ADVERTISING AND THE ROAD MAP FROM COMMUNISM TO DEMOCRACY

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Abstract: This paper carries the transition framework from Communism to Democracy. The first attitude of the Romanians, typical of other people from former communist countries, was to deny their past, one that was highly connected to the much hated now "red values" and generated unpleasant memories. However, being still anchored in their personal past, lifestyles, and, sometimes, fears, such a reality was tolerated for a while, as transition proved a difficult challenge for the people hovering between communist life-style nostalgia and an emerging full of expectations paradise. Nostalgia was subsequently contemplated only by the elderly, for whom the new system was suddenly dangerous because they lacked the abilities or knowledge to fit in. Gradually, advertising becomes more professional, business-like, operating as an agency between the new products and the Romanian people's consciousness. The automotive industry, boasting the foreign car every Romanian had been dreaming of, initially penetrated the 1990s market with second-hand cars which started competing with the Dacia and the old Romanian Oltcit cars. Advertisements promoting jeans and foreign cigarettes, such as Assos, Gauloises, Rothmans, etc, became extremely popular. Likewise, "subscribed" to different TV shows every night, the Romanian population became easily lured by the TV commercial advertisements as well as by the famous TV manufacturing companies. Humor was also identified as an excellent brand promoting strategy as Romanians generally prefer irony, banter and sarcasm to any other attitude towards life. Humor, she holds, may be embedded in all the advertising forms and means capable of re-enacting old folk Romanian characters, memorable jokes that can be associated with many product categories regardless of price or quality.

Keywords: advertising; road-map; communism; democracy; advertisements

1. The Transition Framework from Communism to Democracy

The fracture of communism, typically marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 10, 1989, indicated the "decisive collapse" (Fukuyama, 1992:25) of the apparently invincible communist puzzle and the aspiring hope of the Romanian people to a homogeneous political and economic system. Revolts had already begun in Poland and spread throughout Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Eastern Germany and Romanian in a simultaneous surge (Gruegel, 2008) and although Central and Eastern European countries reacted similarly to this transition from an authoritarian, dictatorial system to a democratic one, they adapted differently to the Western mentality. In fact, Romania entered the post-communist period far behind countries such as Hungary and Poland "in terms of overall acceptance of considerations regarding consumer satisfaction, marketing mix, and operational efficiency" (Lascu, 1993:103).

Analysing the Romanian market transformation of the time as compared to other former Iron curtain states, Dana Lascu (1993) holds that the very socialism that had developed its own brands and symbols of power, continued to influence the post communist public mentality and behaviour long after historically it had ceased to exist in Romania. Harald Wydra (2012), on the other hand, argues that communism had created many indestructible life-patterns that could neither be changed nor reconverted overnight to democratic habits, therefore the emerging new

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society had to be built from scratch. In more specific terms, the red paradise is said to have been followed by two systematic and final destructions of the past that included political institutions, economic structures, traditional rural environments, established social hierarchies, as well as the Romanian symbols and identities (56).

The advertising industry underwent important changes in post 1990 Romania and the subsequent re-invention of advertising is firmly related to the features of the political system, professionals' training, and consumer needs (Moraru, 2015:280). In Moraru's view, the constantly evolving consumer behaviour as well as the transformation of the advertising agencies developed two contrasting trends during the post communist transition period, one triggered by the fact that brands denied their past and the other one caused by the brands' endurance and stability (281).

The first attitude of the Romanians, typical of other people from former communist countries, was to deny their past, one that was highly connected to the much hated now "red values" and generated unpleasant memories. However, being still anchored in their personal past, lifestyles, and, sometimes, fears, such a reality was tolerated for a while, as transition proved a difficult challenge for the people hovering between communist life-style nostalgia and an emerging full of expectations paradise. Nostalgia was subsequently contemplated only by the elderly, for whom the new system was suddenly dangerous because they lacked the abilities or knowledge to fit in. To the collectivist social mindset sustained by the communist ideology a democratic liberation of the individual was opposed therefore the transition period was dominated by a co-existence of communist symbols and signs of capitalism, a sort of "link between capitalist transitional hardships and communist nostalgic commitments" (Bartmanski, 2011:215). Consumerism, market variety, freedom of choice, poverty, and globalization operated as nostalgia triggers of the "Golden Epoch" and marked at the same time the post-communist democracy that was to be reflected in various approaches to the economy and politics of this period.

