

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ADVERTISING - SOME INSIGHTS

Bogdan Nichifor

“Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău
bnichifor@gmail.com

Abstract

Advertising as a tool of communication, but mostly as a marketing tool is subject to many theories and explanatory and normative models. Its contents and performed functions are not yet defined in general recognized theory. Present article focuses on the analysis of advertising in terms of its specific persuasive effort and communication process. Advertising seen as a process is based on the general scheme of the marketing communication process, with a number of specific features related to its content. The persuasive effort is related to creation of favorable attitudes or reinforcing existing attitudes. This process of persuasion is closely linked to the concept of attitude. Most theories of advertising have explored the connection between persuasion and attitude, identifying possible responses that the receiver can give to advertising information. Following lines develop these two important aspects associated with advertising theory, even if they are not the only issues that are debated in the literature.

Keywords

advertising; theory; persuasion; models; effects

JEL Classification

M30

Introduction

Advertising can be considered a variable created by convergent interest expressed in the two major scientific areas: communication and marketing. With origins in the academic and the practice, advertising was tackled on the one hand, as a means of communication required by those involved in the current economic activities, on the other hand, and the solution to communicational problems of various organizations - the media, for example. Advertising and communication, in general, are components of contemporary economic and social system. In today's society, advertising has evolved into a complex system of communication, important for both organizations and the general public. The ability to deliver messages carefully prepared to its targets gave over time to advertising a major role in marketing programs of most organizations. Different companies, starting from the multinational firms and local firms attaches increasing importance of advertising in order to present their products and services to important markets. In functioning market economies, consumers have learned to use the advertising information in their purchase decisions.

A coherent and functional analysis of advertising can be done by calling a vision that incorporates two levels: the descriptive one, which considers issues related to the need to define and differentiate advertising from other marketing tools of communication, and the normative one, that captures the conditions that advertising must meet so that marketing goals can be achieved. The need for strategic vision regarding advertising can be seen as an example of covering the normative aspect of the analysis, while the advertising features and forms can be aspects of the descriptive analysis. The

following considerations are the result of analysis made by the interpenetration of the two levels.

Defining the advertising

The interest regarding advertising resulted in the creation of a body of knowledge that includes vision more or less converging on the role of advertising. The first concrete result took the form of definitions associated with this concept; the definitions tend lately to emphasize same fundamental characteristics: advertising is a communicational paid effort, its financial supporter is identifiable, and the sent message is impersonal.

Definitions released over the years have been numerous, each of those who have proposed to define the concept participating with elements that have helped shape the content of the concept. Marketing literature in Romania proposed a number of definitions of this concept, operating as appropriate with a more or less explicit view. Thus it is estimated that advertising is "*a set of actions aimed at presenting - oral or visual - indirect (impersonal) message about a product, service or company by any identified supporter (payer) "*" (Popescu et al, 1994). According to a more recent definition, advertising "*is a communication technique that involves running a complex persuasive process, for whose realizations are used a number of specific tools, able to cause psychological pressure on the concerned public. The initiator of the advertising communication actions is the sponsor, who in order to achieve communication objectives, wants to send an impersonal message to a well-defined audience regarding the enterprise, its products or services.*" (Popescu, 2004).

As the literature in Romania, the foreign definitions of advertising are numerous. Thus, advertising is defined as "*the paid and media intermediated attempt to convince*" (O'Guinn et al, 2003) or, according to other authors as "*a form of structured and impersonal communication, composed from information, usually persuasive in nature, regarding the products, in the broad sense, paid by an identifiable sponsor and transmitted through various media*" (Arens, 2002).

Starting from descriptive analysis of advertising, we can highlight a number of its features:

1. Primarily, advertising is a form of impersonal communication, the associated messaging being transmitted by means of extremely large addressable media (the mass media). Impersonal nature of it is given in the opinion of the some authors by the lack of immediate feedback from the receivers (Belch and Belch, 2002).
2. Advertising is persuasive in nature. The goal of those using advertising is to persuade the public to adopt a product, service, idea, etc.
3. Advertising is paid by a sponsor. In the opinion of some authors this feature is even a condition which clearly distinguishes advertising from other forms of marketing communication. Publicity, for example, does not fall under the definitions above (O'Guinn et al, 2003).
4. The subject of this form of marketing communication consists of both tangible and intangible products (services, ideas).

