Available online at www.sserr.ro

Social Sciences and Education Research Review

(3) 2 48-54 (2016) ISSN 2392-9683

THE DIMENSION OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL BRAND OF COCA-COLA

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Abstract

Today, advertising is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating social phenomena, a fundamental factor influencing individuals, attitudes or lifestyles. It is an important element of contemporary culture, deeply anchored in our cultural heritage. In this framework encompasses our article, aiming to demonstrate influential aspects of the Coca-Cola advertising slogan as an instrument of culture and ideology, in a few words, a merciless mirror of our society.

Keywords: advertising, slogans, culture, language, communication

JEL classification: I10, H10, O52

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THE ADVERTISING REVOLUTION PRODUCED BY COCA COLA

Given the fact that the advertising messages are always acts of indirect communication which have, beyond a declarative, expressive and assertive level, a directive, implicit and persuasive character, through which the receiver/consumer is determined to buy, we believe that only through a pragmatic approach we can obtain framework conventions which are the basis of advertising signs. The diversity of the commercials can be dissuasive for a systematic research, a brand like Coca Cola, which we are going to talk about in the article, launches sometimes more ads in a single week, carried out differently but having the same message or philosophy. It is still fairly prevalent the idea that the "art of the creation departments of advertising agencies is rather intuitive", even though the research conducted in the recent decades, which have been done in particular by the sciences of communication with an interdisciplinary opening, have shown through the semiotic and pragmatic analyses that there are sets of principles on the basis on which the coding and decoding of the advertising messages take place.

Advertising, in general, has been since the first half of the twentieth century, the carrier of various ideological messages, a behavior shaper and the creator of new myths. Through its enormous impact in the capitalist societies, advertising sells “modes" and "models" of life.

To highlight the role the advertising plays in our representation and envisions about reality, we can use Sandu Frunza’s title, *Advertising constructs reality*.

There are advertising slogans that have turned into life mottos, and those launched by Coca-Cola, over time, are the most relevant in this regard. In fact, Coca-Cola slogans have become true globalization slogans. Coca-Cola is, according to a myth created and propagated on the Internet, the second most popular word in the world after "OK", information which can be checked through a search via Google, another word that is in the top.

From where does, however, such a success come? Primarily through advertising campaigns that kept incontestably transmitting the values of the "American dream”. Coca-Cola has also become a symbol of "integration into American imperialism", which also gave rise to side effects which did nothing else but increased its popularity.

Coca-Cola makes us facing a continuous advertising revolution of different modes of expression, giving rise since its first decades of existence (being created by John Pemberton in 1886) to the multicultural marketing as a means of integrating *the other* in the culture they represent, the American culture.

Its basic strategy is expressed precisely by the slogan "*think local, act global*", that announces the availability for recognizing the differences in mentality and culture

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between the countries that consume or will have consumed the drink. In the spirit of this philosophy, Donald Keough, President of Coca-Cola, said, when being interviewed, the following: "You know, actually, Coca-Cola does not really belong to us [company], it belongs to you, to anyone and everyone who have ever shared a moment with a Coke."

The statement is one of the primary values which represent the cultural meaning that the drink has got and keeps cultivating, because, in fact, Coca-Cola is, indeed, much more than the product itself, it is an industry, "an international resource", "a cultural, global act". Through creativity and ability to grip the realities and cultural trends of an epoch or of a cultural space, the Coca-Cola promoters have created the strongest brand and the most durable visual identity of a product, redefining at the same time, the advertising image. The ways in which it appeared as a symbiosis of tradition and innovation, the fact that it has adapted immediately to the evolution of television, to the evolution of all media or advertising means, including new media, and also that it was ahead the taste's mutations, made Coca Cola an iconic brand, a paradigmatic one that has entered into the modern man's conscience. It is considered to be the brand which is the most interested into the loyalty of its consumers in the history of trade, which underlies its international success.

In the specialized literature, the term "brand" is used to refer to both a special line of products marketed under a recognizable identity, to a large scale, after the logo and other symbolic marks that it uses, and to social image which the producing company tries to impose on itself and its products.

According to Nicoleta Corbu, "brand appears to be designed as an empty concept that fills in time with the repeated experiences of the contemporaries," which means that the brand subsumes what consumers do with the brand in their minds as a source of additional value and profit", being from this point of view, "a virtual good in the sense proposed by Pierre Lévy, as something that exists as a potentiality, without the tangibility of what is present, but without missing some".

Nowadays, this probably is best reflected by Coca-Cola, the branding which "creates identity, structures myths, because the brand is a myth performer and bearer of an identity myth". After a superficial analysis Coca-Cola appears to us as a plurality of paradoxes, of nuances and simulacra.

Specifically, from observing its evolution we find that:

- although the visual identity of the product has gone through very few changes during the 125 years and not in its determinant compartments (font name and color), nor philosophy, the brand syncs perfectly with the contemporary socio-cultural rhythms and with the new promotional techniques in the infinite space of the Internet through the proposed advertising scenarios;

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- although many commercials and advertising campaigns are created annually all over the world, its identity remains unaltered and consolidated;
- although it's a refreshing drink, by the creative association with the winter holidays and, at another level, with the most International holidays, Coca-Cola is consumed by the whole family throughout the year, which means that the idea of a target audience is basically annulled, being the perfect drink for everyone, all the time;
- the symbiosis of visual identity of the product and the philosophy detectable in its advertising slogans is perfect.

We find that the "brand image" and "personality" brand are basically in a constant change, but on a structure and philosophy that goes back more than a century, and the interpretation of the brand as a particular advertising sign must take into account this dynamic.

