

NARRATIVES OF CULTURAL VALUE IN ROMANIAN ADVERTISING

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Abstract: *Communication can no longer be defined today without reference to culture, as these both tailor human's existence. Spiritual and affective values are embedded in culture and inherent in all types of communication, while people's identity, emergent in discourse, is defined culturally and communicated in inordinate narratives. More than that, globalization and internationalization make worldwide values merge and define the messages to fit a society in continuous transformation. In this context, the present paper looks at the way narratives are structured when they surpass literary genre and migrate to the realm of media and advertising.*

Keywords: *narratives, cultural values, advertising, discourse*

1. Introduction

Naturally, the texts that ensure the interaction of individuals in society are meaning born discourses whose analysis and narrative structure extend the meaning beyond literary genres. The narratology of discourse and the analysis of stylistic elements that determine the existence of a text together with the pragmatic features, contextualizing the text within the social, in series of events with characters, places, humans or local representations in the way they appear in the author's cultural code are theoretically differentiated in classifications brought by Jahn (2005), emergent from Chatman's (1978) and Prince's (1982) approaches.

If Chatman differentiates the form from the content in a narrative and looks at the story (content) as all that builds it- people, places and actions, separated from the form all these take in order to be communicated, (as seen in fig.1), Prince brings up the importance of readers and the limits of the text in decoding meaning as well as the contributions personal references bring to the construction of meaning generating, in turns, texts of their own. In contrast, Jahn differentiates between narratives based on the communication channel into printed, performed and non-narrative (i.e. style or form- description, argument). Transgressing the literary genres, all these are applicable in all discourses considered today, from politics to media and from advertising to textbooks.

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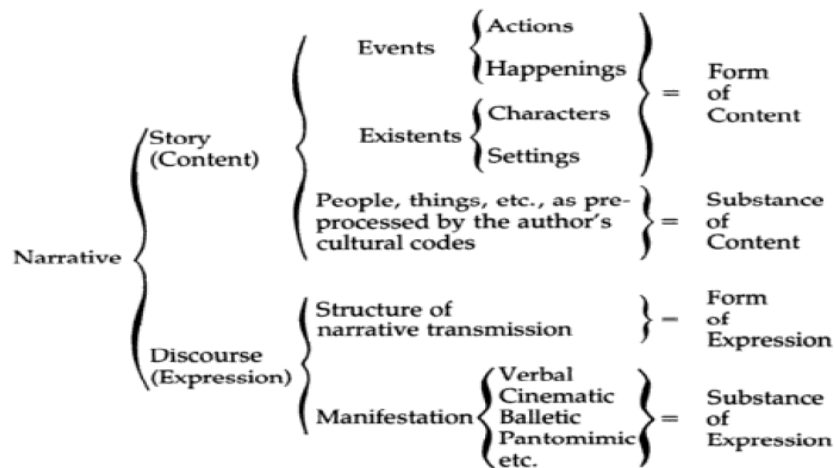


Fig. 1. *Form and content in a narrative (Chatman, 1978, p. 26)*

All this in relation to the fact that the process of communication itself is seen from the perspective of narrative structures and a discourse considers any series of events connected in a temporal and causal way as semiotic representation (Landa, 2005), so that all texts are seen as narratives that can be interpreted in inordinate ways. The pattern of action, the temporal structure (Bal, 1991) and the text as well, the action and the story (Barthes, 1977), the actors (Bremond, 1980; Greimas, 1966) seen as implied or uncertain actors, responsible for their own experiences, the type of implied or uncertain narrator and the manner of expression (Booth, 1983), fictional time (Ricoeur, 1990) but also the narrative situation (relationships, involvement, distance, awareness and acquaintance, voice, focalization, dependence (Jahn, 2005) and capacity of expression in relation to time), all these manifest themselves differently sometimes, yet similarly at other times, especially if the text under lens is an advertising product.

