ADVERTISING AND TRADITION[1]

Abstract: *The culture of a society has the power to shape almost all communicative forms being a sum of ways of leaving, lifestyle, beliefs that people are sharing in order to define their individuality or belongings. Communication is one of the forms through which the culture is created and manifested no matter if we refer to communication between individuals or mass media. The present study refers to advertising discourse as a modality to transmit the specificity of Romanian people through TV spots. The paper analyzes how this TV spots reflect the values that characterize Romanian society, advertising becoming, in this way, a matter of intercultural communication. This means that advertising is not only innovation and originality but also a way to spread traditional values. It is a path to redefine collective imaginary and transmit it to the new generations.*

Key words: *Culture, advertising, tradition.*

1. The Values of Romanian Culture in Advertising

The concept of culture, in various societies, has a meaning which involves a series of similarities and differences. The similarities spring from the existence of universal truths, from a series of common activities, which people have, no matter their nationality. The differences are determined by the various interpretations, perceptions and by the subjective knowledge each individual preserves under the form of beliefs and values, which are grouped in a system of rules, a way of life and an interpretation of reality. A feature of the Romanian culture which Andra Şerbanescu identified in her study *How Others Think and Speak* (2007:310) is the eclecticism, which takes various forms: mimicry, tolerance for diversity, the coexistence of opposites, a taste for picturesque. The tendency towards mimicry of the Romanian people was noticed by a number of literary critics: G.Călinescu, E. Lovinescu, Ralea, Titu Maiorescu – even in the case of popular beliefs and traditional sayings. The adaptation is a result of accepting the mimicry and the immediate consequence of this feature is the Romanians' ability to adapt to the new, which takes various forms: "the conservation instinct, the fluctuation, change as an aim in itself, the temporary solution, the ambivalence (duality, duplicity, dissimulation), compromise and nuance, the conscious acceptation of the natural laws, the moderation, the order of things." (Şerbănescu, 2007: 321).

The philosopher Lucian Blaga (Blaga, 1985:196) believes that the Romanian spirit is dominated by a feature which he calls "plai" (a specific Romanian space, dominated by hills and plains, which influences the Romanian spirit). This ancestral cultural element is very common in Romanian commercials. Another philosopher – Ovidiu Papadima (Papadima, 1995:95) – notices that Romanians have: "a great zest for life and the tendency to taste all it can offer, the Romanian people live to enjoy life, to have three nights and days weddings, to cry out for joy, to prepare many delicious foods for each holiday, to visit others for hours, to find a temporary solution – this is why their work may seem patched, unfinished. The Romanians are always in a hurry, which makes them superficial and always unhappy with the evolution of things. The humour is special – a type of laughter that seems to be serious, irony, self-irony, but most of all –

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making fun of difficult situations". Regarding the acceptation of faith, which Romanians have proven in time, this was called fatalism, by many researchers (Papadima, Călinescu, Noica). The market study conducted in 2005, by IRSOP, a study that aims to identify Romanian values in European context (Andra Şerbănescu, 2007:308), shows the differences between the typical European and the Romanian: "the typical European is seen in a more positive light, than the typical Romanian. In some domains, the difference is very big, the Romanians remaining behind Europeans. There is more. There are fields where Romanians see themselves in a negative, rather than positive light. Romanians are viewed as being less caring, more aggressive, authoritarian, dishonest and disorganized. They are also seen as conceited, idealistic and superficial and are considered to have conservative opinions". All these characteristics which were identified in time, define what we could call "Romanism" – cultural features which are preserved and identify the Romanian people. These features, which are inserted in commercials, become symbols, they raise the interest in the product and they transfer it from the space of functionality into that of identity. This study proposes to analyze how this Romanian cultural features are transformed in values and used in commercials in order to sell the products. The method used is direct observation, the commercial were chosen according to their relevance for our theme.The most recurrent elements in Romanian TV commercials are: the village and its traditions, the family, work, beliefs/superstitions, myths, popular heroes.

