

Applied Social Sciences

Applied Social Sciences:
Communication Studies

Edited by

Georgeta Rață, Gheorghe Clitan
and Patricia-Luciana Runcan

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P U B L I S H I N G

Applied Social Sciences Communication Studies,
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FOREWORD

This volume contains papers from the ISSA – 2012 Conference, which came under the wider range of *Communication Studies*, also called in Romania *Communication Sciences* (following the French model). The papers reflect the Romanian researchers' interests—theoretical and practical—and their progress; these scientists are engaged in the scientific assessment of the phenomenon of communication—as manifested in the daily lives of individuals, professional communities, and organizations—, and of its main approaches and instantiations (public relations, journalism, advertising, library and information science).

The volume's topics range from attempts to exploit, develop and establish ways of approaching communication (media anthropology; communication mediatization in the information society; constructivism in social media; logic and epistemology of beliefs/opinions; critical analysis of advertising; brand philosophy), to case studies of professionalised communication forms (organizational communication; niche journalism; crisis communication; new media; event communications; new information and documentation technologies; intercultural communication; regional advertising). Hence the volume is addressed to the public interested both in the theoretical and applicative levels of communication studies in Romania, and in the solving of real problems of professionalised communication.

The contents of the articles reveal a number of continuances or leitmotifs that can serve as a basis for a picture of the Romanian debates on professionalised communication: information, communication and representation in the informational society; massification, local character and actual globalisation of communication; persuasion, manipulation and critical thinking in media discourse; the epistemological, educational and organisational status of professional communication. The main coordinates of this picture as shaped by the volume's studies resemble characteristics of the cultural spaces—especially Anglo-Saxon and Francophone—that influenced their authors. This is also reflected by the denominations used for their fields, sometimes interchangeably, by the Romanian researchers and practitioners, namely *communication studies* and *communication sciences*.

Another proof is represented by the way professionalised communication is perceived and conceived within the Romanian socio-cultural space. Thus, on the one hand, most authors use terms such as *information*, *communication*, and *representation* as notions that indicate social—mostly organisational—phenomena, aiming at producing, institutionalising and deconstructing meaning in the current Romanian society. On the other hand, media hypostases are viewed as organisational bases of communication circumscribed pragmatically mainly to enterprises' functioning (economic sense); utilisation of technologies (technological sense); and the development of democratic citizenship (symbolic sense). Likewise, media communication—analysed under its various hypostases—written press; TV; advertising; crisis communication; classic and digital/online information and documentation; cultural and PR events, etc—occupies a central place in the volume.

The central role of media communication is not only given by the proportion of studies dealing with the impact of this type of communication means on the Romanians—who are, since 1990, in a constant postcommunist transition to western democracy—but also by the ways media communication is perceived in the context of current globalisation. Either explicitly or tacitly, media are perceived as formative or deforming instruments of institutions', and political organisations', images, or as instruments of managing (either manipulatively or not) their social visibility and the public space. In their relation to the financial-economic institutions and organisations, media are perceived as sources of technological advantage and marketing.

From a scientific point of view, media are perceived in different ways: for the natural and technological sciences, they are enhancers of information and data transmission capacities and sources of their own research activities, whereas for the social sciences and humanities they are instruments of analysing the impact of communication on public opinion and space (particularly in case of philosophy and sociology); instruments of studying the attributing of socio-cultural meaning to different types of signs and symbols (e.g., semiotics and semiology); and instruments of scrutinizing communication as social bond in modern and postmodern societies (e.g., philosophy and anthropology).

Within the research carried out by the Romanian authors, a particular place is given to questions concerning the contribution media communication should make, within the academic and vocational institutions, to the formation of citizens aware, and critical of, the messages around them, but also of media specialists and practitioners professionally and deontologically independent from the media trusts that tend to integrate

them. In this area, the various lines of research endeavour concurrently to identify and assess the skills and competences of a professionalised communicator in various branches of journalism, PR, advertising, library and information science, or in the area of new mass-media systems and technologies.

