

ADVERTISING PSYCHOLOGY VERSUS LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT. The main characteristic of the 21st century is communication. We live in a society of multiple choices, deriving from advanced, not so long ago inconceivable, and technology. We are witnessing a fast spreading of globalization in many areas of our lives – from information to communication, from production to economy, from politics to culture. We are witnessing increasing demands for local autonomy, decentralization, participation and diversity, environmental conservation and increase of local resources, of the need for historical identity. Our society, marked by strong dynamism, by perpetual renewal, may be known through variable and predominantly subjective, symbolical, personal endeavor. The complexity of modern-day social phenomena requires more and more diverse knowledge. The speed at which information circulates demands a greater and timelier interpretation capacity on the receiver's behalf. A strong driver of the human psyche – awakening attention, perception and internal development – in order to update a desire, coupled with the voluntary willingness to acquire a certain good, will describe the psychology of advertising.

Keywords: ad; advertising psychology; advertising effect; knowledge; innovation; lifelong learning

1. Introduction

*“Anything a man can conceive and believe in his mind,
is achievable.” Napoleon Hill¹*

In this world of perpetual change, emergency of new technologies, discoveries, the human spirit tends to seek protection, in a conscientious display of the wish to know, understand and assimilate, to continue to learn. A need arises to train individuals capable to analyze new situations

and give good responses, by using logical thinking capacities. We need to train lifelong learning skills, adaptation skills for new situations. The transition from knowledge, as a whole set of information, to knowledge, as a set of skills will determine a shift of focus in education, from information transmission and memorization, to skill, capacity and competence building.

2. Advertising Psychology in Knowledge-Based Society

2.1. Ads – Knowledge Generators

Contemporary society is strongly marked by an abundance of ads and commercial messages. The very frequency of broadcast in the media channels and the overflowing creativity of the marketers, giving life to still unexpressed needs or wishes, the content, message and design of advertising creations, make commercial messages a part of our everyday life, imprinting our lifestyle. And this is because the publicity is not just an economic, but also a socio-cultural force, influencing social values and the quality of life.

Every day, those who aim to increase sales by promoting goods and services through advertising, are competing with everyone else on the market, in capturing the attention of the target audience, by offering novelty, innovation.

The presence of mass-media in today's society makes a person exposed to about 2000 ads a day. In reality it is confirmed that most times we look without "seeing" the TV ad, "we listen without hearing" the radio spot and pass by printed ads, "without noticing," so that few are perceived, and even fewer commercial messages are actually "absorbed" so as to generate a purchasing, and implicitly consumption, act.

Specialists in the domain have tried to use the concept of *psycho-social field* in explaining human behavior in deciding to buy and consume, which develops based on personal mental processes and strong physical and social environmental influences.

The impact of sociology, social and cultural anthropology on psychological research has been felt in the tendency to link accredited psycho-sociological models and concepts to certain socio-cultural contexts.

If, in an economic approach, the utility value of an object is paramount, in the psychological approach, it is the force and nature of human motivations, while in a social approach the social significance of the objects is the dominant. "It is never the object itself that is consumed, it always manipulates the objects as signs with the purpose to differentiate

either by association with a social group, or by reference to a higher status class.”²

Advertising creation cannot be boiled down to a theory or a single model: in fact, advertising based on permanent explosions of meaning, unpredictable renewal, cannot follow from a single equation. In this light, advertising is the most pregnant expression of mass culture, a “cultural industry”³ and “the spearhead of mass culture models,” promoter of the specific consumerism of the middle classes.⁴

But it does not act on individuals alone, it has complex effects on culture, the volume of knowledge, values and norms in a society. Ads call on the sensational in order to seduce the target audience, display material and erotic stimuli, while the characters and communication contexts are simplistic and stereotypical. Advertising circulates sets of images, ideas and assessments, stereotypes of thought and behavior on which members of the public call when building their own behaviour.⁵

2.2 Methods to Measure Pros and Cons

There are pros and cons in every analysis of the economic, social and psychological components of advertising. Advertising supporters see it as an economic phenomenon providing “drainage” of production to the buyers and pointing to high quality goods and services. The critics blame it for accelerating product obsolescence, artificially developing areas of production and providing false dimensions to economic progress. As a social phenomenon, the voters’ opinion is that advertising enhances individual integrity, proposing new ways of life, providing diversity to life in communities and facilitating choice of the social roles deemed appropriate. Critics think that advertising causes frustration and resentment to those unable to procure the advertised products, thus feeding social conflict, and that the false needs it creates may produce confusion in assuming social roles.

