THE NARRATIVE DIMENSION OF ADVERTISING DISCOURSE[1]

Abstract: *The study proposes to analyse the advertising discourse that uses a narrative frame in order to reconstruct a story as a sure path in promoting and selling a product. In connection with the classic species from literature, advertising discourse finds the roots of imaginary in legend, historical narration, and more often in fairy tale. Firstly this type of approach permits an idealistic presentation of the products/services, an individualization of it, and secondly involves directly the consumer as the beneficiary of hero's actions. The base of such a transgression (from narration to advertising) is the conviction that "story sales" by calling the narrative seduction of the buyer.*

Keywords: *narrative dimension, fairy tale, symbol.*

When advertising first appeared, commercials were merely an enumeration or presentation of the advantages that the product offered. However, the contemporary advertising discourse is characterized as hybrid due to a multitude of intertextual and metatextual elements or because it imitates already existent discourses. Following Greimas (Greimas, 1966:178), we can identify, in advertising, an *object of desire*, represented by the advertised product, which becomes valuable in the eyes of the addressee because it is missing (this lack can be compensated by buying the product, which becomes the helper, since it fulfils a desire) and an *opponent*, which appears once the desire to buy the product emerges and this can be the price, the competition etc.

This paper uses beer commercials (Timişoreana, Bucegi, Ciucaş), broadcasted on television, in order to identify the ways in which the narrative discourse is re-made in advertising discourse. The purpose of this transfer is to make the product more prominent in the addressee's mind and to individualize it as much as possible. The selected advertisements will be analyzed starting from the sequential scheme Jean Michel Adam (Jean Michel Adam, Marc Bonhomme, 2005: 204) developed **(initial situation – complication/trigger – actions/evaluation – dénouement/solving of situation – final situation)**, but also taking in account theoretical aspects from V.I. Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (Propp, 1970).

The World of Advertising Tales

In conveying a message, advertising uses a series of narrative schemes which make the activation of mythical structures possible. Gérard Genette distinguished between *formal* and *thematic* narratology. The former represents the analysis of narrative contents and the latter the analysis of the narrative representation, of the discourse. Another perspective belongs to Gerald Prince, who defines the tale as "a series of interconnected events, which have unity and significance and develop from beginning, to middle and end" (Gerald Prince, 2004:20).

In the advertising discourse, there are several "instances" which influence the result: the *producer* of the story - the advertising company which creates the

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commercial, the *receiver/addressee* and the *channel* which is used to send the message: television, radio, internet, and poster. The addressees are the ones who recognize, in the sequential scheme of a commercial, the pattern of the classical story from the collective conscience, and they give it a meaning according to their cultural individuality "the producers of the story organize the text according to the effects they want to obtain from the one who interprets the text. The interpretation is not only supported by the text itself, but equally by the type of reader or listener of a communicative […]" (Jean Michel Adam, Françoise Revaz, 1996:12).

The idealized presentation of the product by using the narrative dimension of the discourse has a well defined purpose – selling the product. The story creates a world, because it explains the causes which led to certain events, and some commercials are made into the form of legendary stories with the intention of explaining the appearance of the product which is being advertised. The advertising discourse uses narrative constructions based on a certain formula: "that offers clues to the public so that they can recognize the type of story and, at the same time, the type of possible ending" (Mihai Coman, 2003: 52). The advertising discourse creates imaginary worlds, but «„furnishing" a world means placing facts in a certain space and time. It means giving individuals certain characteristics, diegetic worlds» (Jean Michel Adam, *op.cit.* :30). Any story creates a unique world, with specific spatial and temporary coordinates, which is populated by legendary/mythical characters and the addressee has a very important role in constructing the meaning, staring from what is explicit in the text, but also taking into account the implicit content.

Space: The sequential character of the story is beneficial to the advertising discourse because it allows the quick movement from one frame to another. The rapid transition from one sequence to another through a narrative ellipsis does not imply the lack of a narrative space. This is built at a visual and auditory level, by borrowing elements from the fantastic tale (the emperor's castle, the animals that have human characteristics etc.) from the myth or legend (which explain the origin of a product).

Time: Speaking of the discourse time it has to be stressed that in advertising "the narrative anachrony is of two types: *anachrony through anticipation*, which is called prolepsis or cataphora and *anachrony through retrospection*, which is called analepsis or flash-back" (Moraru Mădălina, 2009:94). In the analyzed commercials, there are frequent temporary ruptures and it is the addressee's role to supply the missing data by accessing the information available through collective conscience. The story does not follow the classic pattern, only the key information is given to the receivers, so they can **re-create** the semantic ensemble and place the product among others. Some theoreticians (Seca *apud* Cmeciu, 2010:32) speak of *mental maps* of the category to which the product belongs, which the buyers can activate the moment they find out about a new product. The final aim of the story is to sell the product, to seduce the buyer through at least one of the following steps: **Learn** (the cognitive step), **Like** (the affective step), **Do** (the behavioral step) (Bonnage, Thomas *apud* Cmeciu, *op. cit*.: 50).