It is worth mentioning at this point that, in the recent years, a number of European programmes have been accessed by the government, aiming at developing competency grids or dictionaries necessary for defining and registering professions, including the communication ones, in registers of professions standardised and officialised at national and European levels. To the experienced analyst, this process has obviously influenced the headings under which the Romanian specialists in communication (both theorists and practitioners) have placed their research interests. Even a simple survey of the volume contributors' fields of interest—as revealed by the topics and issues approached—would be illuminating in this respect.

However, we will not proceed to such a study, for it cannot replace the reading of the full text. The freedom of choice regarding the order in which the articles can be selected is left entirely to the reader, as any text can be read independently from the others. We tried to highlight the volume's thematic and problematological unity, not by describing the main aspects of its studies, but by outlining the main themes of the picture as a whole. Thus, we hope that the reader interested in the ways communication is reflected in the Romanian academic debates would be able not only to integrate each contribution into the known socio-cultural landscapes, but also into the picture of the Romanian space sketched above.

—*Gheorghe CLITAN*

CHAPTER ONE

**CONSTRUCTS, MODELLISATIONS,
VALORISATIONS**

SOCIAL ROLE OF BRAND

OANA BARBU

Introduction

When we talk about a brand, we establish a clear separation between the product and the nonmaterial attributes that are assigned to it, understood as benefits. In most cases, the brand settles itself as an alternative to the object, harnessing it under a certain sign. Presuming that social values have their roots in our belief system, we state the brand as being a carrier of value signs for the hyper consumption society. According to the axiological theory, one of the research braches renders the value as being objective, considering it as an inevitable and inherent quality of all things. In the same direction, making a difference between self-value and market-value, John Locke considered the value as being the capacity of an item to serve a need or a pleasure of human life (Vaughn 1980). In this way, it does not matter if the value is or is not recognized, the carrier of the value is no longer the subject, but the object itself.

Methodology: Hermeneutical Anthropology of the Brand Concept

Brand anthropomorphism has been more and more exploited after the year 2000, going from the assertion of sensory brand and emotional experiences offered by this entity, to the idea of a marriage between consumer and brand (McEween 2005) and even until the assertion of *Lovemarks* by Kevin Roberts, based on respect and love for a trademark. The brand presents itself to modern society as being a nonmaterial entity, “a living entity, enriched or dilated in time, the cumulative result of thousands of small gestures” (*ibid.*: 26), transformed into a real social and cultural phenomenon. In a society in which a rational consumption choice is more and more replaced by a personal and emotional one, brands define themselves through “clarity, safety, consistency, stature, membership – everything human beings need to define themselves. Brands mean identity” (Olins 1996). Instead, Gilles Lipovetsky (2006) considers that

this emotional consumption fits brands only partially; he nominates much more than the effects of a marketing wave, it belongs to a social plan, the consumers' one, tracing itself into an intimate logic, based on the search for sensations and of the greater subject. This fact tallies, with a changing of the meaning of the individual and its bond with objects; the product is no longer the subject of the search, the object is not wanted anymore, but the vision and imaginary of the social involvement in its consumption. This *liberation* of the subject will no longer be made in the absence of materials, because the subject is already aware of the power gained by the objects. And so, the revitalization of subjectivity will be made by comparison to objects, the individualization starting itself also with the consumption of certain objects. This actually resembles a "social engine" through the fact that it establishes a bond between people, "touching" them in different ways, transforming their lives and, as a consequence, themselves also.

From this point of view, what differentiates a brand from any other type of sign is the extraordinary versatility of its meanings. In other words, the practical quality of a brand locates itself in the fact that neither meaning is being built before or forever. Being tributary to a social context (even global), the brand is destined to perpetual *semiotics* as a continued re-adaptation of the sign to the constantly changing social reality. In a similar way to certain speeches (Hall 1982), brands can be looked at as ideological statements just because of a limited matrix of meanings and contexts opponent to the ideology in which they were generated. In other words, considering that the brands join the development of the individual in a certain social-cultural space, it becomes necessary for the entire concept frame of the hyper consumption society to recognize the strong presence of brands among our existence.