As for psychic issues, fans argue that advertising strengthens the sense of life, optimism and self confidence in the consumers. Critics say that advertising distorts the hierarchy of values, by cultivating euphoria, hedonism, narcissism and individualism. They also say that in most individuals, advertising disturbs their relation to their living environment, offering a world of illusion. A sort of substitution behavior, where shopping therapy replaces the true cultural values with perishable and superficial tenets, a reason why we might agree that the human saga may be narrated, at least in part, as a history of shopping.

We tend to see the mall as a recent American phenomenon, an essential and somehow ordinary one, stemming from demographic habits, rather

than an element that caused a profound change of what or who we are. The mall is, essentially, just an ancient principle of organization that has not reached its sell-by-date. It may never do. However, by studying it and the activities conducted in it, we can learn a lot about ourselves – about the state of the nation and its inhabitants – from many perspectives: economic, esthetical, geographical, spiritual, emotional, psychological, and sometimes, sartorial.⁶

Unfortunately, both camps start from the assumption that advertising is the only influencing element of consumer behavior. In reality, it is known that there are many other factors with major impacts on it, such as experience, age, traditions, price, fashion, etc. The existence of the large volume of information available today makes people begin to take an interest in only some information. As time goes on and experience accumulates, people start filtering in new information, i.e. develop selective perception.

This aspect makes advertising success decline. It does not mean that advertising is no longer considered of value. For sure, the sense generally embraced by the specialists is that advertising continues to exist as a form of art and, less so, as a brand-building instrument. But the purpose of advertising is not to create a brand, but to protect it. Advertising is used to “resonate” with the consumers. If they are made to think, the brand has met the concept for which it was created. Creativity is the last aspect needed by a brand, once it has become rooted into the consumer mind. The value of art is reflected in the beholder. Only that, once a functional discipline becomes art, it will lose its function and therefore the capacity to be measured objectively.⁷

The theories, and especially the divergence on the efficacy of advertising and publicity, have triggered the development of methods to measure their effects. It was noticed that the effects are influenced by many factors including: type of message, level of investment, age of the market, competition advertising.

- *Notoriety measurement* – constantly applied before and after an advertising campaign.

The method has the advantage of simplicity, but was criticized in its technical and methodological aspects. Many factors can influence product notoriety: seasonality, non-memorization, campaign intensity and duration.

- *Impact of measured variables.*

The method has been criticized for measuring message technique rather than ad effect.

- *Campaign balance* – measures memory and image, notoriety, impact, acceptance, involvement and intentions to buy.

Critics relate to the fact that absence of standardization makes interpretation difficult.

▪ *Measurement of exposure and purchase* – consists in observing the changes of buying behavior based on the level of exposure to the advertising campaign.

▪ *The Barometer* is an instrument for an advertising campaign diagnosis, measuring brand notoriety and image in relation to product use and media exposure, segmented into small, medium and large buyers.

The concept of ad efficiency measurement method validity is often a major issue both for psychologists and for marketers. This was progressively becoming more ambiguous as advance in research outlined the fact that the decision to buy relies on a number of factors: purchasing power, self esteem, individual personality, group of origin, reference group, etc.

The 1960s meant a lot for the background of advertising psychology. Practically, this is when the most important advertising psychology theories took shape, with real efforts to develop and improve theories to identify advertisement consumer behavior, in the light of psychological analysis. For sure, there is no perfect method for measuring the effects of advertising, and the lack of standardization makes application and result interpretation difficult. “The issue of an international standard for measuring the effects of advertising is rhetorical and the answer is negative for now. With no consensus on ideal measurement, we have several types of partial measurements.”⁸

However, attitude to advertising is different and, sometimes surprising. In general, we monitor transfer from attitude to the ad to attitude to the brand, which may generate consumption based on appreciation of the brand, considering that advertising cannot light a fire, just boost it, once lit. In other words, advertising can maintain brands created by publicity.⁹

