

***DECOMMUNIZATION OF THE ADVERTISING LANGUAGE AND THE
EMERGENCE OF A NEW CONSUMER PROFILE***

Corneliu Cezar Sigmirean, PhD Student, "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: The study analyzes the relaunch of advertising in the written press in Romania after 1989. To mark the advertising phenomenon, this research intends to present the antithesis of advertising in the '80s with what happens after the fall of the communism, when the transition to a market economy has opened the pages of newspapers towards promoting certain domestic or imported products.

Keywords: advertising, press, commercial, etatistic economy, market economy.

If we open the page of a newspaper from the '80s, for example *Scântea* (^{nt} *the Spark*), we will find that what traditionally accompanied the history of the press, the advertising, is almost entirely missing. A first consequence of the emergence of the printing press was that of a closer involvement of entrepreneurs in the process of spreading knowledge.¹ The commercial developed greatly in the XVIIth century. Around 1650, a newspaper in London had an average of six commercials; one hundred years later, it had about 50 commercials. Among the goods and services being advertised in the XVIIth century England are racing meetings, witch-doctors treatments and *Holman`s Ink Powder*, perhaps the first brand name of a product patented in 1688².

The advertising phenomenon accompanied also the Romanian press history with its appearance in the first half of the XIXth century. It disappeared or became a derisory phenomenon with the installation of the communist regime, when the market economy disappeared, in fact, the motive of advertising. Consistently, the only product of advertising was "the party politics" and the ability of communist leaders from Dej to Ceauşescu and his family. A retrospective on the '80s period puts us in the position to ask ourselves, what could be the subject of advertising? Determined to pay the foreign debts, Nicolae Ceauşescu sells on the international market everything that can be sold, form products of the chemical industry, light industry, to food industry products, and especially agricultural products. People were left without food, the chase after food has become the main problem of Romanians. An interesting culture of the queue had been developed in Romania³. Household products, TVs, videos, refrigerators, iron, electric heaters, etc. and especially food were circulated in the underground, "stolen" from the state. Car industry did not had to be promoted, Romanians being invited to wait 4-5 years to buy a Dacia, the Romanian version of the French Renault, or an Olcit, made after the Citroen. As a result, the only advertisement that could be seen in those years was the holiday offer in tourist resorts.

¹Asa Briggs, Peter Burke, *Mass-media.O istorie socială.De la Gutenberg la Internet*, Iaşi, Editura Polirom, 2005, p.58.

²*Ibidem*.

³Lucian Boia, *România țara de frontieră a Europei*, IInd edition revised and added, Bucureşti, Editura Humanitas, 2005, p. 135.



Beyond the advertising made, this was one of the few things by which the regime could have shown its concern for the working people, invited to treat themselves, to live their holidays period. In this respect we observe an increased attention to promote resorts like: Sîngeorz-Băi, Eforie Nord, Mangalia, Tușnad, Sovata, Călimănești-Căciulata, Predeal or Neptun. These are the only advertising materials that we can find in the pages of the „Scântea” newspaper in 1989. This fact is demonstrated by texts that induce readers a sense of healing or alleviating the diseases they suffered of through the treatments offered by the resorts in the country, "those who want to care their health, for treating some locomotor apparatus, rheumatic, neurological,

peripheral, orthopedic and posttraumatic disorders, can procure tickets in the resorts Amara, Călimănești-Căciulata, Eforie Nord...", "for cardiovascular apparatus disorders are recommended the resorts Borsec, Balványos, Buziaș ...", "the resorts Eforie Nord, Băile Govora, Mangalia and Slănic Moldova are indicated for respiratory diseases, and for disorders of the digestive tube and hepatobiliary disorders you can choose one of the following resorts ...".⁴ So we witness a mix of descriptive and argumentative advertising text. The same advertising character is induced by promotions inserted in the presentation texts of the resorts: "In this period you can take advantage of reduced tariffs, under optimum conditions for accommodation and meals. In the recommended resorts, that have also leisure opportunities, you can go at the preferred date, the length of stay being at the applicant's choice"⁵. To be seen by the reader, the promotions are drawn with bold, the writing being bolded. Regarding the titles used, they fall into the category of news, ("Balneary treatment at the resort Sîngeorz-



Băi", "Touristic units in Neamț County") or personal interest ("Geoagiu-Băi - a resort for all ages"). At the same time, through titles it is attempted to induce an amplification of the resorts' status and conditions of spending the holidays in Romania: "Sîngeorz-Băi: **a welcoming resort throughout the year**", "Tușnad: A resort with **optimal conditions** for health care", "**One of the finest conditions** for health care in the resort Sovata", "Călimănești-Căciulata resort **always happy of having guests**", "Predeal resort - a **great touristic attraction**").