On the other hand, modern sociology reveals upfront that, in order to interact at the social level, the individual sees himself being put in front of the situation in order to adopt certain forms of behaviour that are accepted by the community, taking upon him and summarizing certain accepted forms of behaviour, translated into social and cultural standards, lifestyles. In these conditions, a brand tries to satisfy these needs of the individual in a symbolic way (but not necessarily) and to keep track of the cultural models of society. In hyper consumptionism, stronger than any other time, brands – as nonmaterial realities – are forced to assume this role in terms of a sprayed universe of values, divided and sectioned according to criteria that belong more and more to lifestyle subjectivity and not to the taught standards (whether they are ethic, social, aesthetic and so on). Brands need to locate themselves at the cultural level and to propose individuals

symbolic satisfactions for their tensions, which need to occur with social models valued by them, and also identity models, lifestyles, self-images, existence and behaviour models through which they can identify themselves.

In the same way, standards that determine the role of the individual and also assume along its social existence must be taken into consideration. These standards reveal social attitudes: the individual adapts to each situation. The standards rely on social and social-cultural models, family, professional, on behaviour stereotypes that depend, among others, on age, sex and social status.

It is necessary to make from this point of view an observation about the difference between common standards and role standards at practical philosophical level. Common standards are those that can suffer a generalization at group or even society level. All these sum up to the assembly of values, beliefs, and even life habits of the group or society. Role standards have a narrower meaning, an individually social function, being the ones that determine the role the person assumes in social life, the way he/she chooses to participate as a social actor. Still, they are signed up in a collective logic, and need to be first of all socially accepted (McElreath, Boyd & Richerson 2003).

The social role of brand consists in the ability to organize, more or less, different forms of affective circuits at the individual level (Lury 2004). So, the brand becomes a mechanism that includes, strengthens and controls this type of emotional investments to offer measurable results, and also, valuable. In the style of the discussed topics so far, we can state that brands are mechanisms that transform affective “energy” into valuable forms of immaterial work.

Brand Culture and its Social Aspects

Branding is defined as the creative process of maintenance and individualization of a brand: the summarized methods through which an organization or a product communicates, symbolizes and differentiates itself toward consumers. “Branding has gone so much over its commercial roots, that its impact is practically immeasurable in social and cultural terms.” (Olins 2004)

More and more authors, like Schroeder (2008) or Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling (2006), propose a *cultural approach of the brand* revealing the opening of this domain towards cultural, sociological and theoretical research. Recently, anthropologists, historians and sociologists approach brands from a cultural perspective, understanding their importance at the

social level, and also accepting economic and psychological researches (Bently, Davis & Ginsburg 2008, Koehn 2001, and Lury 2004).

The “Brand culture” refers to the cultural codes developed by brands – history, image, myths, art, theatre – influencing the meaning and value of a brand, but especially at the social level. From this perspective, the research of the phenomenon often implies the inclusion and understanding of social-cultural influences and the involvement of brand in the social sphere. First of all, we need to accept a fact: we live in a “branded” world in which brands give culture a certain way of perception and branding activities strongly influences modern society. Secondly, “brand culture represents a third dimension of brand research – in conjunction with traditional domains of brand identity and brand image research. The brand culture offers the cultural, historical and political context required to understand the brand contextually.” (Schroeder 2009: 123-126)

There are a lot of definitions for the concept “culture”. The most useful one, in the context presented by us, seems to be the definition given by Clifford Geertz, in which culture represents “a model of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms through which people communicate, perpetuate and develop knowledge about life” (Geertz 1973). We consider that a brand, in order to be relevant for consumers and durable over time, must function just like a culture. Beyond the manipulation of a series of external images or target-groups, companies need to be aware of their core values and understand why, beyond profit reason, they exist. This means that, in essence, a company must develop (or reveal) an *ethos* and a constant vision about the world in which it believes, and only then to take action in occurrence with the *ethos* and the communicated value about the world.