2.2 Lifelong Learning, a Driver of the Knowledge-Based Society

The information resource is the most valuable resource of human nature, always the driving force of scientific technical and historical progress, and of civilization itself, that needs to be developed and strengthened nowadays in the minds of all the residents of this planet. Knowledge, mankind’s cognitive power was never as often invoked as in the post-modern society, a natural heir of the industrial society that was defined and presented as belonging to a knowledge-based society. Self-improvement and the capacity to update information are requirements of lifelong learning, helping contemporary humans learn to be themselves, receptive to change, able to anticipate it and to adapt. Thus, it provides a balanced personality

development with a high degree of independent learning, based on which humans know how to identify and use sources of information, participate in the development of society, in educating other members of their community and improving the quality of life. Self-education is a sentient activity, focusing on self development or improvement, according to aspirations, desires, ideals and the notion of human roles in society.

Therefore, we think that, in the next decade, knowledge is information that acts. This is why we believe that the existence of a knowledge-based society is only possible if based on an information society; knowledge-based society is characterized by an innovative use of information and knowledge, ever faster dissemination as a result of globalization.

With its main defining elements – globalization factors, expansion and enhancement of scientific knowledge, production and knowledge of innovative technologies, knowledge expansion through the most modern and evolutionary means, primarily by Internet and e-book – such a society has its own strengths and weaknesses, that people should be aware of, in order to avoid or benefit from.¹⁰

2.2.1 Attitude to Advertising Stimuli

Nowadays, the fastest growing marketing medium for reaching children and adults at school and at home is considered to be online advertising. People need to be able to identify, analyze, evaluate and select advertising; especially elementary school students must learn to manage that without adult assistance. Furthermore, online advertising to children involves marketing practices that are probably very corrupting to kids, taking into consideration that most of those practices consist of:

- Designing advertising directed toward individual children by asking personal information.
- Encouragement and engagement of children's entire attention for a long time by creating and developing attractive interactive environments.
- Difficulty of children to easily notice the differences between the content and the advertising integrated with content.

Thus, while people are involved in captivating interactive activities, the capacity of online advertising to identify, select, and sell to individual children and adults, gives advertisers unbelievable power over adults and especially, children. By capturing their attention online, marketers reach children and adults directly, enabling firms to establish individual relationships with vulnerable young computer users and also professionals interested in information and knowledge.

So, regarding children, it is obviously recommended that parents and teachers help them in learning the way to identify and evaluate advertising

without their assistance, in order to avoid kids' online misinformation about the e-Education World.

On the other hand, online advertising is used by many sites to provide a collection of links and lessons or massive online courses on various subjects for a variety of age groups, from different areas of activity. Its purpose is also to inform, persuade, remind, and attract potential customers by creating a real demand for the product or service, communicating important information of all forms of educational technology in individual learning and teaching. Moreover, thanks to email, chat and discussion software, the interaction between learners and e-resources, between learners and an instructor and among the learners themselves, based on a huge e-exchange of information, creates the so-called e-learning environment. As a consequence, one of the challenges arising from the existence and development of a knowledge-based society is the very quest for a method to monitor and control knowledge.

A feature of the 21st century – the many media exercising information and psychological pressure on us, especially the internet, radio, press, television, with the latter having the most “seductive,” and hence “manipulation”-power over the public, can only help complete our picture of knowledge.

In this respect, we notice that one of the ongoing scientific concerns is about adolescents' ability to comprehend and evaluate advertising; the enjoyment of ads and their impact on adolescents' beliefs and values; the positive and negative influence of advertising on adolescents compared to adults; the relationship between advertising exposure and adolescents' consumer behavior.

According to Emma Baumgartner and Fiorenzo Laghi (2012), for advertising practitioners, the findings from their study may provide initial insights into the strategic usage of different forms of emotional appeal for adolescents and young adults that would improve advertising effectiveness. In their study, the results show that different advertising stimuli generate different levels of ads effectiveness for both categories: adolescents and young adults. Therefore, the emotional response to advertising is substantial regarding the effectiveness of advertising. Young adults constantly associate highly positive images with higher levels of effectiveness so as adolescents usually express a negative attitude to an ad, but may secretly have positive feelings towards it.¹¹ When advertising images are all positive or negative, the response is based on the most extreme image; on the other side, when an ad contains both positive and negative images, the overall effect is driven by a compensatory mechanism.¹²