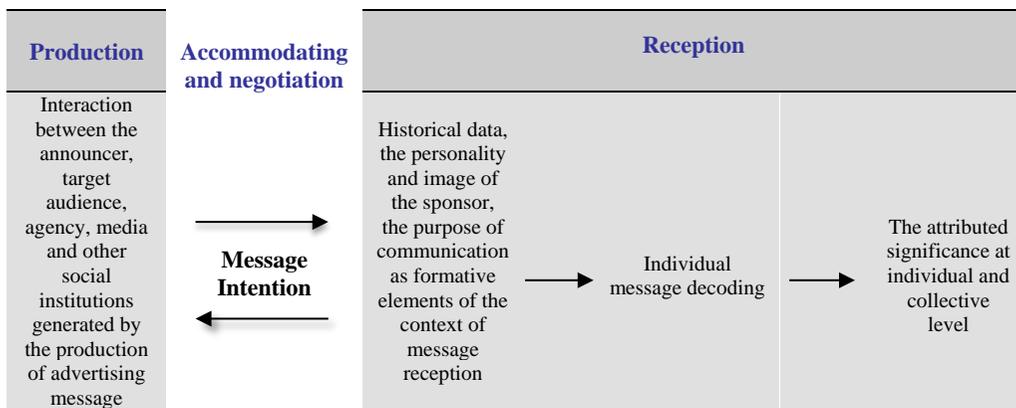
These are not all of the advertising features, but they give only outline that is necessary in delimitation from other elements of marketing communication. In this respect, the above definitions add a possible point at which advertising discussions should start.

Advertising communication process

Advertising seen as a process is based on the general scheme of the marketing communication process, with a number of specific features related to its content. Thus, from the above lines we could see that one of the characteristics is that advertising uses impersonal communication media (television, radio, press, etc.). Joining these characteristics with other leads to a specific pattern in which the advertisement is created, sent and received by the target audience.

The model shown in Figure 1 captures the content of marketing communication mediated by the media. This model explains that the advertising is a finality of a process that involves both institutions and individuals. The process includes two components: production and reception, between them intervening mediation process function, which consists, on the one hand, in the accommodation, which concerns how the communication objectives of sponsor and needs, expectations and attitudes of consumers interact and negotiation, on the other hand, which reflects the manner in which the receptor understands advertising.

Figure 1 Model of mediated communication



Source: Thomas O'Guinn, Chris Allen, Richard J.Semenik, Advertising and Integrated Brand Promotion, 3e, South-Western College Publishing, 2003 p. 14.

Barbara Stern from Rutgers University proposes another model of advertising communication, considering that it is a structured form of the literary text, something that clearly distinguishes from spontaneous interpersonal communication (Arens, 2002). The elements of advertising communication process are those above, except that fact that these elements are multidimensional. Thus, through these dimensions, communication process elements are found either in the surrounding reality or in virtual reality.

Beyond these common elements specific to most definitions associated with advertising, there are a number of elements with which this concept and practical approach is differentiated from other forms of communication and marketing specific instruments. In the first position are found structural elements of all forms of communication - source, message, medium, receiver, feed-back and noise, but also others related, on the one hand, to the external realities of communication - consumer attitudes and competitive environment, and on the other hand, the need for effective communication - repetition and the need to coordinate communication (Nan and Faber, 2004). It is therefore important to analyze these elements in order to emphasize the theoretical characteristics individualizing advertising.