The series of commercials that are being proposed by large companies, despite the fact that they already had entered into the public and individual consciousness, have also the role to direct the infinite semiosis. This is why advertising has become so important in stores or supermarkets, by providing the traders with thermal shop windows, with the insignia of the brand product (in this case, Coca-Cola) or with special shelves in the case of different brands of cigarettes. Coca-Cola made an art from advertising itself in the (super) market and, moreover, established a true style in design and decorative art, synchronized with the trends and patterns in this area.

The pragmatic analysis of Coca-Cola advertising will have to take into account, therefore, the association of the brand with the Pop-Art, the power to visually or auditory dominate, with suggestions from the tactile area (ice cold becoming a real slogan printed on display cabinets and metal firms displayed on storefronts, fast food restaurants, cafes etc.) large public spaces and venues, including private spaces, becoming, as mentioned before, a phenomenon in terms of decorative and more than this, a design style. We should also remember of its participation in the "winter holidays' decoration", probably being the most imported brand which participates in the visual "representation" of our everyday reality.

The sociocultural implications of Coca-Cola made their presence felt in music also. The interaction between words and visual elements was accompanied by interaction with musical elements. In 1971 was launched one of the ads that gave the brand an international scope. The commercial consists of a music video in which young people from around the world, wearing symbols of nationalities they represented, were arranged in an equilateral triangle, the symbol of balance and harmony, on a hill and interpreted in chorus, the song "I'd like to buy the world a Coke." The clip has a clear pacifist, globalized message, and had such a successful melody that the New Seekers transformed it into a global hit called "I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing", which occupied the

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first places in the major music charts of the '70s for a long time. The commercial message, displayed in the form of lyrics that were running from the bottom to the top, was the following:

„On a hilltop in Italy/
We assembled young people/
From all over the world.../
To bring you message/
From Coca-Cola Bottlers/
All over the world./
It's the real thing./ COKE."

Last sentence became one of the most popular slogans of the company. This particular commercial gives us a very relevant example of a double message: the visual and conceptual elements are carriers of universal values - pacifism and equality between people, namely the ideal of communication, which is associated with the hearing ideal, the lyrics themselves talk about how Coca-Cola is an universal gift, a symbol of tolerance, of the union between people, of acceptance of the other and communion, global friendship.

Following this philosophy, Coca-Cola reached one of the most powerful symbols of freedom in countries emerged from totalitarian regimes such as those in Central and Eastern Europe, including the post-December Romania.

THE EFFECT OF PRIORITY AGENDA

The audible and visual brand presence in public spaces, namely commercial ones, has an immediate effect in changing the consumer's shopping agenda. Theorists have used the concept of highlighting, the process being well managed by the marketing departments of the Coca-Cola multinational and placed in a relationship of spectacular efficiency with the advertising campaigns, aimed at influencing the consumer's policy alternatives. An important role in this respect is played by slogans. One of the functions of a slogan is, therefore, that of highlighting and thus making the product it promotes a priority, Always Coca-Cola is probably the best example that can be found in this regard. The slogan appears in both TV and internet videos and is also printed on shelves or on bottle and carton product packaging. The "Always Coca-Cola" slogan is representative of the early '90s.

By advertising it in stores, the companies are trying to change the consumer's mental agenda "skipping all" - inducing the idea of taking them into account. Equally, the

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remembrance of the advertising from the store, and also our mental agenda of brands, can suggest us which alternatives are to be considered before we even ask ourselves what we want. Therefore, specialists in advertising are trying to influence the highlighting of the brand in the store, not only our mental agenda. They use posters in an attempt to suggest us their brand visualization.

When we go into a store or into a local to buy or to order a refreshing drink, we are already in a state of suggestion through category, facing an election with a specific number of options. In a very short time, without even being fully aware of the process, most often without being aware at all, there is a whole "debate" in our mind, possibly triggering all sorts of subconscious processes of will and desire. We become very responsive to stimuli in times when "we lust". The advertisement is therefore decisive and slogans like “Life has taste” or “Thirst for life” and visual "assault" which is so famous, create that state of Genuine ... and Always ... thorough which Coca-Cola wins so many times this "battle".

It is interesting that through this marketing, Coca-Cola won the competition with other "categories" of products by replacing them or, in a subtle way, by associating with them. It is the marketing of its premises dedicated to hot drinks. So, where Coca-Cola is not already in the mind of the consumer when entering a shop or in a Cafe & Bar, will be inserted automatically in the mind:

(a) the suggestion of the product’s category and

(b) its visual presence in the local store or through: posters, objects, proper exposure of the bottles etc.

Even when Coca-Cola is among consumer’s preferences memory, if there is a confrontation with a Pepsi poster, under any form, the individual may consider both brands, which is why advertising’s presence is crucial.

Advertising thus involves a domination of space and a "statement" of its presence in the places where it is sold, which is being made through controlling the multitude of alternatives that may be displayed and placed in the consumer's mind. Coca-Cola has invested more resources over time to highlight the category and make their presence felt continuously in reality to as many levels, but especially in everyday life. Slogans launched by the Coca-Cola advertising campaigns have a decisive role in highlighting the category, and one of their functions is to trigger the mnemonic mechanism that triggers the remembrance of the brand and one of the best examples in the history of advertising is offered in this regard, by the perennial and incomparable *Always Coca-Cola.*

Advertising today is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating social phenomena, a fundamental factor influencing individuals, their attitudes and ways of life. It is an important element of contemporary culture, deeply rooted in our cultural heritage.

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