1.1. The village and its traditions

When he was accepted into the Romanian Academy, Lucian Blaga delivered a speech (1972:2), in which he praised the Romanian village, which had become a self sustaining element, ever-lasting – in comparison to the city, where "a child's conscience is, from a very early stage, stained by the negative values of civilization, which one gets used to, without being able to understand them completely." In the Romanian spiritual culture the village is a "social, economic organism, in which the main components are the households" (Butură, 1992:252). In the traditional village a very important place is given to *the house* which is seen "not only as shelter and place to prepare the daily meals, to create clothing, to establish the rules of social and family life, but also as a place where material and spiritual culture has been transmitted along the centuries" (Butură, 1992:252). These kind of cultural symbols are used in the TV commercials, because advertising is not only an innovative art, but also a means to preserve traditions, "advertising is seen as a form of art and culture and the prestigious cultural institutions are encouraged to present exhibitions related to this field. The boundaries between advertising and other forms of culture are more fluid, the media consumers experiment and understand publicity in an intercultural way" (Butură, 1995:212).

The surprising element is that the majority of products which promote traditional values and beliefs are from the gastronomic field: paté, yoghurt, milk etc. – all of these needing a strong individualization among others of the same type, in order to attract the customers. Advertising has as initial purpose the promotion of the product, but it also deals with what the researchers name "the cultural personality of the individual" (Butură, 1995 :207) – this cultural pressure helps developing the same structure of personality, facilitates communication and gives the impression of authenticity. The series of commercials for Sibiu Paté (Addle Pate) – *The Hatters, The Sounds, The Weavers* – were conceived as small documentaries in which the traditional handicrafts from Dumbrava Sibiului are presented. The campaign had as starting point the desire to reassure the customers of the quality of this brand of paté (addle pate), stressing on its place of origin – a space where the traditions and customs are still alive

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and are constantly rediscovered and brought to people's attention. Thus, the crafts presented in the commercials have something in common with the advertised product: tradition. The characters that appear are true craftsmen from Marginime (an ethnographic Romanian place situated near Salişte river, west of Sibiu), they represent authentic symbols. In each commercial, several generations are presented – craftsmen families that speak about their work. The demonstration of mastery is also authentic; they strictly follow all the difficult steps of the craft, which remained the same, in spite of the passing of time.

Commercial 1 - The weavers:

Voice 1: My mother, my grandmother used to weave. They did this to decorate their house.

Voice 2: Instead of playing outside, I preferred to stay in and weave.

Voice 1: It is not difficult if you like it...

Voice 2: Now I teach other children how to do it. I love it... You have to put your soul into this...

Voice 1: If you were born and raised doing this, you cannot give it up!

Narrator: There is a place where tradition is alive. That's where Sibiu addle Pate comes from.

Commercial 2 - The Hatters:

Voice 1: People have been making hats in our family earlier than 1800...

Voice2: You have to take a hat in your hands at least 60 times, before it is ready. But by doing this, you are given the satisfaction of keeping alive and perpetuating the traditional national suits.

Voice 1: You are satisfied when you see people wearing it. You see them on the street: That is a hat I made!

Narrator: There is a place where tradition is alive. That's where Sibiu Pate comes from.

The central value of these two commercials is the Romanian tradition – Sibiu Paté (addle pate), is promoted as a product that has kept the recipe and ingredients used in the past for cooking. After this campaign[1] the sales increased five times, which is explained by the fact that "the distinctive feature of human societies resides in culture. The man is a unique animal – because of the ability to speak, but also to symbolize, generalize." (Newsom *et alii*, 2010:105). As a result, using the elements that are the foundation of a society is a certain way to promote a product. Culture can be, thus, regarded as a mechanism that is "at the origin of the desires and the personal behavior of the individual, through this, man acquires the basic values of a social group, the various perceptions, wishes and behaviors which originate in the family or in other institutions or groups in the society" (our translation, Petre, Iliescu, 2004: 17). Covalact's new repositioning campaign from 2009 wishes to draw the customers' attention towards healthy, traditional products, and to redefine traditional values by encouraging the consumption of products made locally and not imported. At the core of the commercial we can recognize *Coana Chiva* (played by actress Nastasa Raab), a symbol of the values the brand has. She comes from Ardeal and she makes no compromises when it comes to the quality of a product. The rustic landscapes where the commercial was shot also stress on the idea that the product was made using a natural,

[1] http://www.produsin.ro/produse/pate-sibiu/.