2. Market freedom, consumerism and advertising

From a highly rationalized, collective registered consumption, the Romanian market was forced to adjust to the individualistic behaviour of consumers who decided "to spend their income on aspirations rather than needs" (Moraru, 2015:282). Most consumers became attracted by the alluring capitalist goods and, at least for a while, ignored the local products. This was largely due to the fact that the transitional trade regulations neither stimulated exports and/or imports, nor helped any foreign investments rather the trend was dominated by an increase in consumption goods imports (Baboilă & Baboilă, 2011:1568). The high inflation rates, economic recession and unemployment level soon led to the development of several survival strategies and deep concern about the country's future. The transition period was dominated by an uncontrolled relationship between existing market offers and consumer demands, on the one hand, and the vacillation between global and local goods, on the other.

The attitudes of post-communist consumers towards the outburst of their market and opening to Western goods were largely positive, most of them being extremely receptive to the new trade, at least during the first 10 years following the 1989 fracture of communism. Market freedom was immediately associated with capitalism and the political governments underscored the necessity for the acceleration of economic prosperity by advocating a new ideology of the

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free market and democratic commercialism. However, the launch of market reforms was hesitating and less enthusiastic than expected as "both businesses and consumers waded into a market economy lacking the experience that Western populations had accumulated over nearly a century of advertising encounters" (Serazio & Szarek, 2012: 756–757).

Advertising was an almost non-existent concept during the last decades before the anti-communist Revolution in 1989, because the field was considered a "capitalistic virtue" and "an engine of free market economy" (Mittal, 1994:35). In Romania, all advertising practices were monopolized, propagandistic (Petcu, 2002:71) and were to promote only state and the so-called 'cooperative department stores', the anti-consumerist attitude being included in daily propaganda. Advertising had been labeled as wasteful during the communist period because production was constantly associated with people's needs hence distribution was uncomplicated, non-competitive and, as a rule, the "absence of competition and product differentiation either among manufactures or retailers did nothing to create any need for advertising" (Markham, 1964:32).

Surprisingly, the Soviets did not completely reject the most effective way to promote market resources, given that advertising is important for increasing economic growth. Nevertheless, in the context of World War II and of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, the realm of advertising was labeled as wasteful because the goods production was constantly associated with the people's needs and their distribution was uncomplicated and non-competitive. According to Markham, the "absence of competition and product differentiation either among manufactures or retailers did nothing to create a need for advertising" (1964:32).

Despite the lack of enthusiasm for the foreign capital shown by the new Bucharest political regime that came to power in December, 1989, the dawn of a new advertising era heralded the profound economic changes of the country. Advertising "remains an intrinsic part of the capitalist system, therefore the expansion of advertising into a Communist system is a fascinating study on the merging of the two systems" (Ciochetto, 2005:57).

The press experienced a radical metamorphosis, embracing a new ideology almost overnight. From being loyal defenders of the regime, the journalists now start inviting Romanian people to buy foreign products. Advertisement makers and promoters swiftly discover the visual impact of images and TV screens throughout the country start broadcasting ads for *Pepsi, Adidas, Aquafresh, Bonibon* and other products.



