



The 7<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference  
eLearning and Software for Education  
Bucharest, April 28-29, 2011



**PSYCHOLOGY, ADVERTISING AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE  
KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY**

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**Abstract:** *Advertising acts as an economic phenomenon, related to the free market and as a cultural phenomenon, using symbolic contents by means of the media. The dual nature of advertising results from this double structure: the conflictual nature, due to the competition between brands and social legitimacy, enabling a consensual communication with the public. Imposing no limitation to individual freedom and stimulating human needs, advertising implies the harmonious combination of creativity, originality with the existing wishes. Paradoxically, advertisers think that the public has become very sceptical to advertising topics, so that its mental capacity, behaviour can no longer be influenced by external intrusions; therefore, the attack to the subconscious was resorted to in order to fight against the conscious mistrust. In this world of continuous change, of the new technology, breakthroughs, the human spirit tends to protect itself by the conscious act of the eagerness to know, understand, acquire, to learn all life long.*

**Keywords:** *advertising, psychology of advertising, behavioral consumer, lifelong learning.*

**I. ADVERTISING IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY**

We are living in a world full of opportunities provided by the cutting-edge technologies unconceivable so far. We are witnessing an accelerated spreading of the phenomenon of globalization in various areas of life; from information to communication, from production to economy, from politics to culture. We are witnessing an enhancement of the local requirements of autonomy, of decentralization, of participation and diversity, of environment preservation and growth of local resources, of the need of historical identity and of inbreeding development, in general.

Nowadays society, marked by a strong dynamism by continuous renewal, may be known by personal interpretations, variable and mostly subjective, symbolical. The complexity of the events, of the phenomena of modern society entails an ever wider knowledge background. The information circulation speed is more and more demanding for the receiver's capacity of interpretation in due time of such information.

The need for training individuals capable of analysing new situations and of responding properly, using logical thinking skills. Continuing learning skills and adaptation to new situations skills should be trained. The shift from knowledge as general knowledge to knowledge as general skills entails a shift of accent in education, from the conveyance and memorizing information to training skills, capacities, competences.

A strong means of activation of the human mind – by arousing attention, perception and inner elaboration – to the purpose of updating a wish, doubled by the deliberate availability of acquiring a displayed economic good bears the name of advertising.

Advertising is one of the oldest forms of public relations. It has been used, under various forms, since Antiquity. Inscriptions such as 'Vote for Cicero. He is a good man' were found by archeologists among the ruins of antique civilizations. To the end of the 19th century, the development of the technique of printing pictures determined true pressure on the editors of periodicals in relation with the publication of illustrated advertisements. One of the first researchers of advertising, and implicitly of advertising psychology was Walter Dill Scott, who thought that the function of advertising was no longer to inform but to persuade, and said that 'the function of advertising is to influence human minds. With the development of technology, the advertising posters began to present more sophisticated narrative illustrations. Unless it complies with this function, it is useless and even destructive for the firms which resort to it.' Between 1870-1880 the advertising images had already started to appear on a regular basis in the pages of various publications. A new means of communication appeared: an image of a product has a meaning for the reader, and thus the image is much more complex than any other technique could be.

### **1.1. The advertisement – a knowledge-generator**

Our environment is 'immersed' in advertisements. Thus, the advertising messages affect the life style. This is because advertising is not only an economic force but also a cultural force – a force influencing the values and quality of life. Every day, those who want to sell by means of advertising, enter into competition to capture the attention of the public. In contemporary society, due to the media ubiquity, it is estimated that an individual is daily exposed to a number of approximately 2000 advertisements. Actually, few of them are perceived and only a small part of them is 'absorbed'. We can watch 'without seeing' the TV commercial, we can 'listen without hearing' the radio commercials, we can pass by printed advertisements 'without paying attention'.

The specialists in the field tried to use the notion of psycho-social field when explaining human behaviour, whose evolution is based on mental processes of the individual and physical and social environment influences. The impact of sociology, of social and cultural anthropology on psychological research was felt as the tendency to relate the accredited models and concepts of psychology to certain socio-cultural contexts.