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traditional recipe, highlighting it among other similar products, by focusing on its exceptional qualities: *"too good, as made at countryside"*.

The narrative frame makes Coana Chiva the absolute expert in the techniques of yoghurt production, her position surpassing that of researchers who try to find the perfect recipe. After the promotional catchwords: *"too good, as made at the countryside"* – the belief that "the peasantry represents a deposit of all customs, so villages are the keepers of the first criterion - tradition" is strengthened, and, as a result, all that comes from this space receives more value. The above-mentioned campaigns are a way to reaffirm traditional values, but also to learn about them, to understand the mentality of the archaic village, its order, rituals, customs which the village guides itself by. These are small reflections about how the Romanian farmers understand the time and space of the village, its faith, what is the "order of things", its way of representing and relating to existence.

1.1. Family

The decision to buy a product or a service is determined by a series of economic, demographic, psychological, social, personal, cultural factors, which influence the customers' behavior. Another well known situation is when the commercials present small images of the domestic life, which imitate the daily routine, with the purpose of creating a comfort zone, with which the addressee can identify. In the Romanian culture, family represents the means for the human, religious values to be transmitted, the place where a child is educated and initiated into life, a small community which preserves, transmits and enriches traditional values. For all these reasons, the idea of "family" is often used in advertising. Psychologists start from the idea that the social environment of the consumer (culture, social class), his/her personal characteristics (lifestyle, personal perceptions, and beliefs) and the particular circumstances have a great impact on the decision to buy a product. In order to increase the efficiency of the message, the advertising companies try to trigger emotional reactions. By "generating feelings and states and by associating these experiences with a particular brand or class of products, the companies can develop and maintain powerful, coherent representations in the consumers' mind" (Petre, Iliescu, 2004 : 142). The commercial *Napolact – Salt in Dishes*[1] appeals to the consumers' emotions, triggered by the fact that the addressee gets to identify with the situation presented in it.

> **Napolact Commercial**: "*The true secret of the food from our house is my mother's pot. That pot, with broken glaze, a little bit burnt, used day after day, year after year, filled with soup or rolls with rice and meat. This is the secret! And for the people that know it, those people that pour their soul into the food they prepare, we created the freshest sour-cream with lovage and parsley. Napolact – as it used to be!*"

The remembering technique[2] which the commercial uses allows using descriptive emotions (the reality it shows is a familiar one – the intimate and well-known space of the house, with the mother's figure in the centre), emphatic emotions (the receiver feels the same familiar emotions and the same warmth as the characters in the commercial) and the experiential ones (the connection with direct life is made through identification). The consumer is emotionally integrated through the appeal to strong values: family, its members, the pleasant feeling they are associated with, and all

[1] http://www.iqads.ro/ad_4795/napolact_suflet_in_bucate.html.

[2] Another commercial that uses this is *Napolact – ca odinioară (Napolact –As It Used to Be)* (www.iqads.ro).

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these emotions have an effect on the image of the brand, with which the product identifies. Another commercial which appeals to emotion and feelings is that for *Untdelemn de la bunica* Cooking Oil. The character Bunica[1] represents all the values of the brand: the dishes remind people of the taste from their childhood, they are prepared with care by the members of the family, using only the best and the freshest products, and the result is an excellent one, due to the experience which was gathered in time. This kind of promotion determined the Romanian consumers to vote the product the "most trusted oil brand"[2]. This can be explained through an emotional mimesis (Petre, Iliescu, 2004:137), which is defined as "that phenomenon which appears when a person (the receiver) takes, internalizes and finally, manifests the emotions that another person is feeling (the sender)" (Petre, Iliescu, 2004:137), in the case of the advertising act, the conveyed emotions have a pre-defined purpose – to encourage the potential customer to buy that specific product.