2. Theoretical Background

The analysis of a narrative structure in the context where the narrative structures spreading worldwide are limitless (Barthes, 1977) and present everywhere in our surroundings (Fludernik, 2006) decodes advertising stories as mirroring individual and collective experiences. In this respect, fresher perspectives (Abbot, 2009; Ryan, 2006) speak about the advertising narrative structures' capacity to generate both semiotic resources and an answer to social needs as a result of understanding and interpreting messages, seen as inherent characteristics, since most narrative structures are spread worldwide in various types of media (Jahn, 2005). Advertising, just like journalism and any other public communication products, builds texts based on other texts with co-constructed meaning in an infinite intertextuality with a dissipated time that makes use of more than one temporal axis- the narrative tense, the real event tense, the information tense and the decoding tense. Advertising discourses are relevant not only

linguistically but also through highlights of social roles played by social actors, through power and control relationships of replicated identities with verbal and nonverbal various manifestations. The social reality created by the advertising text, on the other hand, shapes identities in interaction (Besnier, 2004; Hall, 2003; Park, 2004), identities that are never autonomous because they always get social gain in relation to other identities and other social actors and build themselves in contexts with every translation of meaning for each and every targeted individual. Identities are built through antagonistic relationships including similarity and difference, originality and artificiality, authority and anonymity, adequacy and distinction (with people situated similarly in an interaction or people situated differently due to their inherent differences)

3. Culturally Embedded Advertising Content

In order to study narratives in Romanian advertising, cultural values that drive sense and explain bridges of meaning between the advertisement producers and the targeted public in the larger context of European values need to be considered as follows: appreciation for aesthetics, intellectualism, tradition, leisure, sensuality, family and friendship; more than that, in a transition to American values through the phenomenon of globalization, equality, individuality, hard work, hard play, sky is the limit attitude, freedom, mobility, safety, competition, efficiency are to be considered as becoming inherent in societies where American pop culture involves itself. Framed by all these, the Hofstede (1991) criteria provide contextualization and codes of translation for the semiotic meaning which the advertising products bear within the Romanian society. Exploring the Hofstedian cultural dimensions, the local specific character of a country is understood and patterns of expression in Romanian advertising can be traced, in terms of the reasons that drive people's social learning and national manifestation in relation to other cultures. The attitude towards higher status, the degree of interdependence, attitude in life, uneasiness to threats of various natures, the way people hold the connection with past and impulse control speak differently for each society and Romania makes no difference, visible in advertising as well, as in any other socio-cultural product.

In other words, Romanian society accepts hierarchical order without much justification, while working relationships are unevenly balanced and leadership is autocratic. A collectivistic people in itself, the Romanians develop long term commitments to their groups in which every individual feels responsible for his peers and interactions develop on moral terms. Caring for others and for the quality of life, Romanians are concentrated on liking what they do and people focus on work in order to earn their living. Socially and historically tailored to avoid uncertainties, Romanian culture promotes an emotional need for rules, busy time and security while innovations are resisted and punctuality is the norm. Maintaining links with its own past, Romanian culture maintains traditions in most part of the country while the urban and industrialized areas prepare for the future in a more pragmatic approach. As far as indulgence is concerned, Romanian culture is inclined to cynicism and pessimism. They

do yet place great importance on leisure time and control their desires, telling themselves that social norms restrain all that is not compliant.

Casting a theoretical look at the field, advertising makes use of psychoanalysis in order to be effective and cling to people's metacognition, to convince by using the hidden meaning of things. All products thus become representative elements for lifestyle, real totemic artefacts of the social groups. Purchasing and using a product at the impulse advertising gives individuals becomes equivalent to gaining a certain social identity, since people communicate the type of person they are in a modern world by means of consumption patterns (Simons, Slob, Holswilder, Tucker, 2001). Stereotypes and social identity are presented in advertised products through narratives that speak about leisure time and positive aspects of life placed in the context of Romanian cultural values. The downside yet is that the aesthetics in the content is subdued to the commercial for practical and financial reasons only.

