IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF MARKETING

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Abstract

Marketers will always make use of our needs and even invent new needs in order to sell their products. This is a research on the evolution of marketing methods and on the usage of women's images in commercials. Also, a comparison between traditional and unconventional marketing is to be made by analyzing commercials from Romania, Europe and the United States, with a special view on how women are depicted in nowadays advertising.

1. Women in traditional marketing

"*Advertising ... legitimizes the idealized, stereotyped roles of woman as temptress, wife, mother, and sex object, and portrays women as less intelligent and more dependent than men. It makes women believe that their chief role is to please men and that their fulfillment will be as wives, mothers, and homemakers. It makes women feel unfeminine if they are not pretty enough and guilty if they do not spend most of their time in desperate attempts to imitate gourmet cooks and eighteenth-century scullery maids. It makes women believe that their own lives, talents, and interests ought to be secondary to the needs of their husbands and families and that they are almost totally defined by these relationships*."

These words were written by Lucy Komisar, back in 1971 in *Woman in Sexist Society*. On the following pages I will consider some of the advertisements displayed or broadcasted in Romania and abroad both online and offline to see what is still the same and what is different after 35 years, from the point of view of how advertisements are being built and presented to the customers and if they still bear stereotyped messages. If we think of the commercials from our country, we can roughly divide them into two categories: commercials with women as housewives and those that portray women as sex objects. These two categories of ads are addressed to three different categories of consumers.

The first type is targeted especially to female buyers. This type of ads can further be subcategorized into ads for products for home use, such as washing powder, or the latest iron or refrigerator, and cosmetics and toiletries: lipstick, skin lotions, hair spray, deodorants, etc. The products for home use suggest that there is nothing better to be used and that a woman who uses such products can please their husbands and family as domestic happiness would depend on it.

The Romanian market shows many examples of such commercials, if we were to consider only the TV ads for washing powder. They portray women as diligent housewives successful in their daily home duties. Both Romanian and international washing powder brands use the same approach. Consider the commercials for DERO, Persil, TIDE, BOUNUX, REX, ARIEL, and OMO.

Cosmetic products are the second type of products especially advertised to female consumers. These products are presented as products that increase self-esteem and

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therefore the appreciation of men. *Head & Shoulders*, for instance, presents a young woman that after using their product is looked at by all men that surround her. This means that if a woman uses this product she can lure men, and can enter their world. Or that using certain type of clothes can make women look sexier.

Another *sloggi* billboard, used in UK definitely shows women as social butterflies. And the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* definition for the term *butterfly* is sufficient:

butterfly

1 a type of insect with large often brightly coloured wings

2 DISAPPROVING a person who is not responsible or serious, and who is likely to change activities easily or only be interested in pleasure: She's such a social butterfly.

Cosmetics are the best example that illustrates the fact that marketers can create your needs artificially. The wide range of cosmetic products and sorts of such products was developed in the second half of the last century, and it's one of the fastest growing industries in the world, generating billions of dollars annually, as reported by industry professionals.

In Romania the word of mouth marketing and direct selling marketing is very successful for this type of business, and gives the marketer the best ROI's (return of investment) as this is one of the cheapest advertising methods and most efficient. I am sure you have heard of *Avon*, and *Oriflame* sales agents. The brochures they carry around are all full with young women, with perfect bodies, which seemingly look as they look because of the product they use regularly.

These images either still or animated, put great pressure on women, as they have been subconsciously "educated" since early ages that women need to have great bodies, slim, with nice round forms, always nice, happy and smiling. And men also expect them to be and behave like that.

2.2 The second type of commercials uses women images to target male audience. Sex and alcohol is one of the commonest combination used all around the world to get men's attention. One of the recent commercials for bear starts by showing a female body scarcely dressed swinging in a dim light while holding a bottle in her hand. After a few seconds a male voiceover says:

"Ai recunoaşte oriunde această formă..." (You would recognize anywhere this shape...)