Moreover, through the accent that is being put on perception, emotion and valued differentiation, Schroeder (2012) states that brand enters even the cultural spheres of religion, politics and mythology, because of the fact that they promote equivalent models of consumption and joy.

Brand communication is making a call more and more towards emotional consumption, labels with strong ethic messages, products that observe strict standards of environment protection and undertake in social responsibility campaigns, but much more than this, values proposed by the great corporations, re-aiming towards more and more human causes that are closer to the consumer making him more responsible. In this context, brand *philosophies* have the duty and, at the same time, the advantage of noticing social desires, proposing also viable alternatives. With a clean advertising communication speech and social responsibility as over-ordered proposed values, rules, principles and norms of conduct transform

the brand into a mass educator and guide in finding the answer to the question: *What needs to be done?* Here is, for example, a mission declaration of the campaign “Make it count!” that is part of the brand philosophy of the Element brand:

“The Make it Count collection celebrates Element’s deep roots, consistency and drive. It represents the importance of being graceful and approaching everything you do with depth and longevity. Leave an imprint deep enough, that it continues to make the world a better place. Make it Count!” (Element. Online: www.elementskateboards.com)

Motivational prescriptions and life leading rules are traced more and more under the shape of campaign slogans:

“You are Volcom, do your job, recycle!”
 “Green works – Panasonic”
 “Live. Learn. Grow – Element”
 “Connecting people – Nokia”
 “Sharp Minds – Sharp”
 “Come alive! You’re in the Pepsi generation – Pepsi”
 “Think different! – Apple”
 “The Power to Be Your Best – Apple”
 “Together we can do more – Orange”
 “Impossible is nothing – Adidas”
 “Nothing is too small to know, and nothing too big to attempt – Element”

“In a consumer culture, people no longer consume for merely functional satisfaction, but consumption becomes meaning-based, and brands are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity.” (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998)

The greater involvement of brand philosophies at community level is noticeable also at the levels of new reports that are established at the social level, between the hyper-consumer and the others. At first glance, we can talk back to the modern individual that he had retired into selfish individualism, preoccupied with his self, his security, his health, giving tribute to some abilities to escape the daily routine and, in conclusion, citizenship. But, if we look at it from up-close, modern society presents a strong human character with immense need to create a community of interests and to share common experiences. Proof stands social media networks, more and more often social responsibility campaigns, greater concerns about human rights, ideal of tolerance, philanthropy, charity events, self-helping victims, repealing violence and cruelty. The stronger predilection for online social interactivity websites (Facebook, YouTube,

LinkedIn, Twitter) shows that along the products that they consume, the individual is no longer alone, more and more branches of his life are joining the same desiderates.

“The Self is being conceived in postmodernism not only as a product of a certain social system, but as something that the person can actively create, through consumption.” (Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998: 5)

Anthropologists (McCracken 2005) ask themselves the question: *What roles do brands and consumption play in this transformation?* The answer of most of them is related to the fact that brands are symbolic units that are used together with other symbolic units with cultural character (career, music, fashion, religion), in order to build an identity for the individual. Brands create today's values not only through products or services, but especially through the *meaning* that they communicate. This meaning is adopted by consumers to express their own identity: who they are and what they believe in. The creation of *value meanings* can be seen, today, as the most important *product* at the social level of a brand.

More and more campaigns manifest their interest and try to draw attention on the problems that face the individual at different levels of his existence, trying to offer a personalized answer for the question *How do I have to lead my life?*; whether we are talking about his social problems (and here we include both socio-professional status problems, but also genre or religion issues), or personal ones (family problems, social relationship or moral aspects, etc), brands become *teachers* for the masses, regulating socio-cultural or ethical models, lifestyles that are worthy to the century we live in.