The only commercials have not the purpose to promote a service or product, but that of underlining the party's concern for the welfare of the people. Ironically, this happened in a period when finding in the food store the basic commodities (bread, milk, oil, cold cuts) was really a dream of wellbeing for the Romanians. To manage to make a down payment for

⁴Scântea, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 433, Saturday, January 14th 1989.

⁵Idem, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 452, Sunday, February 5th 1989.

purchasing a Dacia or an Olcit was equivalent to acquiring a new social status. Romanians got to live as in the middle age, in the parameters of subsistence economy. Moreover, if we make an analysis of the target audience targeted by the commercials, the Romanians almost reached, in terms of behavioral criteria, to fall within the nonusers' category, individuals who do not consume products from a certain category. Also, from the point of view of the psychographic profile, the Romanians identify themselves with the belongsers category, defined by traditionalist, conventional, sentimental, very patriotic individuals, happy of how the things are⁶. And not because they had no other alternative in mind, but the propaganda and the constraints they were subjected to by the regime inhibited publicly their aspirations.

A reading of the '80s press suggest us the existence of a happy population, "proud" that lives in Romania and does not share the unfortunate experiences of the inhumane capitalism. Proof is in this regard a few articles in the *Scântea* newspaper of 1989. Presented in the column *The capital world in its true appearance* and bearing titles like "37 milioane de americani lipsiți de dreptul la asigurarea sănătății - 37 million Americans lacking the health insurance right"⁷, "Destine în derivă. Un strigăt lucid: Salvați copilăria! - Destinies adrift. A lucid cry: Save the childhood!"⁸, "Val de asasinat în capitala S.U.A. - Wave of murders in the capital of the USA"⁹, "Prăpastia dintre bogați și săraci se adâncește - The chasm between rich and poor deepens"¹⁰, "Copii fără copilărie - Children without childhood"¹¹, "Milioane de tineri - lipsiți de perspectiva unui loc de muncă, a unei vieți sigure și demne - Millions of young people - deprived of the prospect of a job, a safe and dignified life"¹², these articles presented an inhumane world of the Western and American capitalism, devoid of concerns regarding its own citizens, a violent world, with a rising unemployment rate, image in contrast with the economic growth manifested by the "Socialist Republic of Romania", with the continuing concern of "comrade Ceaușescu" for the modernization of Romania. Systematically, the propaganda was performing a cancellation policy of the occident society's values by putting them in contrast with the Romanian achievements. In fact, promoting advertising materials tantamounted to the recognition of an occidental practice. As a result, the advertising phenomenon was a peripheral phenomenon before 1989.



⁶Yankelovich, Daniel; David Meer (February 6, 2006). „Rediscovering Market Segmentation”, *Harvard Business Review*: 1–11. Retrieved 7 June 2011.

⁷Scântea, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 455, Thursday, February 9th 1989.

⁸Idem, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 486, Friday, March 17th 1989.

⁹Idem, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 491, Tuesday, March 22th 1989

¹⁰Idem, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 500, March 31st 1989

¹¹Idem, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 514, Wednesday, 19 April 19th 1989

¹²Idem, Anul LVIII, Nr.14 582, Friday, July 7th 1989



Meanwhile, life radically changed in the Occident. Leisure and education have become priority necessities. Television has become the main tool for information and recreation. Written press faces a decline due to people's preference for radio, television, technical revolution with new methods of editing, photo composition, computer, offset, transmission of breaking news over the radio waves. This fact determines the written press to find the most tempting means of promotion, to search topics as commercial as possible, looking for the sensational, as shape and image, with glaring headlines, tabloid topics and to attract advertising as crucial financial factor of support. There was a true revolution also on the plan of morals. People continued to live in married couple, but they got married less and divorced more. It has been developed a true culture of the body, who knows the most diverse forms: jogging, aerobics, diet, beauty care, the cult of the silhouette, etc.¹³ The market economy and competition become dominant phenomena. Are created large spaces of consumption: supermarkets, hypermarkets, shopping centers, fast-food restaurants, it is promoted the concern for leisure, trips and vacations. On the car market, the consecrated brands are at a real war. Advertising and advertising iconography are becoming more and more aggressive: the text accompanying a detergent sounds in the following manner: "it washes whiter" or "put a tiger in your washing machine" etc.

Of course, towards this world long also the Romanians and the majority of those from the East, from the communist countries. The miracle of communism fall occurred in 1989. In Romania, because of the general discontent, hunger and cold, occurred the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. Among the assumptions bandied about the fall of the communist regime in Romania, according to the historian Jean-François Soulet; the most plausible thesis seems that of a plot hatched by personalities from the party; plot supported actively by the KGB and passively by the CIA and the US Department of State, with the complicity of a part of the

¹³Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza, *Istoria Europei*, vol 5, Iași, Institutul European, 1998, p.401.

