

FROM THE DECADE OF THE PRODUCT TO THE ONE OF THE CONSUMER IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

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Abstract: In the history of advertising we can talk about three ages, three decades of evolution. The first one has in center the product itself. The representative person for these period is David Ogilvy. The second one reflects the period of 60's – 70's and talks about the creative revolution. We can't talk about creativity without mention the name of William Bernbach. The third one has in center the consumer. The internet and social media have a huge impact in advertising campaigns which put the consumer in the center of the industry.

In the present article we are going to present a short history of advertising starting with the product stage until the consumer stage. The paper will include some relevant advertising campaigns examples of each stage that we've mentioned.

Keywords: advertising, product, consumer, creative revolution, social media.

Advertising can be seen, approached or described through a multitude of perspectives, its interdisciplinarity being essential for understanding the phenomenon. The large number of studies and research offers the possibility to discover the phenomenon that advertising represents in a holistic manner. This paper is a short theoretical introspection into the history of commercial communication. In the pages that follow we will look into a part of the data referring to the stages that the industry of advertising has seen.

Stages in the History of Advertising

There are authors who place the origins of advertising in the prehistoric times, identifying various forms of advertising that appeared along with the first exchange of goods and the need to make known their source.¹ For example, the emergence of the writing system among the Phoenicians and the Chinese had a massive impact on transmitting the first forms of advertising messages, as merchandise such as wool, wine and remedies used to be marked with the name of the producer and the country of origin. This type of marking system worked as a quality certificate or guarantee. The first communication channel used by man for spreading advertising messages was the human voice, used by vendors to attract customers in public squares. "It is hard to believe that the Egyptians or Ancient Greeks were insensitive to the benefits of promoting their products. The Romans knew how a pitch should be made so as to sell their merchandise, and among the ruins in Pompeii were found the first examples of advertising.(...) Others maintain that cave paintings were a form of advertising, which ultimately seems to be farfetched. But I believe that we are not mistaken in saying that advertising has existed ever since the first selling goods and the means to promote them - either being the street herald or the announcements hanged on trees."²

In general acceptance, three eras in the history of advertising can be identified:

¹ Dan Petre. Mihaela Nicola. *Introducere în publicitate*, Editura Comunicare.ro, Bucureşti, 2004, p. 26.

² Mark Tungate. *Adland: istoria universală a publicităţii*, trad., Iulia Serafim, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2012, p. 22.

1. Premarketing - from before Ancient times until the emergence of the first mass media;
2. Mass media - from the 1800s until mid-twentieth century;
3. Scientific advertising (based on structural approaches) - from the 50s until present times³

1. *Premarketing*

In ancient and medieval times, the media used for sending advertisements were rudimentary, such as clay or sand stone tablets, rock inscriptions, wooden signs or vendors vocally advertising in the streets.

A Babylonian clay tablet dated 3000 B.C. held information about a shoe workshop, an oil store and one that made copies of documents, while the ancient Egyptians used papyrus to make announcements. In Ancient Greece the arrival of ships with spices, wine or other merchandise was announced by people shouting and singing around towns. Even the Roman merchants used various methods to display their goods: in the ruins of Pompeii, advertisements carved in rock were found, containing different drawings of the merchandise (a string of mutton legs was the symbol for a butcher shop, a cow for a dairy store, a boot for a shoemaker).⁴

The development of the printing press, in the year of 1447, by the German goldsmith Johannes von Gutenberg was a crucial step forward towards mass communication. "The elegantly and properly printed words that we use today were perfected during the years of my life, with divine intervention, as the strikes of cannons are a figment of the devil. The world is so filled with scholars and learned teachers, bookstores welcome you with such countless books, that I am inclined to believe that not even in the times of Plato, Cicero or Papinian knowledge wasn't more available than it is today."⁵ This was the view that F. Rabelais maintained regarding the Gutenberg era, him being preoccupied with the democratization of knowledge.

In the letter sent to Pantagruel, Gargantua, in Paris at the time, praises the advance of the printing press.⁶ McLuhan regards the printing press as the external phase of alphabetical culture that, first of all, detribalised or decollectivized the man. The printing press raises the visual characteristics of the phonetic alphabet to the highest intensity of the definition.⁷

Moving on with the stages in the history of advertising, the contribution of Theophraste Renaudot must be mentioned, a French doctor, journalist and advertising man from the 18th century. After getting his diploma as a doctor, the young French man travelled for a while around Europe. After going back to Paris, he became Louis XIII's official doctor, but as he was also a writer, he studied the issue of the poor in Paris, opening an office for addresses and requests that soon became a popular place for those who were offering or looking for jobs, buying or selling products or simply those who wanted to make a public announcement. In 1631 Renaudot established the first French newspaper, *La Gazette*, becoming the first French journalist and the inventor of classified ads.⁸

³ O'Guinn, Allen și Semenik, 1998, Jefkins, 2000, Russel și Ronald, 1996.

⁴ Dan Petre. Mihaela Nicola. *op.cit.*, pp. 25-26.

⁵ François Rabelais. *Gargantua și Pantagruel*, trad. Al. Hodoș, E.L.U., 1968, p. 235.

