A PRAGMASEMANTIC PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILISATION CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

The social responsibilisation campaigns, rather recent in the domain of Romanian advertising, are social campaigns undertaken by various companies in order to promote their image as good citizens, interested in the problems of contemporary society, willing to invest in it and able to find and put into practice solutions for the negative aspects the society is faced with. The basic criteria to be considered in classifying such campaigns are: the target-audience; the conveyed message truth; the nature of the guarantor-character; the purpose; the nature of the message sender.

The case study discussed in the paper is represented by a few ads, part of PETROM social responsibilisation campaign programme called "Respect pentru viitor"/'Respect for the future', including various projects regarding different topics, such as: pollution, traffic responsibility, rational exploitation of resources.

Key words: *advertising theories, deixis, speech act, the Cooperative Principle, the Principle of Politeness*

Résumé

Les campagnes de responsabilité sociale, relativement récentes, dans le domaine publicitaire roumain, sont des campagnes sociales entreprises par diverses compagnies pour promouvoir leur image de bons citoyens, disposés à investir dans ce domaine et capables de trouver des solutions aux aspects négatifs auxquels se confronte la société. Le critère de base dans la classification de ces campagnes sont: le public-cible, la vérité du message transmis, la nature du personnage garant, le but proposé; le type de l'émetteur du message.

L'étude de cas présenté dans cet article se réfère à toute une série de réclames, partie du programme de la campagne de responsabilisation sociale de la société PETROM intitulée «le respect pour l'avenir», qui inclut divers projets sur de thèmes variés: pollution, responsabilisation dans le trafic, l'exploitation raisonnable des ressources.

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Mots-clés: *théories dans la publicité, deixis, acte de parler, le principe coopératif, le principe de la politesse*

The social responsibilisation campaigns undertaken by various companies are social campaigns meant to promote their image as good citizens, interested in the problems of contemporary society, willing to invest in it and able to find and put into practice solutions for the negative aspects the society is faced with.

These campaigns are rather recent in the domain of Romanian advertising. They promote a positive attitude, manifest against a certain mentality, try to restore the moral dimension of the collective way of thinking.

They complement the marketing campaigns, which aim at promoting goods and services, and political campaigns, interested in promoting a political candidate or a political organisation. Nevertheless, there are some elements which distinguish them from the above-mentioned campaigns, giving them a specific profile.

Firstly, the *target-audience* should be mentioned. A marketing campaign clearly addresses a well definite, intended target audience, established according to the criteria of age, sex, education, cultural level, income, the urban or rural social background, etc. Thus, we distinguish the following categories: teenagers, business people, housewives etc. No matter how competitive a product or service might be and no matter how much a supplier might want to expand its target – audience, they still couldn't include the categories 'teenagers' and 'housewives'. All that they could achieve would be to extend their influence on groups of public not targeted yet, but belonging to the same segment: they would persuade more teenagers to use their product meant for teenagers.

A political campaign also addresses an invariable number of target audience segments: the supporters, the opponents and the undecided. The criterion of delimitation is represented by the ideological orientation of the individuals. The ideal of any candidate is to extend his/her influence on an ever larger number of voters, to change as many undecided people and, why not, opponents as possible into supporters. Unlike these forms of promotion,

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a social campaign addresses the whole society. Irrespective of our age, sex, cultural level, income or ideological orientation we should all react in a similar way to the negative aspects of our social life: domestic violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, environment pollution, poverty, the financial impossibility of benefiting from some necessary medical treatments, the drama of the refugees and many others.

Another perspective in differentiating the three types of advertising is offered by the analysis of the *conveyed message truth*. **At promotion stage**, a campaign for a product offers all the necessary information for the efficient positioning of the product/ service on the market, along with other similar ones. The message is presumed to observe the **Maxim of Quality** of the **Cooperative Principle**. Experts[1] have established that there are several **advertising theories** mainly focused on the correct, accurate conveying of information:

- Learning Theory
- Cognitive Dissonance Theory
- Minimal Involvement Theory

Another series of advertising theories, the so-called, theories of seduction', don't focus so much on the information proper as they do on brand fidelization. Such campaigns maintain the trust of the public in the product, in a certain brand, by suggesting that a state of wellness can be obtained only by using that product. These theories are:

- Childish Impulse Theory
- Assigned Learning Theory
- Promotion Theory

This means that **the maintainance** (**acknowledgement**) **stage** is also based on conveying an important amount of truth to the target public. The balance of forces changes within the last stage in the life of a product: **the decline**. The product becomes morally worn-out. That is why the the producer will associate the product under discussion to some additional advantage in order to make it attractive to the buyer: offering a bonus, a

[1] Claude Bonnange, Chantal Thomas, *Don Juan sau Pavlov*?, Bucureşti, Editura Trei, 1999.