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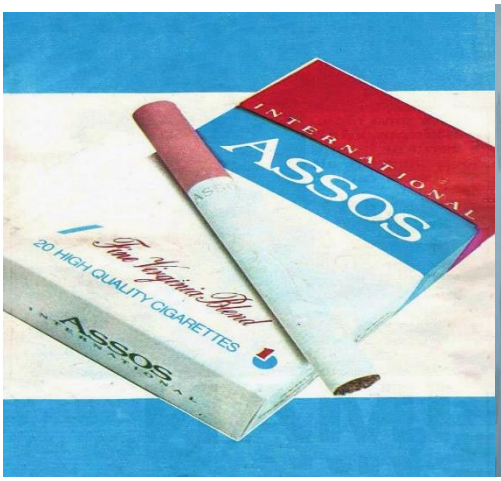
Gradually, advertising becomes more professional, business-like, operating as an agency between the new products and the Romanian people's consciousness. The automotive industry, boasting the foreign car every Romanian had been dreaming of, initially penetrated the 1990s market with second-hand cars which started competing with the *Dacia* and the old Romanian *Oltcit* cars.

The newspapers of the early nineties welcomed foreign makes, inviting Romanians to buy the attractive *Mercedes*, *Opel* and other German imported cars. Very appealing, particularly to men, the cars soon started to compete not only with the cosmetics that made the women of the time indulge in fashionable shopping sprees but also with the candy that were particularly appealing to children.

Advertisements promoting jeans and foreign cigarettes, such as *Assos*, *Gauloises*, *Rothmans*, etc, became extremely popular. Likewise, "subscribed" to different TV shows every night, the Romanian population became easily lured by the TV commercial advertisements as well as by the famous TV manufacturing companies, such as *Panasonic*, *Philips*, *Samsung*, *Sony*, etc[1].

[1]Images were available at: https://www.google.ro/search?q=Bonibon+reclama+pepsi+comunist&rlz=1C1AOHY_enRO708RO709&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjKz4yUss7TAhXFtRoKHU1zBrYQsAQIHw&biw=1155&bih=644#tbm=isch&q=+reclama+televizor+vechi+Panasonic,+Philips,+Samsung,++comunism&imgrc=mSSjUjXXIzUtlM:

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The IT industry proves particularly active in this period, abounding in advertisements for the *Logic*, *Standard Commercial*, *Ice Felix*, *Microcomputer*, *Innovator Computer* companies, etc. The computer, promoted and advertised by means of particularly aggressive campaigns, quickly conquered the Romanian market.

Undoubtedly, any assessment of the advertising phenomenon of the period would have to place the car industry on the top list of advertised products. The emergence of the South Korean *Daewoo* car company[2] on the international market as well as its placement in the Romanian city of Craiova enhanced the dynamics of the Romanian market and increased the national demand for "Western cars" at the expense of the *Dacia* national brand that sought to create highly attractive advertisements so as to counteract the wave of massive car imports. To this, a major contribution was also brought by the advertising pages of the *Adevărul* and *România liberă* newspapers that hosted persistent ads for the *Opel*, *Peugeot*, *Nissan*, *Mercedes* car manufacturers.

[2] Source of the picture: https://www.google.ro/search?q=daewoo+car+communism&rlz=1C1AOHY_enRO708RO709&tbm=isch&imgil=sJQIio_irH-agM%253A%253BihMaS7aIzMLrEM%253Bhttps%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.cars.com%25252Fresearch%25252Fdaewoo-lanos%25252F&source=iu&pf=m&fir=sJQIio_irH-agM%253A%252CihMaS7aIzMLrEM%252C_&usg=__NmEpbZsI8YxxYwWTiSuBl0Gi6fI%3D&biw=1155&bih=644&ved=0ahUKEwjJlsOhwM7TAhUEVhoKHUx6CLgQyjcILw&ei=BRAHWYmAAoSsacz0ocAL#tbm=isch&q=reclama+daewoo+car+&imgrc=CpcHsqYe8DZaDM:

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Within this context, advertising became an everyday phenomenon and no product would be conceivably launched on the market without consistent and adequate advertising, even if, often times, this was hardly ever convincing. Advertising newspaper pages became a reflecting mirror for the changes Romania had undergone throughout the first decade following the collapse of the communist regime. Ranging from cosmetics and pharmaceuticals to *Pepsi* and the very convenient denim jeans, from the IT and automotive industries to the banking mirage and the ever more appealing invitations to visit other European countries flying the *TAROM* airlines, advertising became "a chronicle of the post-communist history" (Sigmirean, 2015:6), a repository of accumulated frustrations and boundless aspirations alike of the Romanian people.