Variables related to the source of communication in advertising refer to its characteristics and their potential impact on attitudes. Over time, a number of features of the source of communication have won the attention of specialists: credibility, attractiveness and power. They aim particularly one that effectively communicates the message and less the one who creates or produces the message. Credibility as a source of communication feature can be approached from two perspectives: the expertise and confidence (Petty et al, 1983). Expertise is the degree of experience and knowledge of the source in relation to a particular issue, while trust refers to the probability that the source to issue information in a sincere manner. Attractiveness can be addressed in turn in terms of three dimensions: pleasure, similarity and physical attractiveness. The third characteristic of the source, i.e. power, keep the position of the source as a potential generator of rewards or penalties for the receiver communication. All these features of the source appear to be more or less important to different types of communication. Thus, in the case of interpersonal communication the power seems to be the characteristic that exercises a high influence on the communicative purpose, in turn, in advertising, credibility and trust appear to be more important.

Variables related to the message are equally important in trying to identify the features of advertising communication. They refer to the type of used message, as well as to aspects of form or style. Regarding the type of used message, exactly the type of call that is put on the receiver there are three broad categories into which they fall: ethos call type, pathos call type and logos call type (Nan and Faber, 2004). Ethos type calls occur when the receiver focuses more on communication and less on the message source. This is especially the case of interpersonal communication where participant's direct link favors this process. Pathos type calls involves that the source to invoke rational or emotional arguments in the message in order to have an effect on the receiver. Advertising is a type of communication that often involves such a speech, well known being this approach attempts to influence the various structural elements of consumer attitudes. Logos call type is invoking arguments drawn from general recognized principles, being first specific to public information. In terms of form and style of the message, one can discuss items such as: the order of the arguments, the type of conclusion, argument repetition (Severin and Tankard, 1997). Of these, the repetition is what confers advertising its distinctiveness from interpersonal communication. Thus, it tends to use the repeated exposure to the same message in order to influence the audience.

Variables related to media can also provide a criterion for differentiate advertising from other forms of communication. Studies in this direction have insisted on distinguishing characteristics of the different channels used for personal or impersonal communication. Whatever media one chooses, the originator of the communication intends to send a message to be perceived and understood by the audience. As with the interpersonal or public communication, particular message to be transmitted by advertising will be adapted to the characteristics of the media. What differentiates advertising from other forms of communication is the overriding interest in ensuring the coordination and control of messages sent through various media. This is especially true in the current context in which the need for coordination is closely linked to communication effectiveness and impact (Thorson and Moore, 1996).

Variables that define the receptor and its response differentiate advertising from certain forms of communication. Thus, as in the case of public or interpersonal communication, the impact of advertising is largely influenced by a number of features of the receptor, such as: gender, age, income, personality, attitude, lifestyle, etc. The answer or feed-back it is the differences that can operate on different forms of communication. Direct and repeated feed-back is a characteristic of interpersonal communication, while the impersonal, indirect and less immediate feedback is a characteristic of advertising and public communication.

Another structural element of communication is the noise. It can be defined as any issue that interferes with the message. Marketing communication in general is considered a form of communication where the noise is very present. It is due to factors related, on the one hand, to the receiver: psychological barriers, and on the other hand, to the context in which the communication takes place: cultural, physical, competitive factors etc. (Epuran, 2002). Unlike interpersonal or public communication, in advertising the most intense noise is due to competitive messages. In today's highly competitive markets, the number of messages promoting similar products, marketed under different brands, is very high and as a result, there is interest of the communication initiator to detach the message and to avoid interference with competing messages.

From the above lines can be seen that advertising as a form of communication has a number of characteristics. How the consumer sees the advertising information, the effect of repetition, the need to coordinate messages and the "noise" are the cornerstone of the process of communication that give shape to advertising. If the receiving mode or the effects of repetition are factors that have accompanied advertising throughout its development, the need for coordination and communicative context are a novelty factors that have aroused the interest of specialists.

Advertising as a persuasion tool

Beyond these issues, related to communicational perspective on advertising, another dimension is related to the effort of conviction, typical to advertising. Most definitions of advertising, otherwise presented in the previous lines, underline its persuasive character. The goal of those using this type of marketing communication is to create favorable attitudes or reinforce existing attitudes so that they obtain a purpose in the form of purchase of a product or a brand. This process of persuasion is closely linked to the concept of attitude. Most theories of advertising have explored the connection between persuasion and attitude, identifying possible responses that the receiver can give to advertising information. Explanations are not always convergent, but they provide an overview of how consumers respond to advertising stimuli.