1.2. The importance of belonging/integration

Belonging to a group or to a social category has two immediate effects: differentiating one's group from others and the tendency to focus on the particular group one is part of. Each individual belongs to a gender, to an age range, a professional and social category, a nationality, a religion etc. These particularities, which are internalized as cognitive and affective structures form images and determine/mediate one's behavior. The idea of collectivity in Romania was associated with imitation, a way of doing things "just like everybody else". Meeting at the church, at social gatherings or dances was a form of participating and getting involved in the social life – a person's existence being permanently related to the community one belonged to. It is from this fact that the metaphor "vatra satului" (the hearth of the village) was drawn – because it implies the idea of living together in a common space. The idea was used in Romanian advertising; an example would be Servus Bier TV Commercials. These commercials are centered on the idea of tradition which needs to be kept in order to prevent being excluded from the group. Being different results in being excluded or even chased away from a social group.

Commercial 1:

"*We have a tradition of beer drinking. After you raise your glass, you sip from it – it is the gesture that matters. Then, you put the beer on the table. This is how I saw my grandfather and my father doing it, so I do the same. I stick to the tradition! And everybody does that. Now, there was one man who didn't care about this tradition. He raised his glass without drinking. But then he didn't have anybody to drink with and no beer to drink. Servus! We care about the real tradition of beer drinking.* "

Commercial 2:

"We have a tradition, when it comes to beer. The tradition to drink it. My grand-grand father taught my grandfather, who taught my father, who taught me that beer is corky. You pour it in your glass and it tries to run away ... Up! Now, everybody around here is an expert! A long time ago, there was one man who didn't care about the tradition. We don't see any other alternative. Tradition is tradition, we keep it! Servus! We care about the real tradition of beer drinking."

[1] http://www.cargill.ro/ro/untdelemn-de-la-bunica/index.jsp
[2] http://www.cargill.ro/ro/untdelemn-de-la-bunica/index.jsp.

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The integrative advertising (Popescu, 2005:87) draws on the social component of the human being. Both commercials are centered on the life of the Romanian village – where the pub is a meeting place, where people socialize and attitudes are transmitted. The internal coherence of the two commercials is given by the traditional Romanian background music. The commercial to *La Minut* mustard, entitled *Ode to the Grillman,* has the same social component. A social sub-group, whose free time activity is being promoted in this commercial, is that of the barbecue lovers. *"Maybe other people do not understand, but we know how much patience is needed to prepare everything, how much of your soul you invest, you would even get burnt, only to get it right. We know that you put the grill before you and you do this for others. So, we want to honor your effort, with something just as good. The best meat rolls mustard you can find. La Minut!"*. A seemingly ordinary product – the mustard is seen as a prize, which is given for the efforts made by the barbecue lovers. The entire discourse is built, at a linguistic level, around the empathy of the producer (the mustard brand) and the people who are passionate about barbecues and who seem to be marginalized by others. The purpose of such advertisements is mainly commercial, however "advertising is one if the multiple links that form between the consumer and the cultural space to which he or she belongs, it offers patters and it helps the receivers recognize familiar situations, thus giving them the feeling they belong to a group and that they are socially protected" (Petre, Nicola, 2001:36).

1.3. Work

Work in the Romanian territory was considered "a tradition, not a value, the fulfillment of a cosmic ritual, not a source of wealth, Romanian work enough not to starve, thus trying to avoid the sin of being greedy, in exchange they are lucky when it comes to food" (Şerbănescu, 2007*:* 333). Work is seen as an obvious task of daily life and not necessarily as a source of wealth: "our peasants even now work only for the necessary things for living" (Papadima, 1995.:76). Hence the Romanian sayings: "running away from work like the devil from incense", "laziness is a great lady", and various cultural stereotypes, which imply that the Romanians do not really enjoy work, all of which are used in some TV commercials. An example would be the advertisement to *Unirea* alcoholic drink (entitled *The Hospital*[1]), which is being promoted, with an ironical catch-phrase: „there is more power, where there are many". The reality presented in this commercial implies that a Romanian worker prefers to avoid work by assigning tasks to somebody else, while engaging in other activities – such as giving orders to others or playing society games. This series of commercials was in fact banned by CNA (institution which guaranties the public interest and the main scope is to regularize the field of audiovisual programs), because it was breaking the Audiovisual Law, article 29, by promoting negative behavior and "misconduct in the workplace".