⁶ Marshall McLuhan. *Galaxia Gutenberg*, Editura Politică, București, 1975, p. 244.

⁷ Marshall McLuhan. *op.cit.*, p. 260.

⁸ Mark Tungate. *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.

Displayed advertisements are one of the most long-lasting forms of advertising, managing to survive the decline of the Roman Empire and being found mostly in the decorative art of European inns from the 16th to the 18th century.

The first laws of advertising were given in England, in 1614, forbidding the use of signs that exceeded the size of the building facades, in order to keep passersby safe.

2. *Mass media*

"We can only talk about an advertising industry from mid-19th century, when the industrial revolution led to significant progress in all social sectors. The main outcome was the growth of economic productivity, that led to an overflow of goods that needed to be advertised and sold. Thus, the advance in technology made it possible for consumer goods to be produced and packed in larger quantities. Merchants now benefited from an incipient transportation network, and the telephone, telegraph and typewriter were discoveries that facilitated mass media, this having an impact on the advertising industry."⁹ The abundance in food, clothing, personal care and beauty products led the manufacturers, who used to sell in their own back yard, to look for new markets. Some of them opened chains of stores, others turned to distributors sending their products in general stores or intermediary sellers. They named their products and started to advertise them in order to make them known to the customers and create loyalty.¹⁰

Advertising as we know it today first appeared in the United States as a part of a developed economic system, between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. During this time the first graphic illustrators started to work in the commercial area, creating accessible and persuasive images for the general public. The first American brands were: Levi's (1873), Coca-Cola (1876) and Budweiser (1876). The first manifestation towards a formalisation and industrialisation of advertising can be seen in the sale of commercial spaces in the 1870s. During that time, due to the development of the advertisements in newspapers, two important professions in advertising were born: the copywriter - who wrote the text for advertisements, and, basically, created the advertisement, transforming the client's wish into a message for the clients; and the account, the advertiser who maintains the connection with the client, making sure that its wishes are fulfilled.¹¹

The inventions of the 20th century, such as electricity, the rotary printing press, telephone and radio represented essential factors towards the development of communication channels, mass-media and, by default, the advertising industry.

3. *Scientific advertising*

"Even though the pioneers in advertising research such as George Gallup, Daniel Starch and A. C. Nielsen started this type of activity ever since the interwar period, the age of research began in the 50s and is characterised by the interest for a thorough analysis of the target audience. Television is the most used medium in those times, characterised among others by the exponential growth of advertising agencies, the growth of consumer importance,

⁹ Dan Petre. Mihaela Nicola. *op.cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁰ Mark Tungate. *op.cit.*, p. 24.

¹¹ Delia Cristina Balaban. *Comunicare publicitară*, Editura Accent, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 6.

diversity and fragmentation of the audience, growth of income from advertisements, and the opportunity of buying some basic goods on credit."¹²

For the American advertising industry, Madison Avenue was the unofficial headquarters. David Ogilvy was the British man that could be often seen on Madison Avenue. Being interested as a young man in Mark Twain, as he mentioned in his book, 'The Confessions of an Advertising Man', he always enjoyed travelling. In France, he worked for a short while as a chef, from where he happily left to discover the world across the ocean. In America he worked for a short while in advertising, meeting people that he got to admire, some as mentors, such as Raymond Rubicam and Rosser Reeves. After travelling across America and meeting the common people, getting to know their hopes, dreams and fears, Ogilvy decided to move to the countryside and grow tobacco. This new job doesn't keep him too long away from advertising. He decided to get back into advertising, opening his own agency in 1948 in New York, Ogilvy and Mather. Two of his campaigns made Ogilvy famous, 'The Man in the Hathaway Shirt' in 1951 and the campaign for the tonic water Schweppes.¹³ Although David Ogilvy cannot be considered a creative in advertising, making it more of a business than an art, he still remains an advertising legend.

In the 50s, a time when economy was in bloom, advertisements focused on the fact that the simple man could now afford various basic and long-term use goods. One example would be the tagline for Volkswagen - 'You know what you can count on.'

The social and cultural changes during the 60s, such as the hippie movement, development of rock music, a newly developed freedom towards sexuality, gave advertising a liberal feel. One example towards this would be the advertisements where nuns were drinking Afri-Cola.

In the 80s advertising became a purpose of its own, being considered that quality advertising was a proof of the quality of the product being advertised. The 90s represent the time of genius creators, such as Oliviero Toscani, advertising coordinator of Benetton. He broke all the taboos regarding race, sex, religion to spread his advertisement message. Pictures such as a black baby carried by a white woman, a monk kissing a nun or AIDS victims managed to plunge the popularity of the advertisements for Benetton.