Thus, considering consumer behavior as a cybernetic-type behavior, which involves a series of inputs, processing and outputs, and seeing advertising as a part of those entries, one will be able to achieve advertising effects similar to logic shown in Figure 3 (Kotler, 2000).

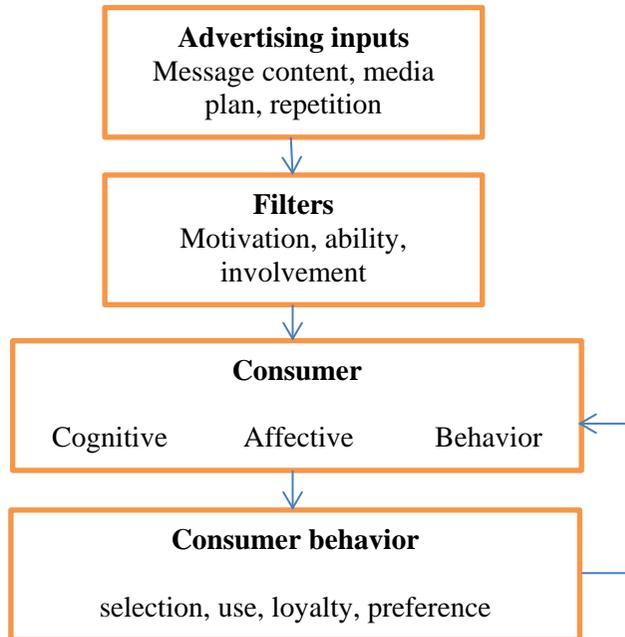
As highlighted in this framework, advertising is an entry for consumer. Message content, media planning and repetition are at the same time inputs and components of a strategy that has the role of triggering the receptor reaction mechanisms. Reaction mechanisms can be internal components of the black box, such as cognitive or emotional reactions, and external, visible through a displayed behavior: acquisition loyalty, etc. The knowledge of the effects of advertising usually involves identifying those internal or external customer-specific side effects that led to the emerging of certain theories regarding the response to advertising.

The starting point in the assessment of the effects of advertising belongs, apparently, to St. Elmo Lewis, who developed in 1898 the famous AIDA model (attention - interest - desire - action). Since then, however, the literature has shown many other opinions in this regard. Among the most popular theories on consumer reaction to information of a promotional nature are (Vakratsas and Amble, 1999):

- market response theory;
- cognitive response theory;
- affective response theory;

- persuasive hierarchy theory;
- theory of minimal involvement;
- integrative theory.

Figure 3 The conceptual framework in studying the effects of advertising



Source: Demetrios Vakratsas, Tim Ambler – *How Advertising Works: What Do We Really Know?*, Journal of Marketing, vol.63, January 1999.

Market response theory is based on the assumption of a direct relationship between advertising and buying behavior, measured by sales, market share and brand choice. This excludes the presence of intermediate effects that may occur at the consumer level, for example expressing brand loyalty by number of repeated acquisitions and not through a psychological predisposition of the individual. The theory has two dimensions: aggregate and individual. Aggregate dimension of the theory is based on the relationship between market data regarding advertising spending or the audience, on the one hand, and brand sales or market share, on the other hand. Individual dimension points toward the choice of individually brand or number of exposures necessary to generate individual or household purchasing behavior.

Cognitive response theory assumes that advertising has the ability to influence the relative importance that individuals attach to various attributes of the product, purchase decision being purely rational (Thorson and Moore, 1996). The primary role of advertising is to provide utilities related to information or search costs. The model considers that on the market there are two major categories of goods: those involving consumer experience and those related to the search process. The goods in the first category are characterized by the fact that they involve the need for repeated use so that the consumer can assess their quality. The second category can be easily evaluated on the basis of objective criteria such as price, prior use not being necessary. This classification, however, is problematic because numerous goods involve both consumer experience and search.