A few more seconds of dancing and the unexpected outcome:

„E o sticlă de *Beck's*!" (It's a bottle of *Beck's*)

This commercial first gets the attention of the male audience by showing a beautiful female body dancing in a luring way and then switches from sexuality to beer, making a connection between perfect "tasty" woman body and the taste of beer. From commercial point of view this TV ad is quite a success.

But these advertisements convey in the background other messages as well. And feminist are right when they draw our attention on such problems. Women are perceived from such advertisements as temptress and sex object, and they are a good companion besides a beer. Or if a woman offers a man a Beck's beer, you can get to his heart. Interpretations can vary a lot depending on the beliefs and past experience of the target

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consumers. But also they can alter beliefs and convictions as long as they are not very different from that of the audience.

Commercials for *Stalinskaya* are even worse, in the sense that they show a man drinking vodka and being surrounded by a dozen of women, as it would be the perfect way to lure women, as it would open the gates to ultimate sex experiences. This is a negative approach both for the image of women and men, not to mention the health issues. Ads for alcoholic drinks send messages such as it can take you away; it can make you stand out of the crowd and ca make you feel successful, sophisticated, sexy. No strong drinks, no fun. Alcohol is often associated in advertisements with parties and sex, freedom and adventure. Often alcohol is seen as fun, desirable, sexy, and harmless. Alcohol commercials are used plenty all over the world as the media make a large share of profit from it.

Unfortunately no one shows the bad sides of alcohol, that of being related to most crimes: murder, suicide, unemployment and child abuse. These connections are never shown in ads.

Media sell target audiences to the alcohol industry on a cost-per-drinker basis, but again this is the main purpose of the mass media: to deliver audience to advertisers. Messages such as drinking is a risk-free activity and being alcohol addicted is ok can be seen in many Romanian beer campaigns: "Încă una şi mă duc!"(One more and I am on my way), or playing tricks on your wife just to get to drink beer with your mates not only that sell addiction but portray that women should stay at home and do their home routine and men should go and have fun with their friends. They show women as less intelligent, dull and unemotional figures. Marketers develop the right message in their commercials in such a way that the motivate consumers to go and buy alcoholic beverages.

The most dangerous aspect of alcohol advertising is the idea that alcohol can help you o transform, dangerous because it has a powerful influence especially on teenagers. Alcohol advertising often links alcohol with attributes and qualities such as - happiness, wealth, prestige, sophistication, success, maturity, athletic ability, virility and sexual satisfaction, when actually abuse of alcohol can destroy all these. Such ads often target young people, because members that feel outcast can see in alcohol the key to integration in a group. Drinking and women are seen as needed steps to reach adulthood. But this is just an idea taken over from real life. You can often hear adults saying to teenagers that they have to drink to become real man. But the problem is that on TV this turns out to be an institutionalized way of "education". Fortunately, governmental regulations all over the world imposed on all advertisers to mention after ads for alcohol that alcoholic beverages can be dangerous to health. If the above commercials had to do especially with the female body, the *Pepsi Light* TV commercial brings back the blonde bimbo image, who commits a terrible mistake that can cause a mafia war. Does this convey that all blonds are stupid? Some Pepsi billboard commercials show women in degrading postures.

Even if all the pictures depict beautiful women, the one from 2005 conveys lust, and sexuality messages, while the other two depict beautiful women who enjoy their soft drink.

The rich and bitchy woman is still to be found in nowadays advertisements. Even if women in commercials are not so much rich as sly they still have the perfect looks and succeed in tricking men.

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For instance when a couple fights over the last drop of *Cola*, the woman succeeds in embarrassing her partner. Or the woman asking for a *Pepsi Light*, changes her voice to an authority male voice, denoting power.

Women can now be strong and fight evil men. In the Airwaves commercial a female character becomes very strong because she uses this product. This goes very well with the popular *Powergirls* cartoons. So this ad just further "educates" teenage girls.

Lately not only have female characters become stronger but they also dominate male characters. Yet, the primary meaning of the *Fanta bamboocha* commercial is that *Fanta* helps you get any woman's love. But sexual connotation is used on purpose by the advertiser in order to make the audience more confused and in the end aware of their product.