Their newly developed abilities of hypothetical deductive thinking seem to characterize the adolescents for ad processing. On the basis of incomplete information, they may tend to make decisions and act properly. Contrarily, young adults may prefer to postpone decision making until they have evaluated all of the information available regarding the stimuli, and they may process stimuli with more caution.¹³ Even although ongoing evidence indicates that adolescents may be more receptive to image advertising than adults, still there is very little empirical evidence,¹⁴ certainly the influence of cognition and affect is age-dependent.¹⁵

Thus, in time, with knowledge becoming richer and richer in information, it will itself trigger radical changes in the vision of advertising people; when addressing an informed society, advertising will adapt its whole array of strategies and tactics, to influence the subconscious, provide new knowledge, that should not overlap with what is already there, and cause ambiguity and rejection.

Continuous struggle against the “seduction” and potential manipulation of advertising may be won by encouraging the so called “information war”, where victories can be obtained with no violence or weapons, just by persuasion – persuasion of an informed, educated, knowledge-thirsty person.

At the individual level, to help fight this “information pressure”, we think we should analyze and check information with the means we have available, and especially by consulting knowledgeable persons; using multiple advertising promotion sources to get an objective term of comparison, even consulting a written specialist source, as books are still the safest source of information. Informational war knows no borders, we are unaware participants.

In market studies conducted in order to observe how the public reacts to ads and commercial messages broadcast on TV, the respondents’ reaction was that people are considered and dealt with like the worst buying tools. 24 /7, TV ads talk about goods and services we have to buy, suggesting that our scale of values is our purchasing power itself. In actual fact, according to the same studies, in contemporary TV, information only accounts for up to 8%, the rest being commercial space and entertainment. Therefore, the target audience is influenced by the 92%.”¹⁶

In informed groups, ads focus on particularities, traditions, ethics and aesthetics. Thus, the captured educated sub-consciousness will be the driver in accepting advertising in a knowledge-based society. This explains why more and more consumers see advertising as a form of art rather than a means of communication. Most times, as advertisement consumers, we can replicate scenes of an ad that caught our attention, unable to precisely name the actual product it was promoting.

People see advertising in the way they read a book or watch a TV show. They become interested in the characters, situations and events, without the slightest motivation to become a future buyer of the advertised product. This is pure art, a real drive to know society through the filter of an informed and creative human mind.¹⁷

3. Consequences of Socio-Economic Behavior

The result of the analysis presented in this paper points to the forecasted portrait of a consumer who is in control to a significant degree. We are therefore witnessing in the consumer a transition from the state of a mere passive receiver, to a new stage in the history of consumer behavior.

The consumer will get more and more involved in the entire knowledge gaining process, by the very wish to know and understand more and more of what he/she is exposed to.

Thus, in order to select what really matters, out of the informational ocean, it is important and really necessary to establish some “orientation points” so as not to get absorbed into the strong waves of new information that threaten to “suck in” those who venture on a voyage without sufficient information. Interest in knowledge, motivation to get information, thinking, as well as the correct use of modern search engines, filtering and selection of information, are elements working in favor of society.

In equal measure, the promoter of the outcome of knowledge, and creator of the image thereof in society, can provide real benefits, by promoting ethics and morality in the respect paid to social values, traditions, culture.¹⁷

Contrary to the natural barriers and question marks raised by psychology and sociology in regard to the exact shape that communication technologies will take or to when they will be fully accepted, the foreseeable future shows signs of change. The years to come will bring major changes to the advertising industry, mass communication and in the approaches to advertising based on human psycho-sociology. It is becoming more evident that publicity can no longer rely on a so-called captive audience that, not too long ago, could be assaulted, like a sitting target, by a wealth of ads and commercial messages.

4. Concluding Comments

In our wish to conduct a psychological study of advertising in the context of a knowledge-based society, in parallel to lifelong learning, and moreover following the natural steps of discovery and description of the two

phenomena, of a psycho-socio-economic-cultural nature, with strengths, and filtered through, education and innovation, we have found that the two share the human spiritual dimension itself and its meaning, translating as thrift and psychological balance. Looking at the Ecclesiastes Book in the *Bible*, Chapter 1, verse 18: “*For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief;*” we tend to believe that these words were written predicting our present day life, in a knowledge-based society. In order to conform to the tenets of a wise person, we think it is important not to remain indifferent, to create positive behavior models and become personalities – perfectionists in frugality.

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