Cognitive response theory is the basis of the link between advertising and price elasticity of demand. On the one hand, high quality and product differentiation entail,

in accordance with the theory of strength of the market, a decrease in price elasticity of demand, especially visible in the case of products involving the experience and, on the other hand, according to the information theory, actively seeking information by consumers generates an increase in sensitivity to price (Bagwell, 2005). Studies in this direction have led to results that seem to confirm both theories (Vakratsas and Amble, 1999; Reed and Ewing, 2004). An obvious consequence of the theory of cognitive response is that by which the sponsors attempts to create an effective advertising, using initially unique selling proposition, and then the product positioning in the market.

Affective response theory is a different approach from that previously shown by the fact that it focuses on the emotional response that advertisement can generate (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1984). According to this theory, consumers form their preferences based on pleasure, feelings or emotions arising from exposure to the message, the objective characteristics of the product playing a less important role in this direction (Gardner, 1985). It is also required repeated exposure to the advertisement to determine the desired effects, but this repeated exposure can lose effectiveness when the frequency exceeds a certain level (wear in - wear out effect). This affective response takes into account, on the one hand, the promoted brand and, on the other hand, the advertisement itself. The creative concept may be largely based on melody, whose emotional effects are recognized. The problem with this theory is the impossibility of separating the affective effect from the cognitive ones. Although it is undeniable that advertising induces affective effects, they cannot however be detached by the cognitive ones.

Persuasive hierarchy theory assumed that in order to influence sales advertising should generate a number of effects on the consumer. Such effects are generated in a particular order, the first being considered as preconditions and at the same time, being the most important. It is believed that these effects are: cognitive effects, emotional effects and behavioral effects. Also occur, a number of factors with mediating role: the degree of involvement and attitude toward message. Involvement has been an object of intense study addressed in the literature. It can be defined as the personal degree of importance given to a product or situation, including the perceived risk in the purchase (Reed and Ewing, 2004). The degree of involvement usually varies from high to low, without considering, however, that it can be addressed simply by this dichotomy. In fact, the degree of variation is constant from one end to the other. According to this theory, there were a number of models. Elaboration Likelihood Model was proposed by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, they considering that consumer response is cognitive one that can take two directions, one related to the evaluation of product attributes and the other referring to the execution of the message (Lee and Schumann, 2004). Both directions follow the cognitive-affective response. Another model aimed at intermediate effects that advertising generate, is that proposed by Deborah MacInnis and Bernard J. Jaworski C. (Smith and Yang, 2004). According to them, at the consumer level occurs six levels of mental processing, which are the following: 1. analysis of the characteristics which have the effect of affective mood 2. primary classification with affective transfer effects 3. analysis of meanings, whose effect is an heuristic analyze 4. integration of information, with primary persuasive effects 5. assuming the roles with persuasive effects of empathic nature 6. processes of construction with effects of self-persuasion. The presented theories and models refer to the importance of involving as the moderator element in the advertising communication.

Minimal involvement theory is an alternative response to the model promoted by hierarchy theory persuasive. According to this theory, the consumer response to advertising involves the following stages: cognitive response, behavioral response and affective response. The experience is one that has the greatest importance in the

formation of preferences and the role of advertising is to reinforce consumer habits and experience. Andrew SC Ehrenberg is the one who proposed in 1974 awareness-test-reinforce model based on the theory of minimal involvement (Barry, 1987). This model implies that the consumer buying behavior has a high degree of regularity and predictability, the habits having a significant impact on the choice of the brand more than advertising and other forms of communication.

Integrative theory supports the presence of the cognitive, affective and behavioral effects, but the order in which these effects occur is dependent on a number of factors such as: the product, the level of involvement and the context of the acquisition. Based on this theory have been developed a number of models. The FCB grid proposed by Richard Vaughn considers two dimensions required in the categorization of products: level of involvement, which can be high and low, and type of motivation of the individual, being either cognitive or affective (Vaughn, 1980). Level of involvement related to this model refers therefore to product category, not to a brand or a particular situation. The implications of this operating pattern are related to the type of used advertising.