The main theories underlying the behaviour models of the consumers towards advertising are presented as forming four big families, each having a different outlook on the consumer whom it wants to influence:

- The family of the economic theories: the reasonable consumer. For all these theories, the consumer is an essentially reason-endowed entity. This leads to a persuasive advertising which tries to bring arguments and to convince the consumer with facts, demonstrations and proofs, an advertising where the brands and products are positioned around their utilitarian function. It is not a strictly informative advertising, but the object of advertising can never be reduced only to information; it is advertising which resorts to common sense, to logic, to calculation, bringing objective arguments and trying to convince the consumer by reasoning.
- The family of the behaviourist theories 'stimulus-response' or the conditioned consumer behaviour. For these theories, the consumer is essentially passive. He learns by habit, reflexes, i.e. automatic responses to orders, and from orders to various stimulations. Founded on the principle of repetition, this advertising is valuable because it brings the advertisement again to the consumer's attention, to make him act. The clear principle of the associated reflex with a response to the stimulus leads to the more complex theories of driving.
- The family of psychological or affective theories. For these theories, the consumer is driven by forces that are mainly irrational such as affection, motivation, which will explain his behaviour. Instead of addressing to the reasonable side of the individual, advertising seeks to play a role at the level of affection. This is a suggestive type of advertising. All advertising is by its nature suggestive, it does not enunciate but suggests, it does not seek to inform, but to motivate, it does not appeal to reason but to the senses. Advertising of this type comes, in general, as an indirect discourse and adopts the symbols and figures as metaphors. The risk of such advertising is that it can lead to advertising actions less specific for the product.

- The family of the social or psycho-social theories; the average consumer. For these theories, any individual is part of several social groups which propose, impose respectively their norms. The imitation of the social status, the valorization, the life style are as many valid concepts to explain society norms. In these cases, advertising will give the product brand the signs of a rewarding group. This is integrative advertising.

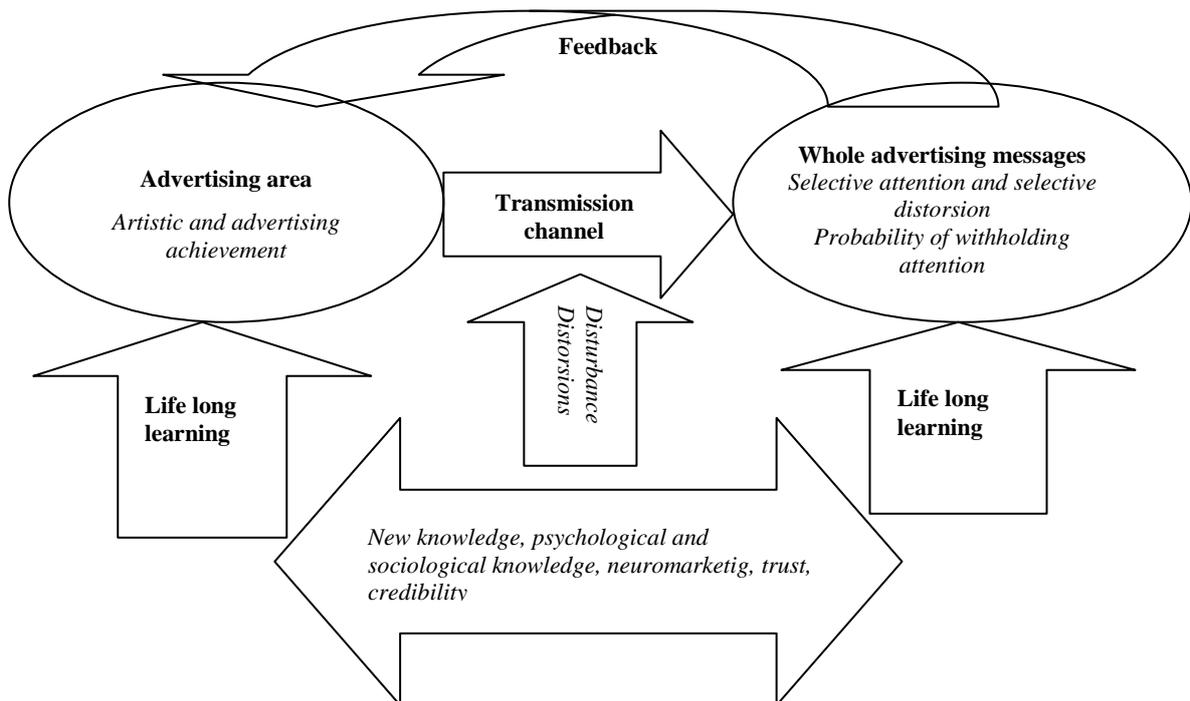
While in the economic approach, the user value of the object is important, in the psychological approach, the force and nature of human motivations, in the social approach the social meaning of the objects prevails. The object by itself is never consumed (in its user value), but the objects are always manipulated as signs which have the function to make differences either by association to a social group, or by reference to a higher status category' [2].