Army and Security¹⁴. The new leader, Ion Iliescu, who is said insistently to have been fellow at university with Gorbachev, was an apparatchik-model, former Minister of Youth, fallen in disgrace, he was not very decided to give Romanians too many chances to open the society towards the market economy. But the Romanians lived euphorically the events of December 1989. The changes were cumbersome: the peasants were given a portion of the land lost by collectivization, but only within the limits of 10 hectares (about 24.7 acres). In industry, the new law allowed the establishment of private enterprises with 20 workers. The foreign capital was not received with enthusiasm, in the early '90s being popular the slogan "We don't sell our country". Gradually, however, Romania began to make its way towards the market economy. In the education plan have appeared overnight dozens of universities, established as private companies. In time, subject to academic accreditation, some of them disappeared. The openness towards a market economy and competition has produced significant changes at the mass-media level and the advertising phenomenon reappeared.

In just a few days after the fall of Ceaușescu regime, the Romanian press has undergone a radical change, almost hard to imagine that in fact the authors of the articles were actually those who until December 22 were competing in praising the regime. Shy, by taking the experiences from the West, the pages of the newspapers and magazines in Romania open to the advertising phenomenon.

Forced to give up to the protectionist barriers, foreign firms enter the Romanian market. After decades of abstinence, Romanians become consumers of foreign products, from food products (soft drinks), to the Western industry's products (cars, washing machines). Prohibited in terms of price, Romanians come to be content with surrogates and second-hand products, from TVs, to cassette players or turntables. As a result, except for several new companies, the pages of the newspapers abound with offers proposed by the firms ad hoc established, importing Western second hand goods. Thus, right from the pages of *Adevărul* (^{nt} *The Truth*) newspaper in December 26, No. 2, the readers are informed that, from this day on, on the stores' shelves, they can find imported foods that they have not used for years, such as oranges, coffee, canned meat, fruit, nectars and juices, as well as meat. Furthermore, readers are reassured "that the stores of the Capital provides daily the entire consumption needs of the population of bread, milk, meat dishes, potatoes, onions, apples".



Advertising has a spectacular evolution in the pages of the newspaper in 1990. If in the first part of the year the advertising section is dominated by ads for imported products or for domestic products (automatic washing machines, vacuum cleaners, water lily), in the second half we notice the occurrence of commercials for the products proposed by the Occident, like Toyota cars, IBM computers or Kodak cameras. Moreover, we note an increase of the column dedicated to advertising, from half a page, as it happens in the first editions of the newspaper *Adevărul*, up to 2 or 3 pages dedicated to advertising texts

¹⁴Jean-François Soulet, *Istoria Europei de Est de la al doilea război mondial până în prezent*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2008, p.142.

in the second half of the year, which shows an increased interest for the advertising phenomenon.

Unquestionably, at the level of the psychographic profile of the consumer, the Romanians are experiencing a fast metamorphosis, expressed through a nonselective takeover of the occidental model of civilization.

By identifying capitalism with welfare, prosperity and financial comfort, the Romanians identify in the mirage of Romanian lottery the opportunity of enrichment. As a result, among the most common ads in the first year are the commercials that promote lotto draws. The National Lottery commercials can be distinguished by the presence in the pages of the newspaper throughout the year, demonstrating consistency in the process of promotion. Furthermore, we are witnessing a diversity in terms of the advertising message but also of plotting. Thus, the lottery ads make use of elements such as the clover - the symbol of luck or Dacia - a public symbol of the social condition for the Romanians, accompanied by messages with a strong impact for a society in transition: *are given winnings in money and trips abroad, if you want to get large amounts of money, if you want to watch TV in colors, if you want to travel in a brand new "Dacia 1300" car, Only those who don't play don't win.* The National Lottery represents for many the chance of overnight enrichment or obtaining goods to which until recently they didn't have access. Under those circumstances, in the Romanian society were emerging pyramid schemes, accepted by the Romanians without judgment, associated with the miracle of enrichment, announcing in advance the "Caritas phenomenon" from the mid '90s.



The Romanian media allocates more and more space to advertising, primarily to local products that were trying to create consumers on the internal market; all the more so as gradually, after the fall of CAR and of many foreign markets where Romanian products were sold, the Romanian economy re-adjusted itself for the domestic consumption. Advertising is becoming more frequent, occupying more and more space in the newspapers.



In our presentation, we considered only the ads in the written press, having as reference the newspaper *Adevărul*, formerly *Scânteia*. The promoters of advertisements found quickly the impact of the visual image, through the TV, in the '90s the Romanian television screen being dominated by the Pepsi, Adidas Torsion, Aquafresh or Bonibon commercials, products that were identified with the very idea of capitalism, welfare, being at that time emblematic products of the market economy open to

competition.

Of course that many phenomena capture the changes in the Romanian society after 1989. Among them was also the advertising phenomenon that is gradually shaping a new

public consciousness of Romanians, on long term and with deep changes at the level of the collective mental.

This work was possible with the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project number POSDRU/107/1.5/S/77946 with the title „Doctorate: an Attractive Research Career