MASCULINE PRESENCE IN ADVERTISING

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Abstract: *The present study is meant to analyze the way the theories of advertising communication may be made use of when the guarantee is a man. We will focus our attention on various masculine hypostases and on the degree they are exploited by the advertiser in order to promote a certain category of products and services. We also mention that we have limited our research to commercial advertising only, leaving out of our consideration the social or the political ones, as they are governed by their own rules of construction.*

Key words: *cognitive dissonance, discourse cohesion, learning, guarantee*

Advertising has turned into one of the most representative symbols of our industrial society, a mirror of it. It is only by simply looking at the advertisements built within a specific cultural space, and we will be able to enter the universe of mentalities and values of the respective social community. The procedure is facilitated by the **signs** which contribute to an efficient construction of the advertising message:

I. Linguistic signs (slogans, verbal clichés, inter-textualities which are specific to a certain epoch);
II. Aesthetic signs (certain hypostases of feminine character or masculinity as well, which are representative for a certain group or for the whole society)

The human typology developed by the guarantee within an advertisement is specific to the community it belongs and illustrates real typological varieties.

In the present study, we will focus our attention upon the **masculine guarantee** as we consider him to have been ignored out of strictly economical measures.

Advertising will be viewed from pragmatic point of view, as pragmatics is the science of spoken language, and advertising represents the most obvious way of identifying the real locutors of nowadays life. The publisher uses items of everyday talk in order to make his message closer to the target. The **theory of speech acts,** keeping or breaking **the principles of communication**, as well as **the deictic categories**[2] will be taken into consideration in analyzing the way the advertising message is built.

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[2] Geoffrey Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics,* London, Routledge, 1983.

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As long as marketing and psychology studies have proved that the feminine image can sell everything, as long as AIDA principle has been proved to work more successfully in the presence of feminine beauty or nudity, why should we not all be concerned with Eve`s delicate heiress? [3]

But the masculine typology presents us an interesting variety of hypostases in Romanian advertising.

Thus, The well/known typology (the macho man, the business man, the sportsman, the husband, the specialist in manlike domains) is on the point of being improved with new identities. This is a clear proof of our Romanian mentality opening towards other realities. The man has been recently presented as a sensitive nature, too.

The universe of domestic cleaning, which has been not so long ago related to the feminine guarantee, started to be dominated by the presence of the man-specialist. So that, his opinion and piece of advice should be taken into consideration. Whether it is about domestic cleaning (see PRONTO products, Mr.Proper), or hair-styling, the man is there to give a helping hand to any woman in need: the hair/stylist recommends what cosmetics she should use to get a better look, the mechanic recommends what abluents she should try to offer a longer life to her washing-machine.

So that, the feminine presence is little by little reduced to a strictly decorative one next to the main guarantee who turns out to be the man.

The present study is meant to analyze the way the theories of advertising communication may be made use of when the guarantee is a man. We will focus our attention on various masculine hypostases and on the degree they are exploited by the advertiser in order to promote a certain category of products and services. We also mention that we have limited our research to commercial advertising only, leaving out of our consideration the social or the political ones, as they are governed by their own rules of construction.

It is a fact that advertising fulfills two major necessities:

A. material necessities (based on the argument of quality, of improving everyday life by means of different products supposed to create and keep life happy: cleaning products, household appliances, banking services, touristic services, etc);

B. spiritual necessities (based on the argument of remodeling, reshaping the personal image of the consumer in the sense that the promoted product or service might succeed in making him look younger, sexier, prettier, more handsome, more successful).

We have thus mentioned one of the roles the guarantee has: to offer the consumer a pattern of a better life.

[3] Vasile Sebastian Dancu, *Comunicarea simbolica. Arhitectura discursului publicitar,* Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2006; Mihaela Miroiu, *Gandul umbrei. Abordari feministe in filosofia contemporana,* Editura Alternative, Bucuresti, 1995; Miege Bernard, *Societatea cucerita de comunicare,* Editura Polirom, Iasi, 2000.

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The pragmatic act of the advertisement could be: `If you buy this type of car, you will be the same successful as I am`.