Advertising creation cannot be reduced to one theory or to only one model: actually, advertising creation based on constant meaning explosions, on unpredictable renewals, cannot be the follow-up of a simple equation. But advertising means first efficient communication and there are rules for good communication. Any message has a content (what is to be transmitted), but this modifies the relationship between the entities engaged in the act of communication. The content is necessary, but the message does not work without the awareness of this relationship. This conclusion is vital for advertising.

The new theories place advertising in the context of the metaphysical edifice dissolution; the pledge of the social order and of the phenomenon of collective solidarity.

Our century is placed under the sign of the value crisis doubled by a crisis of representation. The need of developing a new language is therefore imperative, which might ritualize and spectacularize the social events.

The process of advertising and life long learning under the terms of the subjects' psychological component evolution may be schematically presented as in (Figure 1) below.



**Figure 1.**

The American Wilbur Schramm proposed the following calculation formula to determine the probability that a message might draw attention on itself [7]:

$$\text{Probability to draw attention} = \frac{\text{Received advantages} - \text{Received disadvantages}}{\text{Efforts of reception}}$$

## 1.2 Effects of the advertisement on human behaviour

Although at first sight it looks like it is a matter of marketing (therefore, of the economic sciences) rather than of sociology or psychology, more and more specialists in the line of communication deem that this field claims more to belong to the sciences of communication, the sociology of communication and applied psychology. Finally, the study of the consumer's behaviour considered by marketing provides another miraculous recipe for its regimentation and the evaluation of the communication campaigns and of the advertisements efficiency can be made only by sociology and psychology, by means of a specific conceptual and methodological apparatus.

From these perspectives advertising is the most pointed expression of mass culture, it is a, 'cultural industry' [4] and, the spearhead of the mass culture models', the promoter of middle class specific consumerism. It does not act only on individuals, but it has complex effects on culture too, to the volume of knowledge, a society values and norms. The advertisements appeal to the sensational to seduce the public, display material and erotic stimuli and the characters and communication contexts are simplistic and stereotype. Advertising puts forth sets of images, ideas and evaluations, thinking and behaviour stereotypes the members of the audience resort to when they build their own behaviour [5].

Analysing the economic, social and psychological components of advertising, every one of them has pros and cons. The supporters of advertising see in it an economic phenomenon assuring the 'flow' of the production towards the buyers and drawing the attention on certain quality products and services. The critics accuse it for accelerating the products' wear and tear, it artificially develops domains of production and confers false dimensions to economic progress.

As a social phenomenon, the opinion of the defenders is that advertising enhances the individuals integrity proposing new ways of life, providing for the diversity of the existence in a community and enabling the choice of the appropriate social roles. The critics think that advertising causes frustration and resentments to those incapable of procuring the advertised products, thus feeding social conflicts and the false needs it develops would cause confusion in assuming the social roles.