3. Advertising agencies in post-communist Romania

The first Romanian advertising agency was founded by David Adania in Bucharest in 1880. After 1906, advertising became more institutionalized, as most traders in Bucharest were able to publish their clients' ads in any local or foreign periodical. Publicity back in those days promoted a wide range of products and services. Clients paid for the advertising of farming machinery, inns, tea brands, Jamaican rum, sugar, chocolate, Verona salami, toothache tinctures or hair growth lotions[3].

One way to boost advertisements in the early 20th century was stating that your product was appreciated by the Royal House or by His Royal Highness, the King. Sophisticated ads targeted moneyed people and refined tastes became increasingly common during the interwar period. Unfortunately, that began to change during the communist regime when, in the absence of a market economy, all advertisements became commonplace, uninteresting and often times

[3] Information was available at: http://old.rri.ro/arh-art.shtml?lang=1&sec=170&art=32468

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cheap and kitsch-like.

The emergence context of the advertising agencies in communist countries and the way their activity inspired local agencies to compete on the market is amply discussed by Mădălina Moraru in her study entitled: *Transition from Communism to Democracy in Romanian Advertising* (2015). In this study, based on a theoretical framework, she emphasizes the way agencies have developed, holding that the Romanian industry represents a good example of post-communist development given its dynamic evolution and successful participation in the International Advertising Festival. She distinguishes between the states that encouraged advertising even during communism (Russia, Hungary, Poland, East Germany) and those that rediscovered advertising much later (for example, the Balkan states and Romania).

Owing much of its success to early economic reforms and investor-friendly policies in the advertising field (Reed, 2000), Hungary was a serious competitor of the countries in the region — such as Slovakia, Ukraine, or Romania — whose free-market debut was not as confident or so much supported by foreign investments (Wilson, 2006). In Romania, as well as in Hungary, the local agencies entered the market mainly through creativity and BTL (below-the line) services and were steadily involved in promoting domestic brands, while the global agencies focused on both BTL (below the line) and ATL (above the line) services, considering their financial and organizational capital. The agencies development was facilitated by the Romanian consumers' ever-increasing trust in the advertising role in the society as well as the transforming power of products to brands and the necessity for people and products to communicate their values. While consumers from Western Europe use advertising to deal with competition, buyers from Central and Eastern Europe get knowledge about products (Heyder et al.,1992). However, Romania recovered its cultural and financial capital soon after the fall of communism but more slowly than in other former communist countries, accelerating market and agency development starting 1990.

Throughout the first decade of the post-communist Romanian advertising, professionals in the business resorted to deliberate socio-cultural associations embedding nostalgia, patriotism and pride so as to reactivate their consumers' loyalty. On the newly emerging market, global and local brands met each other and started serious competition for notoriety, by exploiting the so-called "adtopias" (Simon, 1999).

The Western multinational agencies took advantage of the Romanian young democratic markets and soon brought their clients for regional business expansion. Advertising professionals in Romania developed chaotically initially, as employees and agencies were lacking advertising education, training or experience. Professionals learned to advertise by working in other agencies abroad and they acquired a learning-by-doing experience, the first entrepreneurs being foreign investors or Romanians studying and living abroad. As a result, "six multinational agencies had already conquered the Romanian advertising market by 1994" (Rhea, 1996:62), bringing more local agency business. In a short while, the top professionals working in multinationals decided to become more independent and created new local and specialized agencies on the market. During the economic crisis that started in 2009, the local agencies became more competitive due to top selling and more affordable products and domestic brands. Following the first advertising transition stage from communism to democracy, the Romanian market embarked on the Western-oriented complex process of transformation and adaptation by "encouraging a center-oriented robust economy" (Rhea, 1996:89).