As a conclusion, the challenge that addresses public brand represents, actually, the voice of an entire media culture that tries to express itself through proper means. We wish to launch a challenge related to the brand *philosophy* insight seen from a different angle, and that not only assumes a practical-teaching role in modern society, but also maintains to join the chaotic development of an individual that has gone through postmodern misalignment, always raising the value pole of both products and society. Different lifestyles proposed by different brands – like *Think different!* (Apple), or *Just Do it!* (Nike) – can be easily exploited for the purpose of modelling socio-cultural progress, to offer alternatives and cultural methods of free speech.

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISING (A MODEL: INFORMATIONAL ANALYSIS)

GHEORGHE CLITAN

Introduction

Critical thinking is the argumentation practice in everyday life. Advertising is a discourse where critical thinking can occur both as practical reasoning in the everyday life and institutional assessment of skills needed to build and deconstruct such a discourse.

To talk nowadays about argumentation is to put oneself either within the frameworks drawn by a few typical distinctions, or outside them: argumentation theory, or theory of argument; argumentation practice, or practical argumentation. Placing oneself outside the frameworks drawn by these distinctions often means cancelling the distinctions themselves: argumentation theory and theory of argument concern the same thing and the same happens in case of argumentation practice and practical argumentation.

Such distinctions are generally accepted in the following terms: argumentation theory is the study of argumentation practice (in its normative, empirical or conceptual dimensions), whereas theory of argument is the study of argumentation products (that is, of arguments, from the perspective of their functioning as practical argumentation within a given discourse genre). From such a perspective, theory of argument is a part of argumentation in the same way in which arguments or practical argumentation are parts of argumentation practice.

Accepting or cancelling the frameworks drawn by these distinctions is the focal point of the interdisciplinary approaches to critical thinking as argumentation practice, bringing together not only the usual perspectives of philosophers, epistemologists, or logicians, but also those of rhetoricians, communication practitioners, theorists and practitioners.

Critical Analysis of Commercials

This paper attempts to emphasise commercials analysis focusing on the models offered by critical thinking tests, from which we retain only the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) approach. Commercials are approached as “advertising discourses”, and advertising discourses as public discourses.

We describe in brief the three most important LSAT perspectives on advertising discourse analysis (comprehensive analysis, informational analysis and logical-argumentative analysis) leaving aside the outlook analysis of advertising or marketing psychology, perhaps more accessible to the public. We describe those perspectives focusing on informational analysis.

Critical analysis of advertising consists in decoding commercials with at least three types of questions found in LSAT: (a) analytical reasoning questions (for the informational analysis: organization, grouping, structuring information in a discourse), (b) logical reasoning questions (for the logical-argumentative analysis: structuring/destructuring an argumentative discourse), and (c) reading comprehension questions (for the comprehensive analysis: understanding long discourses by comprehensive thinking).

Here is a display of the characteristics of the three types of analysis in the critical thinking skills according to LSAT (*The Official LSAT Handbook* 2010: 2-4):

- 1) Characteristics of the informational analysis:
 - A. Organizing, grouping, structuring data;
 - B. Identifying a basic information structure;
 - C. Possible use of the given information;
 - D. Compulsory use of the given information;
 - E. Possible use of new information;
 - F. Compulsory use of new information;
 - G. Choosing the entities using the available information;
- 2) Characteristics of the logical-argumentative analysis:
 - A. Identifying an idea, theme or main problem;
 - B. Constructing an inference;
 - C. Identifying an argumentative structure (explicit or implicit);
 - D. Identifying a similar argumentative structure;
 - E. Identifying a reasoning error;
 - F. Identifying a similar reasoning error;
 - G. Identifying the assumptions and presuppositions in an argument;
 - H. Using the additional evidence/information;
 - I. Explaining an event, including a conflict or apparently paradoxical state;

3) Characteristics of the comprehensive analysis:

- A. Identifying the main points of view;
- B. Explanation of the meaning/significance/reference of the expression;
- C. Argumentative structure of the text/discourse/advertisement;
- D. Construction of inferences concerning advanced points of view in advertisement;
- E. Expansion of the discourse content/gaining new knowledge;
- F. Identifying and highlighting attitudes;
- G. Identifying the analogies and the principles that a commercial uses;
- H. Emphasizing the purpose in which the advertisement is used.