"Listen to the bubbles. Fanta tell you what to say.
I like your bubbles.
(Slap)
I like your orange.
(Slap)
I can't get enough of you…" (MTV Channel)

Commercials with homosexuals are very rare, yet most often they show a negative attitude toward gays and lesbians. The slogan for Str8: "There is no other way!" lives no room for tolerance in the mind of the consumers.

Or a recent *Samsung* commercial shows a man meeting a beautiful woman which turns out to be a drag-queen, as he goes in a men's toilet. And the slogan goes "Nu te lăsa înşelat de aparenţe!" (Don't let appearances deceive you!). Or *Axe* used some years ago a commercial in which even gays are attracted if you use their spray.

Yet, now many commercials have transcended sexual roles and stereotypes. *Ursus*, for instance, shows groups of people all enjoying the beer: "Să sărbătorim împreună!"(Let us celebrate!) - referring to famous Romanian people and their achievements.

Mr. Proper is no longer just for women. It is now the help for a young cook apprentice that needs to wash up everything very quickly. Yet this might be an exception as men are generally accepted to be better at cooking than women, so the message to women is to do as the professional cooks do. So the authority tells what is to do and to use this product for efficient cleaning.

Feminists assert that 90% of the advertisements use male voiceover. Advertisers consider a male voice to have more authority. Exceptions are those products that are specially designed for female consumers. Marketers consider that on most occasions men are more likely to assume the Parent/Adult role while women are more inclined for Adult/Child roles, hence the dominance of male voiceovers in radio and TV commercials. This is still valid in the case of ads we see nowadays.

Women in Guerrilla Marketing

"*When in Rome, do as the Romans do*", but not if you want to stand out.

Guerrilla marketing is the newest method of advertising. Guerrilla marketing is an expression coined by Jay Conrad Levinson and first described in 1982 in his book Guerrilla Marketing. **Marketingterms.com** defines it as follows:

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guerrilla marketing:

Unconventional marketing intended to get maximum results from minimal resources.

Guerilla Marketing, generally speaking has the following features:

– are off the beaten path

– use unexpected methods and assault the consumer when less expected, the same as in the case of guerilla warfare

– costs are cut to a minimum

– it uses unconventional methods of promoting products or services

– can bring big and small businesses to the same level of advertising power

Some marketing professionals include online marketing in the guerrilla marketing methods because online marketing is much cheaper then any other way of traditional marketing. But most online marketing methods are just a transfer of ideas from offline marketing to online marketing as already shown in the first chapter. SEO (Search Engine Optimization) was once a novelty but now it is a pretty common method of low cost advertising, used successfully by many companies, even in Romania.

But the most efficient advertising campaigns that use guerrilla marketing are two big companies: *Ebay* and *Golden Palace Casino*. Out of the two, the second often uses shocking actions to get the attention they need.

Casino games are in many states illegal. Also, advertising gaming is banned directly on TV or in newspapers by federal law, as gambling is considered addictive and harmful, and it is often connected rightfully or not with the Mafia and money laundry-ing. Yet, the online gaming industry has been on a fast rate increase over the last few years and presently it is estimate that there are over 2000 casino sites. And being the first in the search engine listings is no longer enough as any good marketer knows that continuous marketing is a necessity to make a certain product or service profitable. The fight for the market share in the gambling industry is fierce and you always have to do something to stand out. Golden Palace Casino was founded in 1997. They started small but now they are the biggest and most important online casinos in the world. How did they get to this top position? ~ Through marketing, and especially through guerrilla marketing. Maybe you remember the Romanian boxer Mihai Leu. He was among the first sportsmen to have a Golden Palace Casino tattooed on his back during a fight broadcasted to millions of viewers. They paid one man and got their message across to billions.

Then Golden Palace thought of spicing things up a bit and getting coverage on all TV channels, which happened indeed in 2003 and 2005 by employing male and female daring streaking actions. Such occurrences were later covered by all the American media, and then taken over by the whole world.

