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The abstract of the Ph.D. thesis
The Romanian advertising creativity of the '90s
Romanian press

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Keywords: creativity, divergence, relevance, SIT method, experts, the '90s, Romania

The thesis brings into spotlight the advertising creativity of the Romanian transition society from the '90s. There are too few coherent papers written in that period from which we could draw relevant information and based on which to accurately recreate the tableau of that epoch. Nevertheless, to better understand the place the advertising occupies in contemporary Romanian society, the starting point must be understood, respectively the fall of the former regime. At a common sense level, we are discussing the '90s as being the era of a couple of sprouts of communication public behavior (commercial, institutional, etc.) which helped to conceive and cementing new patterns that will influence the whole commercial communication.

The first chapter is dedicated to defining creativity. It has the role of sketching the general framework of the paper and setting reference points for the two main analysis concepts. Thus, we have a subchapter dedicated to the *ensemble perspective* through which we review the main theories and developmental steps of the concept across time. The literature gravitates around the *divergent thinking – relevant thinking* conceptual poles. A short definition for these will ease the readers' tracing of the following paragraphs and connecting the concepts. The relevant thinking is in a strong connection to solving problems (especially those with unidirectional solutions). Divergent thinking assumes changing the direction and including certain traits that guide the process towards new and innovative solutions. Two subchapters are dedicated to the two theoretical pillars which sustain the analysis: *the divergence* focused on novel elements that give an advertisement savor and originality, respectively *the relevance* that takes into account the level of adaptation and connection with the consumer, and his aspirations.

Divergent thinking is intuitive, artistic, holistic, and facilitates emotional utterances. The distinctive advertisements with surprising elements stand out in a batch. The essence does not reside so much in finding the most original ideas, as it resides in finding the ideas which originally solve the communication process. Scientifically analyzing the creativity dimensions, the researchers chose to focus on "novelty" and "suitability" to certain objectives. Creativity started being perceived as a way of breaking conventions.

We understand the relevance in terms of the strategic effort of connecting to the consumer and the market, a strategic effort that stands behind every creative gesture in advertising. Advertising is adjusted and aligned with creativity. This strategic guidance represents one of the fundamental accounts of any type of advertising elaboration. *The relevance* is the one that embodies the significance, the suitability, and the value for the target

group. They are rendered through elements of the advertisement which bring value to the consumer.

There were quests for finding the means of balancing the innovative and unconventional ideas with the needs and aspirations of the target group. Powerful nuances in terms of creativity demand a strong tuning with the objectives, the consumer is invited to take the creative leap and understand the message by filtering it through his knowledge. The divergence is centered on producing a consistent number of ideas which contain artistic and intuitive ideas, revealing the emotional substratum. Those which are illustrated in the commercials and considered as different, uncanny, are easy to notice in bigger bulk. On the other hand, the relevance is strongly linked to the idea of meaningfulness, as well as the importance of the promoted message. The relevance revolves more likely around a network of concepts, twin ideas, and their synthesis.

To identify the various forms of '90s creativity, it was necessary to dedicate a special chapter to the social changes which appeared in that period. Thus, *The '90s – transition and contrast* chapter encompass several dimensions destined to a thorough overview. The first subchapter is focused on the Romanian society, pinpointing to the main transformations it suffered after the fall of the past regime. To capture a priori valences relevant in the construction of the press advertisements from the following years, each subchapter will review the behavior of the individuals and the social particularities from the beginning of the '90s which were in an antagonistic relationship on most occasions.

The second subchapter is dedicated to the media spheres, talking about the change of names of several media outlets, as well as the rise in circulation numbers, in the context of the old regime versus the new one. It is also closely analyzed the ascent of the print publications, as well as having a special place in shaping the commercial objectives of the press instruments. The last subchapter looks at the neighbors, considering the evolution of neighboring countries from the Eastern bloc. This section is destined in organizing those common threads that determined the mirroring of some effects in each of these societies.

The '90s Romanian society was witness to countless changes in all directions. There was an overlay of deeds with national valence with cultural imports that led to artificial mixes of values and beliefs. These produced a dissonance in the messages the media was promoting. Also, because concepts such as *brand* did not exist in that period, all the communication initiatives were redirected based on trends and new market entries.

The search for finding legitimacy in all domains was fierce, including the ones focusing on emerging social identity. Everything was placed under the incidence of consumption which recorded an exaggerated growth, including media consumption aspects.

The commercial objectives of the print media cleared the path for numerous manifestations in terms of promotion. As previous constraints fell, the materials contained heterogenous messages, from all the fields, not having levers to indicate a certain direction in the expressed ideas.