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deduction, chances of lottery winning, etc. The truth of the message sent is under the shadow of this additional advantage. The ad maker will not be so much interested in outlining the intrinsic features of the product or its benefits as he is concerned with emphasizing the advantage which attracts the public. A political campaign is very sensitive to the intention of blurring the truth in order to obtain some personal advantages for a certain candidate[2]. The candidate acquires an image able 'to sell', to 'seduce' the voters. The image is based on simplicity, intimism, sincerity. The most severe piece of criticism regarding political advertising is that it changes people, i.e. citizens, into passive spectators of the political show, thus hidding the basic problems. The 'charming' election ads manage to substitute the truth of the message.

The only form of advertising which is not subject to any criticism regarding the truth of its content is the social campaign. It sends the information as such because there is no ulterior motive justifying its distortion.

Another distinction among the three forms of advertising is given by the *nature of the guarantor-character.*

By using **the strategy of authority,** a product campaign foregrounds:

- a VIP (singer, sportsman, TV producer);
- a professional (a dentist, a mechanic, grandmother – the guarantee of quality in cooking);
- an unknown beneficiary (part of the target group);
- the product itself;
- an element which links to the personality or universe of the target audience (for instance, to set women as target audience, the ad can use iconically objects specific to women: make-up, mirror, lipstick, etc).

This strategy implies the process of **authority transfer** in political marketing: a well known character in the Romanian political arena 'guarantees' for his/her younger colleague (we can exemplify with PDL

[2] Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Comunicarea simbolică. Arhitectura discursului publicitar*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1999.

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campaigns which used the image of Mrs. Mona Muscă to promote the candidate of that time – Adriean Videanu).

Within a social campaign, the guarantor-character is almost inevitably the victim of the social negative phenomenon evoked: the abused woman, the unhappy refugee, the beaten child left on the streets, the birds killed by environment pollution.

Classification

As we mentioned before, the social campaign is a relatively new presence within the Romanian advertising domain. If we follow attentively the social campaigns created so far, we can notice that many of them are sponsored by EU, which means that Europe is giving us a helping hand in solving our social problems.

Formally, all social campaigns have in common quasi-similar scenarios: outlining dramatic social problems: domestic violence, sexual abuse, racial discrimination, traffic accidents, war negative effects, starvation, poverty, refugee problems, etc. Textual and iconic message go hand in hand resulting in an efficient **discourse cohesion** meant to persuade the civil society.

The dominant feeling which stays with us after having contact with such campaigns is sympathy for the victims. The image of the abused children, aggressed wives thrown out by their violent husbands, misfortune-striken refugees appeals to the sensitivity of the collective mentality: they impress and shape new attitudes and convictions meant to better the profile of our society. These campaigns have also in common **the guarantor-character**. He/she can be the victim of the evinced social negative phenomenon (as shown above) or the representative of the civil society which positively intervenes to improve things. PETROM offers such examples and we shall analyse them in our case study.

Textually, all these social campaigns directly address the public. The ad maker uses vocatives, imperatives, indirect or rhetoric questions, they representing the background against which the discourse referent is projected. **The referential axis** is easily distinguishable, thus the public being able to take quick and efficient measures to improve the situation.

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Using Roman Jakobson's terms, the source of the message is the one which communicates his/her thoughts to the public.

In a social campaign we distinguish:

- a direct sender (the NGO or company involved in solving the problem);
- an indirect sender (the victim him/herself, suffering from the social evil under discussion. The sender speaks for all his/her countrymen, found in the same unfortunate situation).

Depending on the followed **purpose,** we distinguish the following types of social campaigns:

Public Awareness Development;

- Public informing;
- Fund raising;
- Social promotion of some educational, artistic, sports programmes, meant to benefit the society, especially the young people;
- Mentality changing;
- Shaping a new attitude towards some social realities (anti-racial campaigns enter this category);
- Determining the active personal involvement of the public in social programmes.

All these campaigns appeared within Romanian advertising after December 1989. Their presence is a clear sign that our society improved, meaning that we have learned to acknowledge our own mistakes. Their presence is also an evident sign of democracy, of free will and opinion, of asserting life needs and ideals. It is a sign of our society maturation and increased responsability towards its own destiny[3].

Another classification of social campaigns has in view the **nature of the message sender.** We notice two distinct types of senders characterizing Romanian social campaigns:

1. government organisations, social, cultural, charity organisations, cultural institutions (for example: UNHCR – United Nations High

[3] Olga Bălănescu, *Reclama românească*, Bucureşti, Editura Ariadna 98, 2008.

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Commissioner for Refugees, The Ministry of Education and Research, The Ministry of Tourism, Romanian Police, social-cultural foundations);

2. companies which make products or offer services (for example: Avon – a cosmetics company, BRD, Vodafone, Petrom – an oil company.