But soon they found even cheaper methods but with even greater impact. How about the extract from the following article: "Golden Palace Casino announced today that it has added the latest acquisition to its manifest of preposterous eBay purchases by paying a 33-year-old US woman $15,199 to legally change her name to GoldenPalace.com."(www.theregister.co.uk/2005/03/31/golden_palace_rebrand/). So meet Mrs. GoldenPalace.com. Former Terri Ilagan, is the first to have sold the right to be renamed on *Ebay*, and she seems to be happy about it, as she got $15,000.

Ebay helped *Golden Palace* even more buy allowing others to come up with other strange ideas. The most common is to sell parts of your skin for advertising campaigns. Men most often sell their forehead or forearms, while women sell most often their chest.

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Photos and comments on these can be found on http://www.goldenpalaceevents.com/. The company is so proud of these achievements that they even dedicated a site to share these stories. These ads show that the strongest instinct has become the power of money and fame as these women have willingly sold services. Golden Palace just took full advantage of the possibility as any good marketer would do. Yet no other American corporation has ever used this type of advertisements.

Many have already criticized these methods especially those that involve naming the children, but no law can forbid that. From wearing a temporary tattoo on your chest, or your forehead and from selling the write to change your name to giving the right to name your unborn child demonstrates that advertising has become a deep rooted part of our daily lives and desire for wealth and fame can be successfully used by marketers to their profit. Golden Palace Casino pays a small amount of money, to get coverage all over the world. CNN, BBC, Yahoo News are just some of the giants that spread the news, that advertise through the news presented.

But as in the case of traditional marketing, guerrilla marketing uses both men and women to send their messages to the target. It is true that again it seems that women are rather treated as sex objects but in this case often the mater of choice is in the hand of those who sell their bodies. Hence, marketers now speak of human billboards.

While from a marketing point of view, guerrilla marketing is very successful, efficient and gives the best ROI (Return of investment), from a social point of view it is probably the worst as it sets no boundaries to whatever morality has become. Women have become even more libertine, more temptress but yet ready to make their own decisions regarding their body and by this to break the stereotypes. In this case feminists should have nothing to complain about as men are also used for this kind of advertising methods.

CONCLUSION

Even if advertising in the traditional marketing sector has changed over the last years, this change is not necessarily towards removing the stereotype female figures with their physical and spiritual "qualities". We can rather see a tendency to balance these female stereotypes with advertisements depicting dumb and clumsy guys. So the marketers have not actually dropped the old stereotypes, they have just added male counterpart advertisements. It is still trendy and probably, it will always be, to laugh at others. This is especially the case when the target consumer falls in the under-25-year category.

Women are still seen as sex objects and temptresses especially in ads for alcoholic drinks, or as mothers and housewives in ads for home use, and as goddesses in commercials for cosmetic products. All these put pressure on the female audience, but we have to admit that now there are more and more organizations that bring these issues to the attention of government officials and to corporate boards. And, in their turn, these organizations put pressure on companies to change their way of marketing and advertising. Some companies have already changed their branding to a less sexist approach. *Orange* for instance shows that a couple needs to go through everything together, as a couple, and then everything can be better. *Ursus* conveys the same message of equality between the sexes.

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Yet, what is still out of control is the online marketing and guerrilla marketing. This is probably because these are relatively new methods and are very dynamic. And it seems that this kind of marketers can always elude organizations control. Still, it is also a proof that women are free to do whatever they want. They can sell their bodies, their names, even their unborn babies' names and all this irrespective of the support of their husbands. This proves that women have become more independent from men but more dependent on money. But freedom without financial independence is no independence at all. The only question that remains is who influences who? Does advertising influence culture or does culture influence advertising?

So no one should put the blame on advertising whatever the reasons, as marketers, in order to make themselves understood, first of all need to use a common language and culture with that of the consumers. Pop culture is an example of what that common language is, and that is why it is sponsored by big corporations, and pop culture does promote stereotype values. But after all, money makes the world spin round and round.

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