4. Between importing brands and the (re)assertion of national identity

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Brands act on different markets regardless of global or local features. Indeed, according to William Mazarella "the global is constructed locally just as much as the local is constructed globally" (2003:17), and advertising is to be found at the intersection of consumerist globalization, aesthetic politics, and visual culture. In his book, *Shoveling Smoke* (2013), he examines the complex cultural politics of mass consumerism in a globalized marketplace, showing how the contemporary Indian advertising industry developed from the mass consumption during the 1980s as a self-conscious challenge to the austerities of what he calls a "state-led developmentalism". Nigel Hollis (2010) sees a similar global acceptance through local expression, however he argues that advertising standardization should be (re)considered as per the interest in successfully promoting a global brand on any type of market. In this sense, he sees a "powerful role for the national culture and the purchasing drive for both the global and local brands of a nation" (2010:136).

The theoretical framework of the *Brand Positioning* concept started to take shape, as early as 1972, on the basis of a series of articlespublished in the *Advertising Age* by Jack Trout and Al Ries most suggestivelyentitled *The Positioning Era*. Later, in their classic book, entitled *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (2001), rated as top 10 media and marketing books of all time[4], Trout and Ries extended their concept and expounded why "positioning" a product in a prospective customer's mind does still remain *the* most important strategy in business, According to them, positioning helps deliver the commercial message directly to the customer's mind, integrating the brand in his world of connections and similarities. The first approach of this meaning is not to bring something completely new, but to somehow control the consumer's mind. The concept of brand positioning was further enriched by Luc Dupont (1999), who argues that people often confuse brands and are satisfied to only use products without paying much attention to their identity. "Let's be honest. The difference is not in the toothpaste tube, the soft-drink bottle or the strength of the detergent. The difference is, in fact, in the personality of the consumer. We do not buy products, we buy positioning" (1999:13). In his book, 1001 *Advertising TIPS* (1999), Dupont provides ways to position a product or service and holds that positioning becomes critical in case of massive brand invasion in the same product category. Every brand develops its category and product lines, and its main purpose is to extend the brand name and create sub-brands, however, in the process, the brand history, the product origin country and the subjective impact on the consumers must be taken into consideration.

With regard to Romanian brand positioning, a thorough study was conducted by Mădălina Moraru (2012) who analyzed the positioning types for several local and international brands and established a close correspondence between them. She finds that the highest percentage is represented by positioning through product qualities/services, while positioning through history (history-based) tops the chart of local brands. She also holds that brands born before the democratic era rely on their history so as to gainconsumer trust, in other words, their credibility relies on long-lasting market authority andthe need to recover the past by revitalizing their image. On the other hand, brands of notorietyare not concerned with this evolutionary aspect, most likely because theyalready rely on history through tradition and market priority. She finds that there is a bigdifference between the two brand categories with respect to the relationships between brand,consumer and product. While global brands reveal objective positioning features, focusing on product qualities, consumers,and use, local brands focus on

[4] http://adage.com/article/ad-and-marketing-book-reviews/al-ries-jack-trout-s-positioning-marketing-book/134945/

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subjective features such as history, symbolicaspects and consumers. Consumers occupy the third place in both situations and the only type exclusive to global brands is leader positioning, developed byfamous brands such as *Vodafone, Coca-Cola*, *Windows 7*, etc.

In another recent study on the penetration of the European brands on the Romanian market of the 1990s Mădălina Moraru (2015) holds that Romanian advertising in this period found a glocalized way to develop brand identity and in so doing, the transition from communism to democracy is said to have brought about the transformation of the market and consumers' mentality. The balance of the industry between the global and local influences was nonetheless determined, in her view, by both the Romanian consumers' profile and the country's economic development.

In order to trace how the media has progressed throughout this time and how it managed to convey a bolder message to promote global and even local brands, Moraru takes the old-surviving ROM chocolate-bar brand[5] and associates it with the evolution of the Romanian market and the consumers' mentality at the time. Her study is twofold: to assess the evolution of the Romanian brands during the past two decades as well as to examine both the adapting effort to the European level of advertising and the way local specificity was built through unfolding the national pride embedded in the local brands.