After encompassing these perspectives, to develop more complex analysis instruments, we dedicated a chapter to the SIT method (systematic inventive thinking). This is in strong connection to the concept of divergence, the SIT instruments substituting the lack of conceptualization in the literature and structuring commercials according to certain typologies. The SIT method brings in the spotlight opt models set in two major typologies: the *unifying* tactics group, as well as the *extreme* tactics group. Regardless of the typology, the methods are undoubtedly subsumed to the divergence sphere, the argument being that they illustrate unpredictable, new, and unusual ideas. Furthermore, the unifying tactics are subordinated to the promotion channel, using its resources for a bigger impact, while the extreme tactics are focused on the message, always exaggerating one of its elements.

For better comprehension and a cursive read, we dedicated a subchapter to each type of instrument. The *unification* is the first tactic derived from repeated exercises of generating creative ideas. The moment an "oriented thinking" pattern was developed, the ideas being fixed in "hooks" related to the promoting mean or the message significances, which up until then was considered a "constraint", a useful assisting tool was developed for the creative process. Setting these points of reference in the creative scenario led to the appearance of unconventional ideas.

The *activation* encourages the watcher to physically interact with the advertisement. Unlike the classic process in which the message speaks for itself, the activation incited the consumer to take certain measures which help the message reveal itself. The perspective of a new interpretation of the issue is how the activation process can be redirected.

The *metaphor* is one of the most used (and abused) tactics. The power of associations and the used symbols resided in the simplicity and the ease of applying it in the case of any product, service, and message. The metaphor represents the meaning association between two elements which would not be normally linked, being a central pillar of imagination.

The *subtraction* tactic is founded on "breaking" the classical models of creativity, by eliminating an essential element of the advert, such as a visual cue, text, or the product name.

This elimination has the role of augmenting the message. To obtain the most innovative executions, it is recommended the alternative subtraction of each element, identifying which of the versions best illustrates the idea.

Knocking down the walls lifted by the familiarity of the individual with the market, as well as the inevitability of the cliché, can be surpassed by replacing the external promises with which the individuals are used with a more radical approach, but which solves without predicaments the issue of credibility: the extreme consequence.

The *absurd alternative* suggests that a consumer can avoid acquiring the product and still get the desired benefits. Notwithstanding, the presented alternative is completely absurd, so that the consumer will perceive the product as being the desired solution. An extreme juxtaposition will be illustrated, leading to the discovery of innovative creative ideas.

The *inversion* is a continuation of the question "what would happen if the individual would have the product?". Many of the commercials appeal to the consumer's emotion, inducing feelings of sadness, bitterness or loneliness, to amplify the benefits of the promoted product. In the encounter with a conscious and market-oriented consumer, fears are not the most suitable mean of modeling the message.

When there would be nothing to say about a product, the suitable tactic is the *extreme effort*. This technique permits the unlimited exploration of imagination and implementing absurd humor in the most refined ways, determining the client to do anything to protect his product.

Before switching to the empirical section, we made a chapter dedicated to the concept operationalization. This chapter comprises the quintessence of terms previously revised, as well as the concepts used in the methodology and grouped based on the meaning associations and uses. This is followed by a consistent chapter of *methodology*. The two subchapters are named starting from the methods used: *the content analysis* and the *expert interviews*.

The first method is dedicated to the analysis of press advertisements from the '90s, based on the content analysis grid formulated based on literature, the divergence-relevance union, and the SIT instruments. Following the content analysis, it can be affirmed that, in the case of *divergence*, we talk about the pre and post GSM era. This is the category that represented the summit of divergence in the 1993-1999 period. Shortly put, we can conclude that relevance is dominant each year, being noticeable during the period by counterposing it to the divergence which, as it would normally be, had spikes and made itself noticeable at an individual level, in terms of categories.

The second method is meant to deepen the trend analysis identified in the empirical section, by consulting experts that activated in advertising in the 1999-2000 decade. As a whole, the experts' opinions were extremely critical regarding that period, revealing the fact that the advertisement was far from the Western countries' standards. However, the interviewed specialists admit the fragility and the gaps given by the lack of maturity in this field. Therefore, in some respects, some creative executions were treated with indulgence, candidness (even humor). Just as in the content analysis case, the GSM category came out, again, as a creative leader for the whole period. This remains the category with most divergent executions and with messages which broke the innovation templates.

The advertising of those years was cataloged as a mix of enthusiasm, naivety, simplicity, trials and errors, the creative demarches being kneeced by the unstable socio-economic medium and by client-entrepreneurs who did not understand the utility of communication instruments, just as well as they did not understand the force they were gaining with the appropriateness to the audience requests, and the promoted benefits. At a professional experience level, it is important to observe the important detail that they were contemporary with the opening of branches of international agencies in Romania.

The penultimate chapter focuses on the general *conclusions*, starting with the commonly identified points in the results, concluding and unraveling the main answers for the research questions, as well as confirming/ refuting the hypotheses. The '90s were a tumultuous period on all the socio-economical aspects of the Romanian society. The opening to the international medium facilitated the appearance of the national advertising industry. The studied epoch represents the moment of birth, growth, and the first signs of its maturity. The last chapter completes the thesis as it discloses the *limits and future research perspectives* that can be drawn based on the analysis.