The first category expresses itself through the social campaign constructed. Its intrinsic purpose is to promote and protect the moral values of society, to to ensure the observance of fundamental human rights: the right to life, education, decent living standard, health protection, healthy environment, etc. The institution or foundation does nothing else but put into practice social programmes for people's benefit and identify itself to the citizens through the specific of its activity so that the citizens should feel protected.

For instance, the association ROMANI CRISS was created with the precise aim of promoting a new, non-discriminatory attitude towards the gypsies. The social campaigns initiated by Romani Criss present the human, sensitive side of the personality of gypsies, their natural need to be integrated in society, the suffering provoked by their rejection out of the existing prejudices.These campaigns belong to the category of campaigns meant to shape new attitudes towards social realities.

The Ministry of Education and Research started campaigns of promoting its educational programmes. Civil society was given the possibility of learning how the Ministry of Education and Research involves itself in improving the life of children, teenagers, young peole in general, especially from the perspective of professional training.

The sender (NGO) has two major purposes to reach through the social campaign:

1. to announce and inform the society about its activity;
2. to change mentalities and to create a positive attitude in society regarding the negative aspects of social life.

The public is thus informed much more efficiently. The cold statistics, even if more impressive because of their exact figures, don't convince people as strongly as the image of a child sleeping in the street, in a box.

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The 30 second TV ad or the printed ad will have a much more effective impact than a well prepared conference in point of informativeness[4].

The second aim of these NGOs is to promote a new attitude towards some negative aspects of life. This is an educational enterprise proper and it requires more attention in point of message construction (both iconically and textually), since the **perlocutionary component** of the communicative act can detemine the better profile of the society. The question to be asked is: what matters the most? That we should know the domain of activity of the Ministry of Tourism, of some foundation or association or that we should obtain a human, positive reaction of our country fellows regarding those less fortunate than them?

The second type of social campaign sender is the supplier of products/services. This type of sender entered only recently our advertising market, assuming the role of changing our social life for the better.

It is this second type of sender that our paper focuses on, since we consider it more important to see how a company interested in making profit agrees to get invoved in social programmes meant to improve the society that the company is part of. These companies are perceived by the community as lucrative, interested in increasing their turnover and profit. Through their involvement in social life they improve their image most efficiently and this leads to a higher profit. Lately, **social responsibilisation campaigns** have become a **PR** strategy: showing the society that they are interested not only in profit, turnover increase and producing high quality products which to better our lives has become a second nature to companies[5].

PR specialists consider social responsibilisation campaigns one of the best strategies of getting a top position on the market[6]. The customer will have a new perception on AVON, for instance, since the company is one of the most actively involved in promoting social responsibilisation campaigns

[4] Allan Bell, Peter Garrett (eds.), *Approaches to Media Discourse*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

[5] Bernard Dagenais, *Campania de relații publice*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2003.

[6] http://www.responsabilitatesocială.ro/companii/petrom.html

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in Romania. Avon will be regarded not only as a manufacturer of cosmetics, but also as the source of a helping hand for women in trouble. The target audience will be more receptive towards the company. Market surveys showed that the company turnover increased visibly in the interval 2006-2007 as a result of the undertaken campaigns[7]. The breast cancer prevention campaign had a great impact on the feminine public, who preferred Avon products to others for the simple reason that they wanted to be part of the humanitarian programme started by Avon.

The material presented below is a brief pragmatic analysis of the latest social responsibilisation campaigns unfolded in Romania.

Case Study

For the beginning, we will discuss a few ads, part of PETROM social responsibilisation campaign programme called "Respect pentru viitor"/ 'Respect for the future', manifested over the years in the form of various projects meant to increase awareness regarding different topics, such as: pollution., traffic responsibility, rational exploitation of resources etc. In this way, Petrom aims at motivating people by appealing to their affectivity and sensitivity. The natural consequence is a change of attitude regarding people and the environment. Therefore, Petrom chooses a relevant cause, since it is a company which pollutes the environment and is willing to make up for it by supporting environment preservation.

Ads have as target audience the whole society. Any ad is a dialogue between the sender (the ad maker) and the receiver (the society), a scenario which proposes possible solutions to rapidly solve not some needs of a definite category of people but some acute problems of contemporary society, in this case environmental problems.

Iconic message: *a glass full of water is offered to a child by an adult. Out of lack of attention the water is splashed while handing the glass*.

Title: *The more you waste, the less they willl have*.

Slogan: *Petrom. Respect for the future.*

[7] http://www.avonresponsabilitate.sociala.ro/html

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Text body: *Don't waste water*. *We'll need it tomorrow too*.

