character and then to climb to the advertising slogan: "Come to the Marlboro Where the flavor is". The product naming substitutes the region name. The acting picture is dominated by the human character which is the only vertical entity in the image. Surprises, in fact, the comic action of the foal which is looking, under the surprised glance but full of energy of the master, the absolute freedom.

f) Shapes

The three characters are in deep harmony with the environment, both in terms of color and ambient. The fact that the background is faint, thus having soft contours, poorly defined, makes us think at a welcoming nature, edenic, a nature of all possibilities. The only sharp things in this picture are the ears of the two horses, which make refference to their natural wildness, at the acuity of their senses, and the flexed elbow of the human character that denotes strenght and virility. They come to compensate and score the softness and roundness of all other lines from the photo.

g) Colors and brightness

The dialogue of colors used are structured, like that of shapes, on two levels: the plan of advertising subject and the plan of the background.

The colors are brown – yellow, predominantly is brown, natural color of dry tobacco. The territory sends for dreaming and imagination (through non-enclosing).

The colors of the human character clothes refer to the color structure of Marlboro land generally identified with the Grand Canyon.

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)

3. Symbolic analysis

At the above presented is added the interpretation of posts and also the decryption of symbols present in the image. The arrangement of characters against each other can be interpreted according to social usances (stereotypes), but also to the archetypal patterns that have been imposed over the centuries, transcending any culture (myths). In this case, the imaginary could be compared with a two-sided surface, one pointing to the psychological life, the other oriented to cosmic life. In this way, our images would be images of the world, which explains why they have the ability to establish a certain sympathy between man and things.

Proceeding with the analysis, we find that the symbols, through their meanings hidded to our conscience, but accesible to the subconsciuosness, are those that give power to stereotypes, ensuring their sustainability.

The human character is typical for Marlboro ads, young, or rather, middle-aged, strong, capable to domesticate not only the horse, but also the nature. Thus, in this picture, the Marlboro man, the only vertical entity in the image, controls the time. *The past – the big horse –*, positioned in the left of the picture, is dominated by the owner of Marlboro package through reins – volunteer coercive model and ropes – rewarding model, working on the emotional register. The future is represented by the young horse that seems to be hard to catch. We are thus shown how the Marlboro man, lord of heaven, earth and all living things, controls the time thanks to the new product. Marlboro cigarettes, through their smoke and aroma make the transition from the real world, fallen, where the time heavily presses, cuts and crushes, to a primordial world, almost sacred, where the master is just Adam, in the edenic world full of divine love in which Eve with Pandora's box was not invented yet.

The advertisings have an international dimension given by the "fantastic instruments" put into the service of multiculturalism, *the Internet and World Wide Web.* Perhaps our national

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)

shell tends to a universal dimension in which the context and the own world of the receiver prevail over internal semantics of the message and over the transmitter intention.

Simply "manufactured" by the advertising, the XXI-st century man is a kind of being that perfectly harmonized with "American way of life" life made him a curious creature, which is constantly looking for new. "Drunk" with electronic speed, this very special kind of citizen is seeking the removal of reality from the representation by replacing the hard with the soft.

The Romanian advertising assimilates concepts from universal media that have to be retreated to our national specific even if "Cow-boys eager to drive their herds anywhere the grass grows undergo large territories, despising enclosures beyond which gardeners maintain their own cultures with great effort"[1].

Bibliography

BOUGNOUX, Daniel, *Introducere în stiintele comunicarii*, Polirom, Bucuresti, 2000.

CORJAN, I. C., *"Semiotica iconotextului publicitar"*, în *Limbaje si comunicare*, nr. 4, 1999.

JOLY, M., *Introducere în analiza imaginii***,** Ed. All, Bucuresti, 1998.

PETCU, Marian, *Sociologia mass-media*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2002.

[1] Daniel Bougnoux, *Introducere în stiintele comunicarii*, Polirom, Iasi, 2000, p.137.

BDD-A17785 © 2011 Editura Universităţii din Suceava
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:15 UTC)