Shed in this light, the narratives that build advertising are all based on social needs and thus trends emerge in communication patterns- the trend to be rich, to be attractive, to be healthy, a domineering attitude and social prestige. For these, references are made to food, maternal protection, hospitality, sociability, reputation and warranties. The purchase and possession desires are triggered by targeted strategies as well: personal experiences that endorse trust, repetition of messages in various other contexts with other actors and scenery that ensure retention and personal prestige that gives credit for quality. In general, the forms that advertising takes in its way to the targeted public are suggestion, on the one hand, and argumentation on the other.

Suggestion can vary in its power to succeed based on gender, age, education, social strata. For this, different coding strategies are employed:

- Chronological - the events presented in the narratives are shown as they happen;
- Spatial-actions in the narrative are presented using the cinematographic technique, similar to the way they are perceived by humans- with augmentation and fictional dimensions, with spectacular movements and fantastic dimensions in space
- Associative - mental connections are made based on rationale;
- Deductive - it is initiated with a statement and continues with images, words, facts and details that support it;
- Inductive - facts that sustain a statement presented at the end of the narrative are introduced to the public.

Related to content, positive suggestion is more favorable than the negative one – a message with a product that does good is more efficient than a product whose qualities highlight that it does not do harm. A suggestion-based advertising will always hint at toiletries, leisure, clothing, cleanliness. Conversely, argumentation advertising is efficient for products like cars and technical products.

4. Content Analysis

“We must prepare young people for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds” (Armean, 2018, p. 13) is the Center for Media Literacy’s view when speaking about its UNESCO mission. Bringing under lens the “most wanted” advertising in Romania in 2017 and 2018, the present analysis will concentrate on television (YouTube basically) broadcasted advertisements since viewers, the so-called light viewers, in Romania still watch TV shows a lot. It is important to mention at this point that there is a change in the way people use TV devices. What is important in this context is that the TV screen has witnessed a high rise in its use for YouTube in general, and for advertising watching in particular. As a result, statistics have recorded a 45% increase in the use of TV for YouTube watching compared to the previous year in the EU. As a result, television has been added as a device in targeting and reporting of the Google Ads campaigns along with computers, mobile phones and tablets.

As far as the content is concerned, we mention food advertisements (Cabral, with Lay’s, in *Gustul Lay’s te cucerește cu zambete & premii!* - The Lay’s taste appeals to you with smiles and prizes), for toiletries (Andreea Esca for Nivea in *Descoperă alături de Andreea Esca secretul NIVEA Q10 POWER pentru un ten cu aspect tânăr!* - discover the NIVEA Q10 Power secret with Andreea Esca for a young looking complexion), Antonia with Avon (Prinde-te in Hora Frumusetii – Join the Beauty Folkdance) OLX with *The #bebebine grant* (OLX.ro – Indemnizația de #bebebine - The well-to-do baby Grant) and technological equipment devices (Micutzu with CatMobile - *Nu știi când te lovește ghinionul* - You never know when bad luck strikes).

They display stories on common activities, dialogues from the mundane of human lives in settings connected to common people and problems that need daily solutions. The context introduces the idea as suggestions, in a pleasant, joyful and relaxed way. Time is indefinite, there is a time of the action that is non-referential, the time when the message is decoded and it brings no influence on the meaning of the message and the time the message is produced, which leaves no traces on the general understanding. The characters are overtly famous and public persons or suggested as such. The places as settings where the action unfolds are each time adjusted to correspond both to the product and to the user- social gatherings, shops, recording studios, the playground, etc. The stories built around the significant characters suggest richness, attractiveness, health, a domineering attitude and social prestige. Looking at cultural values, one does scarcely identify pessimism and cynicism in the stories Romanians produce or watch to internalize (an example could be the advertisement or CatMobile - mobile phone protection devices with the slogan “One does not know when bad luck strikes”).