Her results are interesting and show interesting processes. With regard to the relationship between local specificity and global influences in Romanian post-communist advertising, she finds that importing global values was largely determined by the so-called iconic worldwide "advertising culture." Indeed, thematically at least, an idealistic image of the world, with happy families, entertainment, parties with friends, and a number of other stereotypes are undoubtedly inclusive of symbols unfolding the global influence over local advertising. She further quotes in this respect the significance of the narrative patterns taken over from top brands, as is that belonging to the *Procter & Gamble* brand which operates as a schema that could be successfully applied to other product categories as well. Generally, such schema establishes a problem, looks for its solution in the form of a product, celebrates the success of overcoming the problem and finally highlights the brand signature. Actually, this pattern is nothing more than a fairy-tale in

[5] Picture taken from: https://www.google.ro/search?q=ciocolata+rom+reclama+comunism&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiRuMK8qtDTAhVLCsAKHdSkC3UQ_AUIBigB&biw=1155&bih=644#imgrc=Ur0PduetU1zoOM:

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which the hero is the product or the brand itself. She finds that production techniques, online networks, and international creative competitions are the most effective global influences over Romanian advertising.

In terms of the solutions proposed by the respondents of her study, Moraru (288) indicates that the best way to find an authentic voice in European advertising consists in conveying its specificity through effective techniques of creativity, which are particular features that professionals intentionally use to localize ads. Most respondents expressed firm beliefs in the tradition, ethos, and anthropology-based approaches that represent the most widely-used specific features of local advertising. The respondents constantly mentioned the rural area, natural landscapes, and especially the myth of return to one's origin all of which could be reflected in advertising by an unpolluted atmosphere, virgin soil, and fresh products. The feeling of patriotism that has been more recently reactivated as national pride after having been demystified by the unpleasant and nostalgic memories about communism, was still very powerful across a good segment of consumer perception and could be revived, respondents believed, by re-enacting snippets of it in ads that are apt to recapture one's childhood memories, the history of older brands, and everything else that may be connected to the 'Romanianness' concept[6] (the feeling and living in a Romanian way).

Humour was also identified as an excellent brand promoting strategy as Romanians generally prefer irony, banter and sarcasm to any other attitude towards life. Humor, she holds, may be embedded in all the advertising forms and means capable of re-enacting old folk Romanian characters, memorable jokes that can be associated with many product categories regardless of price or quality.

Another surprising finding of the study is the negative perception of the capability of Romanian advertising to adapt to capitalist standards, because globalization is a mindset often associated with the destruction of Romanian identity. However, a critical issue that the study considered regarded the defining of the "local brand" term. After the Revolution, the market registered three main categories of brands, and their situation reflected the evolution of advertising and the transition from a communist producer mentality to democratic trade. First of all, several brands ceased production after 1990, lacking the strength to improve and promote their products through effective communication. The second category survived through various strategies focusing on brand capital, while the last is inclusive of the newly born brands of democracy. Moraru (291) lists an impressive range of strategies used by the surviving, successful brands such as the ROM chocolate, *Dacia* (cars), *Bucegi* and *Timișoreana* (beer), *Eugenia* (biscuits), *Dero* (detergents), *Napolact* (dairy), *Gerovital* (cosmetics), or *Plafar* (herbs and teas) These brands, she maintains, liberated themselves from their past and history by modernizing their capital and, more often than not, this strategy represented a disguised rebranding.

For brands, having their own history and survive on the market involves achieving a certain level of maturity, communicating constantly, and, most relevantly, it involves re-brand positioning and product innovation. There are powerful stories in the Romanian brand history

6 For a better understanding of the term, see Cristian Norocel, "Heteronormative Constructions of Romanianness: A Genealogy of Gendered Metaphors in Romanian Radical-Right Populism 2000-2009", in Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe, Vol. 19, Issues 1-2, 2011; Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Central European University Press, 2001.

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during the past 24 years that have become memorable and have helped consumers establish personal relationships with some brands, mainly by creating brand events and a successful experiential marketing environment along with the rediscovery of their national identity and pride.

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