Character: V.I. Propp (Propp, *op.cit*: 85) identifies several types of recurrent characters in a story: the villain, the donor, the magic helper, the dispatcher, the hero, the false hero, the princess and her father. Another classification, made by Greimas (Greimas, 1966 :170), distinguishes between actors (they have certain features) and actants. „In a story, the hero, meaning the central character is the one who is animated by a desire or

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has a reason for action or a purpose to follow" (*ibidem*). The presence of only one actor does not guarantee the unity of action. In the advertising discourse, due to the sequential character, there are a small number of characters, yet one can still recognize Propp's typology. In some situations, the advertised product can become the hero of the story or the reward.

The Forms of Discourse in Advertising

Roy Paul Nelson (Roy Paul Nelosn *apud* Costin Popescu, 2005: 114) identifies 5 types of publicity that can be found in a commercial: the testimonial, the story, the slice of life, the discourse and the demonstration. If we take into account the point of view of the discourse used, the analyzed commercials can be divided into:

- *advertisements which follow the classic narrative pattern* (and are, therefore, closer to the fairy tale: Timişoreana- The Prince, Timişoreana – The Siege);
- *advertisements which explain how the product appeared* (which are closer to legends and myths: Ciucaş – The Meadow, Bucegi – The Legend);

There are situations when these two directions meet, the fairy tale elements being merged with the legendary-mythical ones (the *Ciucaş* advertisement).

Timişoreana – The Prince

This advertisement, which is called The Prince[1], follows the classic narrative pattern, thus being closer to the category of the fantastic tales. Unlike the classic tale, in the case of this advertisement, there is no narrative instance that can connect the sequences; they are connected at a visual level, by the presentation of the succession of events. There is no mention of the place and time and this indetermination is an implicit way of making the receiver to associate the narrative scheme of the commercial with that of the classic tale. Propp (Propp, *op. cit*.:26) identifies in the fantastic tale a limited number of functions ("the function is something a character does and it is well defined from the point of view of its significance in the development of the action"). These functions can be easily recognized in this audio-video commercial. It starts with a function called "lack" (*ibidem*:28) - the prince lacks something and in order to change this situation, he decides to start a journey- and this is the motivation for leaving his family. The travel is one of initiation, the hero has to pass some tests (he is tempted by women, he is accused of theft, he has to work in a factory that produces beer barrels) which finally lead him to knowledge. If we analyze the advertisement from J.M. Adam's perspective, this is how the scheme of the story will look:

[1] The commercials used as examples can be found under the same name on *www.iqads.ro*.

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Initial Situation	**Trigger 1**	**Actions/Evaluation**	**Solving/ Trigger 2**	**Final situation**
The hero begins a voyage of initiation	He is accused of theft and he becomes a common worker	He fails in finishing the work he is supposed to do	The helper intervenes	Rewarding the helper by recognizing the merits of the product

Fig.1. Timişoreana-The Prince

At the beginning, there is no reason provided for the journey, but finally this is specified. The addressee realizes at the end of the commercial that the purpose of the journey was meeting the people from the kingdom: "*You cannot lead people if you don't know them*". This can be connected with tales from Romanian oral folklore: the prince/ruler who wants to be part of the lower class in order to find out what it lacks or needs or to praise the subjects. The advertised product is part of the story; it represents a means by which the helper explains to the hero why work in the beer barrel factory is important. The acknowledgement of the product is offered in the end through "*the imperial medal offered to the most distinguished beer*" and this sends the addressee an message of trust in the quality of the beer because of its age (the argument of time), but also because it is the prince himself who tasted the beer and decided to reward it with a medal. Through this story, the beer is transferred from a class of anonymous products, into that of individualized ones, which are motivated by a story and last in time due to their qualities.

Timişoreana – The Siege

This commercial has both common traits and differences when compared to the previous one. The differences are given by the fact that in this case we deal with a heterodiegetic narrative, the flow of the actions is obtained through an omniscient narrative voice: „When the war and the thirst were killing an entire army, a simple man changed, through his kindness, the course of history. And the beneficiary did not forget about his help and offered him the praise he deserved at the inauguration of the first beer factory in Romania".