American and European values are appealed to, also. These are: freedom, leisure, efficiency and competition. Classifications of the most viewed advertising in 2017 and 2018, mentioned above, are made with algorithms that measure user’s intention to see a certain advertisement as well as the user’s interaction with the ad itself- watch time, shares, organic views, as compared to the paid ones. Their stories involve emotion based on connection to family, children and music and make use of original pieces of music created especially for the idea they run to be effective. The problem is that they are

consumed in motion, on mobile devices and in a process of multitasking, therefore solutions had to be found to ensure continuation and permanent exposure to the advertised idea. Thus, video campaigns develop sequential stories that appeal to sequences of formats and messages to be delivered as serials in the form of video advertisements to keep track of the previous stories. In this way, the targeted public can be held active and focused.

Connected to this, the bumper ads that complement TrueView and Google Preferred have been introduced in Romania as well, at the end of the 2017, as very short six second-commercial videos, delivered especially on mobile devices. Content is mostly oriented on technology, fashion and beauty but the contribution is yet poor, as compared to the proportion of existent advertising. They are a new instrument of getting through to the public to bring effectiveness, since they do not allow being skipped in visualization and they are used for reach, teasing or reminder, for offers or new product launch, having been included in most of the video short stories strategies.

Along with these, commercial spots that either represent promotions for cultural values embedded in nationally tagged products or promotions for internationally marketed products yet advancing national values are better received due to an easier internalization. As examples, we mention the advertising spot that promotes 4G internet option in a totally Romanian, nationally specific environment- the Danube Delta. Other values the advertisement makes use of are family, support, unconditional love, confidence, life, community, collaboration and altruism. Another ad would be the promotion of a nationally specific Romanian dish - *mititei* that shares the same values of family, altruism, kindness, joyful attitude, leisure and support. Last but not least, the ad made for the national car make- Duster is one that represents the characteristics of the product in relation to features the Romanian people share- confidence, support, endurance, reliability, family and unity. If the suggestive advertisements make use of original musical fragments or adapt fragments of famous musical bands (Taxi – "I ruined your Feng Shui") in a representative manner, the Duster ad that is a persuasive car ad makes use of a stronger musical sequence- a fragment from Queen's "Another one bites the dust(ER)".

Among these, the advertising that sells nationally and culturally related products identifies the national individual's characteristics- medication ad makes use of the mother-in-law's myth (Supramax ad) and mother tongue grammatical errors makes use of the quality Romanians have of house-keeping and house trimmer (*Doar Savana unistrat* translated as "Savana - the dye, one layer only"). It is obvious thus that all elements are conducive to individual values transferred to the targeted public and suggest or persuade in the desired direction. Advertising for nationally traditional brands like drinks (beer) or food products (salami, sausages) make use of social values like manliness and natural beauty, strength and power, freedom, fairy-tale sights, historical and social values (the ad for Ciuc beer, the ads in man's Celebration Day campaign, the ads for Meda meat products or the ones for Matache the Butcher or Cris-Tim).

The lexical selection is adjusted to depict a context conducive to a world which the message is designed to recreate. Most of the coding strategies that Romanian

advertising uses are the spatial, the inductive and the deductive ones, using cinematographic effects to recreate a world where everything is possible through the use of the intended product, while those that are inductive or deductive highlight either the product or the message with variation from case to case, based on the targeted public and the intended effect.

5. Conclusions

The pattern of action in the analyzed advertisements is chronological and cinematic while the temporal structure makes reference to an indefinite present for a better involvement of the targeted public. The action and the story unfold in settings connected to the advertised product or services and the actors depict characters usually met in common contexts where the product is required. The latter are seen as implied or uncertain actors, responsible for their own experiences. The narrator is either implied or visible and the fictional time is narrative present to provide livelihood and endless referencing to each viewer but also to the narrative situation.

The relationship between characters is a relaxed, easy, friendly and supportive one, similar to Romanian character traits. The characters are involved in the story they depict and provide a solution for their friends and acquaintances, irrespective of the distance between them. Their capacity of expression is facial in combination with a proper lexical selection, appropriate context and surrounding persons to raise awareness through the particular way the voice is heard, with focalization on the product's or service's features. Advertisements can be seen as accompanying stories for social learning of a nation, stories of people's culture and social development at a certain stage in life.

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