All these theories claim the presence of different effects of the advertising effort (Weilbacher, 2001). However, they are different in that the stresses to a greater or lesser extent a given type of effect, whether cognitive or emotional. The similarity, on the other hand, is related to emphasize given to the concept of experience. Latest opinions on the issue suggests that the three effects are unbreakable and should be addressed not as a hierarchy, but rather as dimensions of a complex reality that characterizes the consumer and his reaction to the phenomenon of advertising (Vakratsas and Amble, 1999).

Conclusions

Advertising approach is based, as we have seen, on a variety of theories and explanatory models. Whether they define how advertised is developed in social or individual, or explain how it affects the lives and behavior of the individual in his capacity as consumer, they have the merit providing new directions and perspectives of development of advertising practice.

It can be said that advertising has been and remains a very important area of interest, this being due to its impact on human society in general and given its communication impact. The multitude of theories and models express very clear that the study of advertising was not static, but dynamic closely linked to socio-economic development. We are currently witnessing reconsideration of its conceptual framework, a number of specialists talking even about new advertising.

References

- Arens, William F. (2002), *Contemporary Advertising*, 8/e, McGraw Hill/Irwin, Boston.
- Bagwell, Kyle (2005), *The Economic Analysis of advertising*, available at <http://www.columbia.edu/~kwb8/papers.html>.
- Barry, Thomas E. (1987), The Development of the Hierarchy of Effects: An Historical Perspective, *Current Issues and Research in Advertising*.
- Belch, George E., Belch, Michael A. (2002), *Advertising and Promotion: an Integrated Marketing Communications Perspective*, McGraw Hill/Irwin, Boston.
- Epuran, Gheorghe (2002), *Comunicarea în afaceri – strategii, tehnici, modele de decizie*, Ed. Alma Mater, Bacău.

- Gardner, Meryl Paula (1985), Mood States and Consumer Behavior: A Critical Review, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 12, December.
- Holbrook, Morris B., O'Shaughnessy, John (1984), The Role of Emotion in Advertising, *Psychology and Marketing*, no. 1.
- Kotler, Philip, Armstrong, Gary, Cunningham, Peggy H. (2000), *Principles of Marketing*, Fifth Canadian Edition, Prentice Hall.
- Lee, Eun-Ju, Schumann, David W. (2004), Explaining the case of incongruity, *Marketing Theory*, vol. 4 (1/2).
- Nan, Xiaoli Faber, Ronald J. (2004), Advertising theory: Reconceptualizing the building blocks, *Marketing Theory*, vol 4 (1/2).
- O'Guinn, Thomas, Allen, Chris Semenik, Richard J. (2003), *Advertising and Integrated Brand Promotion*, 3e, South-Western College Publishing.
- Petty, Richard E., Cacioppo, John T., Schumann, David (1983), Central and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 10 | September.
- Popescu, Ioana C. (2004), *Comunicarea în marketing*, Ediția a II-a, Editura Uranus, București.
- Popescu, Ioana C., Șerbănică, Daniel, Balaure, Virgil (1994), *Tehnici promoționale*, Ed. Metropol, București,
- Reed, Peter W., Ewing, Michael T. (2004), How advertising works: Alternative situational and attitudinal explanations, *Marketing Theory*, vol. 4 (1/2).
- Severin, Werner J., Tankard, James W. Jr. (1997), *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, and Uses in the Mass Media* (4th Edition), Longman.
- Smith, Robert E., Yang, Xiaojing (2004), Toward a general theory of creativity in advertising: Examining the role of divergence, *Marketing Theory*, vol. 4 (1/2).
- Thorson, Esther, Moore, Jeri (1996), *Integrated Communication: Synergy of Persuasive Voices*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Vakratsas, Demetrios, Amble, Tim (1999), How Advertising Works: What Do We Really Know?, *Journal of Marketing*, vol.63, January.
- Vaughn, Richard (1980), How Advertising Works: A Planning Model . . . putting it all together, *Journal of Advertising Research*, 20(5): 27-33.
- Weilbacher, William M. (2001), Point of view: Does advertising cause a "hierarchy of effects"?, *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 41, December.