Owing to this **double sided structure**, advertising has been considered to be `the rational study of the irrational human behaviour`.[4] What should we understand out of this? That the contemporary consumer purchases goods not only because he really needs them, but because he wants to be trendy, to get a better image in front of the eyes of his friends. It has been stated that the contemporary consumer is being induced a certain need by the publisher, only to increase the profit of the producing company.[5]

This is why persuasion plays an important part together with conviction by means of specific strategies.

Thus, advertising has been attributed a mythic dimension and a sociologic one, as well. They are meant to exploit certain features the target has or would like to have:

- the image of the macho man (for promoting perfumes);
- the image of the protective father (for promoting bank services);
- the image of the savior (for promoting cleaning products);
- the image of the rebel and nonconformist youngster (for promoting mobile phone services);
- that of the specialist whose scientific authority improves the impact of the product on the public (for promoting tooth paste: the dentist, the hair-stylist).

Let us follow the relationship established between the theories of advertising communication and the way they have been applied to different categories of products or services (the type of guarantee made use of should be also taken into account).

The advertising art is the result of activating several main levels.

The first level might be advertising approach to other arts: photography, literature, movies, posters. Thus we simply cannot go on without mentioning the major role the painter JEAN TOULOUSE LAUTREC played in the development of advertising. The banners created by him were considered to be real pieces-of-art promoting the new –by that time- Moulin Rouge night club.

Another source could be the fact that advertising contains a mixture of codes:

- the utilitarian code;
- the commercial code;
- the socio-cultural code;
- the mythic code.

[4] Daniela Roventa Frumusani, *Introducere in semiotica,* Editura Univers, Bucuresti, 1991.
[5] John O`Shaughnessy, Nicholas O`Shaughnessy, *Persuasion in Advertising,* London, Routledge, 2004.

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The masculine guarantee is able to activate all the codes mentioned above. Let us exemplify.

The new BCR Campaign makes the masculine guarantee activate the utilitarian code (the promoted banking services are presented as being useful for the consumer who is invited to make `banking with BCR`), as well as the socio-cultural one, at the same time: the masculine guarantee appears in more hypostases: the tennis-man who makes the public be tensioned until it does not know the bank he is working with.

The mythic code presents us the image of the savior: the bank clerk is able to bring safety and release to citizens (the image of a couple walking on a rope, or that of the child running in the street for his ball). The same campaign activates the commercial code as it sells the product.

Our Romanian advertising activates, under such circumstances, **the theory of cognitive dissonance**. It is made use of when the consumer has already made up his mind and decided what product to choose (he had applied the **theory of learning** [6]) and even more, he wants to be sure that his choice is the best one.

So that, a new procedure is on the point of being done: it is a **post-behaviorist scheme** meant to fix his certitude.

The cognitive dissonance was applied especially for those products which were implying great expenses, or major changes of the life style of the consumer. It is about those categories of products for whose purchasing the consumer is seriously involved:

- either because they are very expensive and needs to know on what he is spending his money (motor-cars, electric or electronic household appliances, banking or insurance services)
- or because they trigger a great responsibility in the process of purchasing, for himself or for his family (medicine).

The masculine presence offers **credibility to the promoted product.** Here is a brief typology:

- the bank clerk (Transylvania Bank)
- the mechanic (Calgon);

[6] Claude Bonnange, the quated work: this theory was formulated during the span of time between the two World Wars, at a time when very few companies were interested in promoting their products by means of advertising. As long as competition was not that tough, the people needed only to be informed, not to be persuaded as well. So that, the role of advertising was strictly informative. The first companies who made use of this theory of learning were the producers of cleaning staff: PROCTER&GAMBLE, COLGATE, LEVER. They even created a so-called `code of thinking`, a certain `creative strategy` made up of three main steps: *the promise* (our product can whiten your clothes better than other abluent can do), *the benefice* (you will get stainless clothes, result which you could not get so far) and *the proof* (the testimonial of the beneficiary). These three steps were supposed to be accompanied by an informative and new tone, attentive to the promoted event. But very soon, all the producing companies started to take benefit of the advantages of technology. The consequence was that they were all bringing the same benefits to the consumer, their products were alike. Under such circumstances, this theory was dangerous to be used any longer by the producing companies.

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- the dentist (Blend-a-med tooth paste);
- the hair-stylist.