1.4. Beliefs/superstitions/myths

The message of the advertisements is usually intended to reach the mass, a „collective" character, which needs to understand the message. Advertising can become mimetic (by appealing to myths, superstitions or popular beliefs), because it wants to create a parallel world, governed by the principles of pleasure and beauty. The strong impact of this technique is due to the fact that people "re-create complicated images very successfully and have the tendency to appreciate in a positive way the brands that

[1] Name taken from www.iqads.ro website.

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resort to this type of communication"[1]. The positive reaction of the consumer to the archaic messages comes from a need which is fulfilled by inserting them into the advertising universe. The myth provides two elements: firstly it ensures a collective identity and secondly, it feeds the desire for an ideal, by appealing to fantasy. The advertisement *Dorna - Hora*[2] uses the Romanian myth of the *iele* – female supernatural beings, virgins with a great seductive force and unusual powers who live in the ether. Their presence fascinates men, who are easily seduced by their beauty and dance – the *hora* – in which they are lured. Their existence is associated with nature – they live in abandoned places, in ponds or on the banks of rivers. They are cheerful women, who seduce by wearing light clothes, made of transparent materials – such as flax or silk – nevertheless, their presence has a negative impact on the man who watches them, because their dance is a dance of death. However, in the above-mentioned commercial, they receive a positive role; they are fairies, who manage to determine the man to give up alcohol, in favour of fresh and natural *Dorna* water.

1.6. Folklore heroes

The hero represents, no matter the culture, a symbol of absolute intellectual and moral values, a role model who stands out from the crowd, by doing remarkable deeds. The hero has sometimes supernatural powers, especially when we talk about folklore. Adriana Marinescu explains the typology of the hero in the Romanian culture, by using the concept of myth, in her work *Tipul eroului în cultura română: de la stereotip la comportament politic* (Marinescu, 2009: 13). The author identifies, depending on the temporal dimension in which they appear, various types: the hero archetype, the ideal prince, the saviors from the period between the world wars etc. The hero savior typology is widespread in advertising. It can be found in various forms, depending on the situation: the legionary model of the martyr who fights for the national values, the revolutionary who wants the preservation of the national identity ready to sacrifice himself in order to preserve unity, the commoner whose outstanding deeds lead to re-establishing the lost balance of the community. In the commercial *Iancu –dreptate şi tărie (justice and strength)*[3] we have the stereotyped portrait of the savior. It is created with inspiring elements from the mythological imaginary and from the collective memory, which are brought into present by using this national symbol. In his community, the savior is an important character, who occupies a central place, due to the trust that people have in him. They go to him with all their problems and he finds solutions. *Iancu,* whose name reminds us of the historical figure Iancu de Hunedoara, is endowed with messianic features; one calling is enough for the situation to be solved. Using such concepts in advertising is due to the fact that "for Romanians, the myth of the providential hero is identified with the national unity myth, and this feature of the Romanian political and historical consciousness has proven very important from the point of view of the relationship between the nation and its leader" (Boia, 2010: 256-9). The savior gives people a feeling of security by getting involved in their social life – we find him participating at daily activities, but always ready to solve conflicts. The victim becomes the winner, the thieves are punished by the entire community and the

[1]Costin Radu, Strategic Planner Leo Burnett, http://www.iqads.ro/a_2146/reclamele_se_intorc_cu_mii_de_ani_in_urma.html
[2] http://www.iqads.ro/ad_19776/dorna_hora.html.
[3] http://www.iqads.ro/ad_4719/iancu_dreptate_si_tarie.html.

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advertisement ends with the central image of the promoted product – Iancu, the alcoholic drink.

Regarding Romanian advertisements, we can notice, through this analysis, that this type of discourse reflects specific national elements. This offers important information about the values of the Romanian culture, since advertisements have, as a starting point, ancestral concepts such as – village, family,work,community, beliefs/superstitions/myths, concepts which have built our national identity. So, advertising is not important just for its economical part but it becomes a way of understanding the values of a society, how that society is organized, which are the beliefs that we can find in it; a kind of big mirror of national identity.

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Acknowledgements:
"The research was financed from the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Program for Human Resources Development. 2007-2013 [project POSDRU/CPP 107/DMI 1.5/S/78342]".

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