As can be seen, the informational analysis of an advertising discourse is determined primarily by analytical reasoning skills, but its elements are found in the other two types of analysis considered here. We limit only to an analytical approach of advertising discourse, focusing on the questions with which we can identify the course of information in a commercial and the expected effects of different ways of using the information.

Informational Analysis of Advertising: A Model

For the informational analysis of the advertising discourse from a critical thinking perspective, we retain only how skills were used to analyze the information in the LAST test. This test consists of multiple choice questions, some of which concern the use of information skills in reasoning or thinking. Among the questions in the structure of the three types of items, analytical reasoning questions are crucial for testing data analysis skills used in reasoning or thinking, but not sufficient. In the analysis of advertising, they must be accompanied by questions aimed at, in one way or another, all information contained in a product ad, regardless of whether they are logical reasoning questions or reading comprehension questions. *What questions are to be made in terms of information analysis?*

Before the analysis, we present briefly what we mean by informational analysis questions (*The Official LSAT SuperPrep 2004*: 4-39):

1) The purpose of the information analysis questions consists in putting and solving problems, and discussing it assumes the ability to understand a structure of entities and relations and to draw conclusions about those structures, more exactly:

- A. The ability to identify elements or structures of elements (given information) under the form of default terms of a problem, that can be (a) Groups of contextual elements: conceptions, visions, perspectives, situations, actions, entities, space frames, time frames, background frames, assumptions, relationships, structures and so on); (b) Groups of entities

that can relate between them: persons, places, things, events, images, shapes, colours, expressions, representations, etc.;

- B. The ability to relate well keeping in mind some default terms, reasoning consisting in putting/representing the problem in data (the perceivable forming/reforming of the problem): (a) Statements, rules, conditioning and reasoning regarding the default terms: highlighting, explaining and stipulating the relations between certain entities or structure of them (entities structures, relationship structures); (b) Structures or organisations under the form of requests of given information (e.g., placing given elements/information from first to last, selecting subgroups of elements/information of a bigger group, matching elements/information from another group;
- 2) The necessary skills assumed by the informational analysis questions are those describing regular relations, like:
- A. Designation: 2 entities, P and O, and their subentities, R and S, must be analysed from the informational behaviour point of view during the fourth consecutive instantiation, called 1, 2, 3 and 4;
 - B. Ordering: X is positioned before Y, but after Z;
 - C. Grouping: A discourse tries to analyze, regarding the problem that it discusses, 6 points of view – R, S, U, V, W and X. Each point of view is analyzed from the perspective of its creation: A discourse tries to analyze, on an issue that discusses 5 ways – R, S, U, V, X. Each point of view is analysed from the perspective of its creation – pros, cons and holds and abstentions;
 - D. Space orientation: An advertising poster has 6 information focal points, and each point is connected to at least another point in an interference system, some of them being targeted one way only.

A special category of information analysis questions are “problem-solving questions” regarding the necessity of solving a problem (data-problem). To highlight and better understand the role they play in the analysis of an advertisement, we present briefly the risk of falling into didacticism. Briefly restate two subcategories of these questions:

- 1) Questions regarding what is necessary, what is possible and what is impossible from the request:
 - A. “Which of the statements regarding X should be true?”
 - B. “Which of the statements could be false?”
 - C. “If Y regards Z, which of the statements regarding X has to be true?”
 - D. “If Y and Q sometimes regard Z, which of the statements regarding X could be true?”
 - E. “What might or must happen regarding X in general or under certain terms?”