In promoting medicine, the masculine guarantee is as persuasive as the feminine one: the father who, having caught a cold, is afraid of not being able to attend his daughter`s first concert (Aspirin +C), the grandfather eager to play with his grandsons (Fastum Gel).

This theory also offers us a special creative strategy: at the beginning (the first step) the advertisement addresses to people fully satisfied with the product they use; the next step is to introduce an element which is not known by the consumer, pretending that there is a product which is better than what they have been using so far.

A mood of **anxiety** is thus induced, a **state of dissonance for the consumer** who starts asking himself in a doubt: *`should I give up the trademark I have been using so far? That one which has made part of my life for some good years?`*

The third step is the answer to this tensioned question: No, he should actually not give up the known trademark as (what a happy coincidence!) the new revolutionary product belongs to… the same trademark he has been used for years. So that, he should be even proud of his qualitative choice, envied by so many others.

We could represent the three steps ia a graphic as it follows:

1. satisfaction;
2. anxiety;
3. increased satisfaction.

We may say that this strategy succeeds in making the target more confident and trustful in the respective trademark.

The advertiser will succeed in positioning the respective trademark as a leader in the market, surpassing the other similar products in the market.

Another source of advertising art consists of making use of a new **linguistic and iconic rhetorics,** owing to which a new concept is activated: **discourse cohesion (**we understand by `discourse cohesion`[7] the procedure of matching the textual image with the iconic one, the two of them making sense together.)

The greater the semantic distance between them (we refer to the textual message and to the iconic one as well), the stronger the impact on the consumer will be.

This is the **strategy of association**, meant to draw the attention of the public by means of this very discrepancy which exists between **cut** and **text.**

Let us exemplify.

Iconic message: - a young shepherd is making karate in the field, while being with his sheep around. The image is quite shocking as we do not expect such a scene (a shepherd making karate) to happen in such a context (in the field),

[7] Angela Goddard, *Limbajul publicitatii,* Editura Polirom, Iasi, 2002.

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while surrounded by his sheep. We obviously ask ourselves: `What does he want to promote?` So that, we start reading the text.

Textual message

Headline: *Want more action?*

Body text: *Here you are the only TV channel exclusively for action movies: BOOM channel.*

If you subscribe till May, 1st, get 10% discount.

Slogan: *BOOM Action*

The semantic distance is obviously, considerable, between the iconic message and the textual referent. The advertisement under discussion perfectly illustrates the strategy of association and the **theory of promotion** as well.

This theory is developed of the following pattern: **do – learn – like** in the sense that the consumer is determined to purchase the service almost on the spot (he is given a discount), and after that he will find out more information about his decision: he will watch the movies and see that the new TV BOOM channel is exactly what he has been dreaming about: dynamism and action, the attitudes adventures fans are fond of.

The masculine guarantee, under such circumstances, presents an identity familiar with our Romanian universe: the image of shepherd, well known by our people, much seen even today in the mountains. The strategy of association appears when this patriarchal cliché is put together an up-to-date service: BOOM TV channel, dedicated to action movies. We should also bring out into strong relief that this cliché is familiar to our mentality, to our system of values, and that it would not have worked within a foreign advertising field, a French one, for instance.

Specialists have seen that the most successful advertisements which are accepted and `listened to` by the consumers are those which trigger the process of **implying the target by means of anxiety** and **implying the target by means of pleasure[8].**

When the consumer implies himself by means of anxiety, the respective product or service is connected somehow to risk (in the sense that it may turn out to be dangerous, risky). When the danger belongs to the financial side of life, the advertiser maker use of a masculine guarantee.

This procedure is explained by the fact the products with a great (high) degree of implying on behalf of the consumer generally belong to the masculine culture: banking or insurance services, motor-cars. Electronic or electric household appliances, etc. The consumer needs to be given a guarantee for the quality of the product he intends to purchase, needs to know for sure that the product is credible enough in the market, among the other similar products. The features of the masculine personality are, by excellence, safety, courage, strength, having

[8] Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness,* Princeton, New York, Princeton University Press, 2002.

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everything under control. It is exactly what a consumer would expect to have after purchasing a product.