As for the mental aspects, the defenders bring as an argument the fact that advertising consolidates the feeling of existence, develops the consumers' optimism and self-confidence. The critics think that advertising forges the hierarchy of values, cultivating euphoria, hedonism, narcissism and individualism. Moreover, it is asserted that advertising troubles in most individuals their relation with the environment offering a delusive world. It is a kind of substitution behaviour where shopping-therapy replaces the true cultural values with perishable and superficial ones.

Unfortunately both sides start from the premiss that advertising is the only element influencing the consumers' behaviour. Actually it is common knowledge that a series of other factors has a major influence on them, such as experience, age, traditions, price, fashion etc. The conflict between the supporters and the challengers of advertising has even resulted in the appearance of theories on their efficiency, such as the theory of minimal effects, the 'cutting edge' theory, A-T-R; all these theories try to explain the role of advertising in influencing the consumer, the attitudes, the life style and culture they belong to.

Due to the available volume of information, people start to be interested only in certain information. As the years go by and experience is acquired, namely a substantial fund of information, people start to filter the new information, i.e. to perceive them selectively.

This makes the success of advertising and publicity to decrease. The theories and the divergences related to the efficiency of publicity and advertising entailed the development of methods of measurement of their effects. It was noticed that these effects are influenced by a lot of factors such as: type of message, level of investment, the market age, the competition advertising.

1. The measurement of notoriety is constantly applied before and after the advertising campaign. The method has the advantage of being simple, but it was criticized in its technical and methodological aspects. Many factors may influence the notoriety of the product: seasoning, dememorization, campaign intensity, its duration.
2. The impact of measured variables. The method is criticized because it measures rather the message technique than the advertising effect.

3. The balance of the campaign measures: the memory and the image, notoriety, impact, acceptance, involvement and buying intentions.
4. The measurement of the method of exposure and buying consists in noticing the alterations of the buying behaviour depending on the level of exposure to the advertising campaign.
5. The barometer is a diagnosis instrument of the advertising campaign, which measures notoriety and brand image in relation with the use of the product and with the media exposure, the segmentation in small, medium and large buyers.

The problem the psychologists used to face was the concept of validity of the methods of measurement of the advertisement efficiency. This was increasingly surrounded by ambiguity because, while advancing in research, the fact that the buying decision is based on a series of factors clearly took shape: the purchasing power, self-esteem, the individual's personality, group membership, reference group etc. The '60s meant a lot for the substantiation of advertising psychology. Practically, the most important theories developed during those years in the psychology of advertising, we may even speak of some efforts for the development and improvement of the theories which allow the identification of advertising consumers' behaviour from the point of view of psychological analyses.

There is no perfect method of measurement yet of the effects of publicity/advertising and the lack of standardization make it difficult to apply and interpret the results. The problem of the existence of an international standard of measurement of the effects of advertising is rhetorical and the response is for now negative. In the absence of a consensus on the ideal measurement, there are several types of partial measurements' [6]. Yet the attitude towards advertising is different and sometimes surprising. In general, the interest lays in the transfer from the attitude towards advertising to the attitude towards the brand, the more one likes an advertisement the more one would appreciate a brand and would buy it.

## II. LIFE LONG LEARNING – DRIVER OF THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

*"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars".  
(Oscar Wilde, "Lady Windermere's Fan", 1892)*

The informational resource is the most valuable resource of the human nature, the eternal driver of scientific, technical and historical progress and of civilization and which today must be developed and consolidated in the conscience of all the inhabitants of the planet.

Knowledge, the human being's cognitive power which has never been invoked so frequently as in post-modern society, a natural heir of the industrial society, was defined and presented as belonging to the knowledge society.