Today, new ways of communication, such as the internet, managed to open a new era of advertising. What is more, globalization processes, under the motto "think local, act global" are leading to the development of a new strategy oriented towards global marketing.¹⁴

According to the authors W. Leiss, S. Kline and S. Jhally, depending on the time in history they appeared, the advertisements are divided into four categories:

(1) *idolatry period* (1890-1925) - the advertisements from that time worshipped the product, that being generated by the industrial system that had recently discovered its sense of power and accomplishment, starting with 1875 when it realized that its great capabilities can be applied to the mass production of goods. During that time, the emphasis was on presenting the attributes and benefits of the product, highlighting the informative and descriptive side, images missing from the template. The emphasis was also on the advantages of saving time, money and energy.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹³ David Ogilvy. *Confesiunile unui om de publicitate*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2009, pp. 145-151.

¹⁴ Delia Cristina Balaban. *op.cit.*, pp. 10-12.

(2) *iconic period* (1925-1945) - this period goes from a descriptive and informative approach to one where the accent is on the image, on an emotional presentation and the benefits of the product or service.

(3) *narcisistic period* (1945-1965) - is the period that appealed to an idealised image of the product. The accent was on presenting the images, the emotional side but also social integration.

(4) *totemic period* (1965-1985) - in primal societies totems were representations of animals or natural objects that could be identified with a group or a clan. Totemic artifacts as a whole created a code that was considered a system of social meanings. Moving on to the production of goods, authors consider that these could be transformed/seen as real totems, symbols of a lifestyle.

We can consider that, seen through a social and commercial perspective, the history of advertising knew three stages. These stages will be reminded and described in short in the next paragraphs, as we will call them eras.

The era of the product

Exponent: David Ogilvy

A typical quote for that time (the 50s): “I have a theory that the best ads come from personal experience. Some of the good ones I have done have really come out of the real experience of my life, and somehow this has come over as true and valid and persuasive. (D. Ogilvy)”

The main idea: the product and the truth about the product is the decisive variable in configuring an idea of communication, of a campaign.

"These was a time when brands was only household goods - soap, tea, detergent, shoe polish, boring common products that were consumed and replaced. The brand was a symbol of consistency. In a time when products were counterfeited, the quality of production was inconsistent and the price varied, the brand meant quality, quantity and standard price. The projected brand image was supporting the product. Today, all this has radically changed; the brands claimed their place in the world. Often, we take functional qualities of a product for granted, and, while brands continue to deal with their image, it's not just about their own image, but our own. Nowadays, branding means mainly involvement and association, the proof of personal and private affiliation. Branding lets us define ourselves through a shortcut that is immediately comprehensible for the world around us.”¹⁵

The era of the creative

Exponent: William Bernbach

A typical quote for that time (the 60s and the 70s): “The truth isn't the truth until people believe you, and they can't believe you if they don't know what you're saying, and they can't know what you're saying if they don't listen to you, and they won't listen to you if you're not interesting, and you won't be interesting unless you say things imaginatively, originally, freshly. (W. Bernbach)”¹⁶

The main idea: People are bored by the truth. People don't need truth, they need nice stories.

¹⁵ Wally Olins. *Despre brand*, trad., Ștefan Liuțe, Editura Comunicare.ro, București, 2006, p. 16.

¹⁶ Luke Sullivan. *Hey, Whipple, Squeeze this: A guide to creating great ads*. John Wiley&Sons, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2003, p. 6.

Creativity is the essential ingredient in the advertising industry. Either we are referring to the product or the message sent to the consumer, in order to have the right impact they need to start from a brilliant idea. The creative activity doesn't only mean art, it means anchoring into reality and a lot of pragmatism. It's a complex work and involves the existence of a strong connection between a word specialist (copywriter) and a visual specialist (art director). Their work can have an immense impact among the consumers who validate the creative work. In order to inform the customer, to attract him and create values, the message needs to reflect its cultural values. That involves not only a great deal of inspiration and knowledge, but also the use of instruments and techniques.

The era of the consumer

Exponent: the Internet/social media, the power of user generated content

Quote: “The best and most effective advertising is that which sets out to *involve* consumers, both in its communication and in the process of developing its message. That may sound obvious, but I believe that very few advertisers and their agencies produce advertising whose message is involving in that way, and that their inability to engage consumers in a dialog or broader relationship is largely a reflection of an outdated, mechanistic philosophy on how advertising works, and a process that keeps consumers, at best, at arm’s length.”¹⁷

Main idea: The consumer decides. His voice is listened to. Marketing research emerges, the studies on the consumer focus on the insight, account planning is created. According to Jon Steel, account planning was conceived as a way for agencies to treat the very affliction that ails so many American advertisers and agencies today, by creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with consumers. The planner’s role was basically to embrace consumers as partners in the process of developing advertising, to use their input at every stage of the process to inform and sometimes even inspire creative ideas, and to guide and validate the resulting advertising campaigns.¹⁸

The question that arises is: *What's next? An era of producers, maybe?* The era of the customer, when he is seduced by the power of CHOICE is starting to become obsolete. People are starting to see that freedom is selective, that they are free to choose between a determination or another and it is restrictive. The true freedom could be the freedom in relation to any possible determination. People are starting to understand that behind the idea that "they choose, they consume" they are, in fact, the ones being consumed.

What would an era of producers mean? A kind of common ground through which all producers would unite to support, defend and consolidate consumerism. We are at a crossroads.

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