When such products are promoted by making use of the attributes of the feminine personality, the credibility of the product (or service) is diminished, even spoiled (because the attributes would be romanticism, sensibility, emotion, tenderness, sensitivity, weakness, need to be protected, and they reflect themselves upon the promoted product or service, inducing the idea that it bears the same attributes).

It is the case of the campaign initiated by MILLENIUM BANK in 2009. It developed under the slogan `life inspires us~.

Iconic message: a bunch of pink orchids, placed near a feminine body, whose face cannot be seen.

Textual message

Headline : *It is all about emotions. It is all about you!*

Body text : *When it is about banks, most people think about money. But we think it is about anything else: it is about life, namely emotions, dreams, it is about the wishes each of us has.*

Slogan: *Millenium Bank. Life inspires us.*

The textual level induces the specific elements of the feminine universe, as well as the iconic level does> emotions, dreams, wishes, that is a clear cut of the bank from all those who `think about money when it is about a bank`. I dare ask: what should we think about when we intend to choose a bank to save our deposits? Are we not supposed to choose that bank on criteria of safety, power of protection, `strength` in the market?

The masculine presence, even funny, is more credible in promoting banking and insurance services, than the feminine one. Humor does not spoil at all the efficiency of a message. Let us think of the slogan uttered by the funny dwarfs in promoting TIRIAC BANK, the credit for personal needs[9].

The household appliances keep on belonging (within our Romanian context) to the category of products with a high degree of implying the consumer.[10]

Even for the cleaning products (as far as we know, the so-called `cleaning field` is related, by tradition, to woman) , the masculine guarantee, under the hypostasis of the specialist is more credible than the feminine one. We all remember the male-specialist coming to help the woman out of her trouble when she does not know how to perform a better and a quicker cleaning operation, or

[9] www. Bancatiriac-creditdenevoipersonale. ro

[10] Claude Bonnange, Thomas Chantal, *Don Juan sau Pavlov?,* 35, the authors consider that the houlhold appliances do not belong any longer, within the American society, to the category of products with a high degree of implying the consumer, and that these products are very much alike biscuits and tooth paste in point of responsibilizing the consumer.

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how to fix her hair better under difficult weather conditions, like windy or rainy days (Mr. Proper might be a good example for the cleaning products.)

The theory of minimal implying make a very clear distinguish between the two categories of products: those with a high degree of implying the consumer, and those with a low degree of implying the same consumer. The phenomenon was firstly used by Krugmann who noticed that the so-called `cheap` products (with a low degree of implying the consumer) need a special strategy of being promoted.

This strategy might consist of making these products appear more often in TV spots in order to help the consumer keep them in his mind. At first, he, the consumer, will not pay any attention to them, as he considers them to be unimportant. It is not a big deal, after all, to choose a tooth paste on the shelf in supermarket. Any will do!

Little by little, he will find himself able to render every single piece of information he was provided with, concerning the respective product: price, ingredients, advantages, he will also remember the musical background and will gladly sing it out of his will.

The scheme of minimal implying will be the following:

1. a simple but very often repeated message, either by means of the print or the audio-video media;
2. no perceptive defense on behalf of the consumer (namely the target will not take into consideration the great frequency of the message in media, but it will unconsciously enter his mind and remain there against his will);
3. the unconscious altering of the level of knowledge concerning the respective product (the consumer will remember its name at first, then he will start singing the song which accompanies the commercial, and little by little he will keep in his mind the features of the product as they are contained by the song,);
4. the appearance of a new consumer behavior: that of purchasing the respective promoted product.

A new hypostasis of the masculine guarantee is brought out into strong relief: the funny guy who will join his mates for a drink. It is a typical Romanian hypostasis in which a great part of the masculine target recognizes itself, and thus it has a huge impact on the public who will purchase the product as it feels that the advert directly addresses to it.

We will break now the classical procedure and will not draw any conclusion as experience proved that what it might be of interest for us, might not be of interest for you and the other way round.

Actually, the theme of the respective study is too strongly linked to our contemporary life and too representative for our advertising for us to limit it to several conclusions only. It is a fact that nowadays we witness the process of our entering the great concert of globalization. We enter the great concert of the

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European nations synchronizing ourselves with them, but not forgetting a bit who we really are, and what makes us different from the others around us. This might be the very principle on which the whole activity of the European Union is based: unity in diversity.

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