There is discoursive cohesion between the textual and the iconic message. **The iconic metonymy** (the glass water) focuses our attention on natural resources which must be exploited rationally**.** The two stretched hands have the role of a **double catachresis**: the hand of the adult (which manages the future) gives the glass to the young generation (a thirsty hand which seems to cry for help). The text body sets an imperative attitude in the collective mentality. **Verbal interaction** is **personal**, the ad maker acting as an advisor of the customer when necessary.

The pragmatic act is implicit from the title and anticipates the exact information from the text body: natural resources must be carefully preserved. The persuasive impact is expressed by the markers of **personal deixis** present in the title *you*, *they* and the guarantor-character, *the child*, who, even not present in the ad, is present through his hand. The **time deictic** *tomorrow* has a subjective character: the near future is subjectively perceived as a cause of worry since people are careless regarding the rational usage of natural resources.

The speech acts regulate the expressive construction of the message**.** At the level of **communicative intention,** the message of the title is based on **a directive act**. The remark is rather an urge belonging to **the affective**, **non-specialised discourse register**. The source-speaker is a participant reacting affectively by showing his concern for the consequences of presentday acts at the level of society. Thus, Petrom appears as an advisor, an agent who fights for environment preservation and sends an alarming message.

The principles of communication cannot be ignored since they help constructing the textual message. **The Cooperative Principle** implies observing the **maxims of quality**, **relevance**, **manner**. The ad maker asserts what he/she strongly believes, obeys the referential axis all the time during sending the message and is clear, avoiding prolixity or ambiguity. Moreover, he/she manages to convey his/her conviction in what he said or expressed iconically.

The Principle of Positive Politeness (centered on the interlocutors and on the relationship established among them in conversation) includes

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the **maxim of interest**: the sender (Petrom) is preoccupied with the problems of its interlocutor (society). **The generosity maxim** is rendered by sending the message of willingly renouncing something in favour of the interlocutor. The time deictic element "risipeşti"/"waste" enables the sender to give some advice for a better, safer future when children will stop suffering.

Another ad from the same campaign initiates a dialogue with the target audience.

Iconic Message: *a group of children collected recycling wastes and are pleased with it.*

Title: *It shows that you want to be in Andrei's country*

Text Body: *Encourage your colleagues and teachers to enter "Ţara lui Andrei" contest. Beginning with April 22, every week you have to work on an interesting topic* (*environment, recycling, communication*) *and finally you could win the first prize, a camp ticket in Andrei's country. Other prizes are at stake – bicycles and school supplies for the whole gang. Access www.taraluiandrei.ro and find out how you can become the most ecologist child in the country.*

Slogan: *Respect for the future.*

Ţara lui Andrei/Andrei's country is an interactive, online programme, allowing the participation of all categories of public, in order to help preserving the environment. Good ideas are rewarded by winning points, which represent trees to be planted by Petrom every spring and autumn. *Ţara lui Andrei* becomes the beautiful, clean, *green* alternative image of Romania.

The pragmatic act is obvious from the metasyntagm *Ţara lui Andrei/Andrei's country*, a metaphor for a clean society and also a piece of criticism against people's indifference and carelessness. **The personal deictic** *Andrei* is subjective in nature, being the imaginary embodiment of responsible man, full of respect and care towards nature and his human fellows. This character is an indirect garantor, meant to sustain Petrom's cause and increase its social credibility, thus influencing and even manipulating various categories of public regarding Petrom's image. **The discourse register** is pleasant, affective, jovial. The ad maker adresses the

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public informally, playing the role of a good, friendly advisor. The language used exploits at best the semantic field of school, stressing the presence of the garantor-character, the child, being well-known that all public segments are sensitive to him. **Verbal acts** fall into several categories. **The illocutionary component** becomes evident in the form of **expressive and directive speech acts**. The sender is a direct, affective participant in the act of communication and addressing is constructed on elements of the spoken language. The directive act is sustained by the commissive act; in exchange for his responsible attitude, the little ecologist is rewarded by being sent in one of the camps in Andrei's country (ideal, paradisiac space, totally different from the known landscape) and all sorts of school supplies. **The discourse register** is affective, the sender appealing to feelings and not to reason.

Conclusions

Such ads represent the main device for Social Responsibility Campaigns undertaken by various actors, be they companies, PR agency or NGO. They are an attempt for dialogue in order to influence the public opinion. Even if some of these ads refer to a particulat social stratum or category of target audience, the campaigns address everybody in point of the solution proposed. These ads prove that the ethical policy of Petrom is not a false one. SRC programmes are permanently and systematically updated. Even if the benefits of these campaigns favor first of all the company, they also prove their implication in social life through a positive, pleasant and determined attitude manifested in long term SCR investments and projects, never abandoned, but coherently and perseverently put into practice. Social Responsibility Campaigns are based on ethics, on fairplay in relation to society and any company tries to make up for the prejudices caused to society as a result of its economic activity.

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