The objectives of the activities of Life Long Learning are the education and development of the cognitive potential of the subjects for an integrating relationship with their natural, social and cultural environments. The learning experience aims at highlighting and knowing the various meanings of the environment, those that are not visible in particular. These meanings/knowledge are of several types in order to reflect the characteristics of the environment wealth: for example, they may be historical, artistic, scientific, naturalistic and anthropological meanings/knowledge. The wealth of knowledge, distributed in the territory enables the subjects to go through many forms of cognitive experience, for example, from the perceptive experience (through senses and body) to the emotional experience (through artistic representations); from the cognitive adventure in scientific explorations (through test and game) to progressive and open end knowledge (for example, in the relationship with the individuals, the generations, the communities and cultures); from relational knowledge, capable of recognizing environment features from the holistic point of view, to the awareness of being a part of the environment; from divergent thinking (which develops through a constant questioning) to operative thinking (which is through active learning engaged in the increase and defense of natural, social and cultural resources).

Culture, true culture, endows the human subject with the filters required for the detection of the true values expressible by needs and necessities and protects him from the status of manipulable

buyer for anything and anytime. And culture is acquired by learning. Continuously. It is because in the current society knowledge is perishable and need to be renewed every two or three years.

To learn how to learn and to want to improve constantly are the requirements of continuing education, by which contemporary man learns to be himself, responsive to changes, able to anticipate and adapt to them. Thus, the balanced training of personality is assured, with a high level of learning autonomy; based on that man knows how to identify and use the sources of information, to participate in the development of society, in the education of the other members of the community they belong to and to the increase of the quality of life. Self-education is a conscious activity, oriented to the training or accomplishment of one's own self, in accordance with the desires, aspirations, ideals and outlook on the role of man in society.

The domain of knowledge is a very wide one, it improves in time. Advertising which needs to appeal to an informed society, adapts its strategy and tactics by influencing the subconscious, bringing new knowledge/information that should not overlap the present ones and create ambiguity and rejection. Advertising lays emphasis within the informed groups on particularities, on traditions, on ethics and aesthetics. Thus, the educated and forestalled subconscious will be the driver of acceptance of advertising in a knowledge society.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The evolution and structural transformations of modern and postmodern societies are immediately and directly reflected on marketing and advertising, domains which are very sensitive to the influences of the social, cultural etc. environment. These influences are extremely varied and a review is inevitably limited from the very beginning. No doubt, in the postmodern consumer societies, the most important characteristic is the unprecedented development of technology.

Consequently, the prospects of evolution of advertising are influenced first and foremost by the development of technology and in particular, of the communication technologies.

In spite of the inherent obstacles and of the legitimate questions that sociology and psychology raise with reference to the exact form of these communication technologies or the moment when they will be widely accepted, the future is clear: the next years will bring major changes both in advertising, mass communication and approaching advertising from the point of view of human psychology. It is obvious that the industry of advertising will not be able to count on a captive audience that may be bombarded as a fix target by advertising messages.

The forecasts envision a consumer who has the control, who finally takes revenge for the tens of years when he was a mere passive receiver, exposed to the media bombardment, unable to fight back against advertising aggressions. He will also involve more and more in the whole process of marketing.

The postmodern paradigm implies structural changes in marketing and advertising, mainly in ,the shift from predictability to unpredictability, from rigidity to flexibility, from the need of certainty to the acceptance of uncertainty' [5]. The consumers perceive in this paradigm advertising as a distinct domain but submitted to intertextuality; they see advertising as having historical and cultural identity, but they draw their meanings and rules of interpretation from the rest of culture; advertising is not seen as isolated from culture and social environment it comes from.

As a defining characteristic of advertising, the characteristic of extremely fast reaction to any general tendency of the social system it belongs to is worth mentioning here, because it is often present in the vanguard of changes, as a force which develops and imposes models, defines and supports trends for most of the individuals in society. Thus, advertising is one of the most dynamic areas of social life, one of the first willing to embrace change and address innovatively to the needs and wishes of the new consumers, ready to get out of the areas of cognitive comfort, ready to try new approaches and to assume risks.

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