The story is placed in a specific space and time: the battlefield of the war between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs, from 1716. The hero, who is in difficulty, receives help from a person who is later rewarded for his kindness. We chose this commercial to illustrate the integrative character of the advertising discourse. Although there are pauses which could break the narrative, the coherence is ensured by the collective cultural experience of the addressee, who can integrate this story in the already familiar framework of a classic tale. This way, one can transfer and supply the missing elements from the narrative chain, without having any difficulties in understanding it. If we apply the already familiar scheme of J.M. Adam we can notice the temporary leap from one moment to the other (before and after the war), which is achieved by saying "after two years".

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Initial Situation The war	**Trigger 1** The hero is wounded, he has no power	**Actions/Evaluation** ¤	**Solving/ Trigger 2** The helper intervenes, so the hero wins the fight	**Final situation** Recognition and reward

Fig.3. Timişoreana – The Siege

If we compare it to the previous commercial, in this advertisement the product is the reward offered to the helper, instead of being the one rewarded. At the inauguration of the first beer factory in Romania, the hero recognizes the helper and offers him the possibility to be the first to taste the freshly brewed beer. Again, the argument of time is important, since Timişoreana is the first beer produced in Romania, it is better than other similar products. Another category of advertisements which use the narrative discourse is that of the commercials that present the origins of the product, which are often drawn from legends or myths. The legendary discourse is born by „connecting the *now/present* (the time of the story) with the *then/past* (the time of the event)" (Mihai Coman, 2003:87). In a folktale, the here moves in imaginary lands, but in the legend, the degree of verisimilitude is higher, this literary species being considered „the only one interested by the truth" (*ibidem*:72). This connection with the reality offers credibility to the literary discourse, so the commercial no longer „sells a story", but it is rather based on a real historical event, from which the legend appeared.

Bucegi – The legend of the Sphinx

The legend created in the advertisement for Bucegi beer combines narrative aspects with elements which are specific to the Romanian cultural background. The advertising discourse contains elements taken from this background, but it also uses certain classification and generalization elements. The place where the action happens is the natural world, at a gathering where Storyteller 1 opens the dialogue by introducing the legend of the Rock called Babele and of the Sphinx. The existence of these in the natural environment is a testimony that guarantees the truth of the legends invoked. Storyteller 2's intervention, who speaks about the origin of Bucegi beer, cannot be contradicted, because of the existence of the product. The detailed explanation of the brewing process (high-quality hop, barley) and the association of cultural elements (the legend of the rocks called Babele and of the Sphinx) lead to a clear positioning of the product in the addressee's mind. The intertextual sentences connect two types of texts: the adverting text which alludes to the anterior one (the well-known legend). Based on this combination, the legend of Bucegi beer is constructed.

> Storyteller 1: The legend says that some shepherdesses climbed the mountain with the sheep and here they became rocks, because they missed their lovers too much. The Sphinx was also a brave young man, who is now this magnificent rock.
> Storyteller 2: People say that this cold beer also comes from Bucegi. When reaching the plains, the cold mountain water is mixed with hop and barley, and it gets this golden and foamy color.

The succession of visual elements (the plains, the Sphinx, Babele), auditory (the orally-transmitted legends), the placing of the beer bottle in the front (in the background, we can see the storytellers, the listeners and the Sphinx) are some of the

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important elements that help building the brand. The legendary elements create a precedent for the product, a history built on an imaginary level, which makes the product more valuable.

Ciucaş – The Meadow

The advertisement which Gavrilă&Co. produced combines elements of legend (by explaining the process through which the product appeared) with those of a fantastic tale (a fairy tale world, created at a visual level by using fantastic characters, the personified stag, and the grand castle). The alternation of evaluating sentence (which give arguments and motivations for the product) and narrative-descriptive sentence, makes the scriptural and iconic elements particular. The process of individualization and the placement of the product among similar ones work through two key-components: verbal and non-verbal (several senses being involved: the sight, the hearing, and the taste):

> The secret of Ciucaş Meadow is that every thing has its own purpose. From the clear water to the sun-roasted hop, from the carefully supervised malt to the yeast. Each of them is part of Ciucaş beer. A beer made by the laws of nature.

In this commercial, the narrative dimension is sustained by the descriptive dimension. The rhetoric of images and words help informing and persuading the public.

Final considerations

The narrative dimension of the advertising discourse helps the idealized presentation of reality, building worlds in which the product or the service provided has a dominant role. The advertising campaigns use the narrative discourse especially for products that are consumed on a large scale, which need individualization: the creation of such commercials is influenced by the target audience, by mass culture, which still contains stereotypical elements that can be used, or by national conceptions and ideas (a target audience which is rooted in a popular culture, familiarized with epical schemes and mythical/fantastical figures). Since the advertising discourse became an important means of communication, it is a major factor of creation, preservation and distribution of cultural values.

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