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MYTHS, ARCHETYPES AND STEREOTYPES IN CONTEMPORARY
ROMANIAN ADVERTISING COMMUNICATION

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Review of the book Mădălina Moraru, *Mit și publicitate (Myth and advertising)* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2009).

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The volume *Mit și publicitate (Myth and advertising)* deals with a topic which converges with other disciplines like communication science, sociology, anthropology, literary theory, history, psychology and even philosophy of religion, from an original perspective. Myth and mythology are concepts which take us back to timeless elements, but when talking about advertising, even if it has been used in some forms for hundreds of years, we need to place it in the contemporary advertising communication. This association between myth and advertising leads to the main theme of this book. *Myth and advertising* is based on the doctoral thesis of Mădălina Moraru, a young assistant at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Science from the University of Bucharest. The book is proof of the maturity of the author, who has been present through articles and conference presentations in the very restricted circle of Romanian researchers that analyze advertising from the perspective of communication science.

The first part of the volume presents some theoretical concepts which are illustrated through various examples from advertising. These are: myth, archetype, symbol, stereotype and the narrative, the PhD student aiming at highlighting the terminological delineations, as well as the link between these concepts.

The first chapter uncovers a wide range of aspects: from the classic myths (the heroic myth, the return to the origins of myths, the erotic myth) to their features in the field of advertising (the narrative character, exemplarity, the etiological function, the temporal dimension, the collective character) to the concept of archetypes and its relationship to the myth, the classification of archetypes. Mădălina Moraru starts from the distinction suggested by Roger Caillois between heroic myths and situational myths. Other authors referred to are Mircea Eliade, Carl Jung, Michael Palmer, Northrop Frye, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Gilbert Durant.

In the second chapter the author merges literary theory with elements of communication science, the main theme being the narration and its role and place in advertising. Reference models are: the actantial model of A. J. Greimas and the narrative logic of Claude Bremond, which are then directly applied to the advertising speech. The analysis of some advertising models for the publication "Șapte zile" ["Seven Days"], for Rehau PVC products, and an ad for an ING ROL account exemplify these models. The anticipative narration (known also as the false journal is identified in the Romanian advertising field in the content of a press model devoted to the Camay soap) fable, humorous narration, historical narration, autobiographical narration (advertising CV), legend or even advertising fairytales are used in the advertising communication of the Romanian public space, the PhD thesis concluding, at the end of this chapter, that the narrative dimension of the advertising speech gives the opportunity to illustrate known advertising models and to identify various

epic forms. The narration does not work independently, but always resorting to description.

The third chapter discusses the stereotypes which fall within the horizon of theories related to the social construction of reality, the paradigms of psychological behaviorism, referring to authors like Allport, McDougall, Bandura, Turner, Tajfel, Festinger, etc. If talking about stereotypes, we cannot exclude the name of the journalist Walter Lippman, who analyzed stereotypes in the twenties, and also developed an important concept for the science of communication – the concept of public opinion.

In the same chapter basic knowledge of marketing and consumer behavior are used in the advertising practice like: target audience (which can be determined either by socio-demographic criteria, or psychological ones, which appear in literature under the description “values of life style”), and also consumer types and the concept of positioning. The most quoted authors are Philip Kotler, Al Ries and Jack Trout.

In the following, stereotypes are classified and the use of stereotypes of gender, social stereotypes, age stereotypes and also cultural and historical ones in the Romanian advertising are exemplified. The role of stereotypes in advertising, as in other public communication types, is to simplify and to structure reality, the individuals are seen in advertising as consumers. Thus, the author ends this chapter by showing how the relationship between product and consumer is consolidated through the formation of some essential representations in the building of the self-image.

The fourth chapter entitled “From small heroes to heroes of advertising (answers to several questions)”, represents the empirical part of the volume, even if the first three chapters were not completely theoretical. Content analysis is used in the empirical research in this book, being one of the most used research methods in the communication sciences. The author is aware of the advantages, but also the limits of this method. She analyzes audio-visual ads, identifies characteristic elements of the hero myth with precision, and the hypotheses are clearly expressed. The objectives of the research are: to identify key features of the hero and the trials to which he is exposed, to identify the conflicts he is involved in, to establish a relationship between the product and the hero, to identify other stereotypical dimensions, to identify the archetypes of the hero in advertising, to compare the classic story of the hero with the simplified one from advertising, and finally to achieve a correlation between the dominant features of the hero and the discovered archetypes. These objectives have been successfully fulfilled by the proper use of the research method applied to a suitable sample of ads considered as verbal and visual narratives. The corpus includes ads for various categories of products: alcoholic and soft drinks, cars and accessories, telephone services, television, information, media, courier and Internet, toiletries

and cleaning products, medicine, insurance and banks, counseling and guidance, food, fuel and clothing items for a wide range of international and national brands.

Mădălina Moraru identifies some archetypes of the hero: the explorer, the providential, the magician and the creator (the most common archetype met in the analysis), the fighter and the avenger, the missionary, the lawman, the tempted and the tempter. If the product is in the ad's story, then it will have a definite role in solving the conflict, if the hero moves in a certain area, the degradation defines some specific aspects of him, and the dominant archetype has to assure the control of a world as follows: if you can identify stereotypes in advertising scenarios it means that the hero, represented by the consumer, has some relevant characteristics of gender and age for his duties, in the sample analyzed, the hero being mostly a young man who easily succeeds in physical challenges. If some narrative ads allow the identification of archetypes, then these are suggestions of myths, symbols and the presence of recurrent features, the identified archetypes being subordinated to the hero's myth, some characters even help solving the conflict: some of the ads examined developed myths that adapted to the context provided by the use of the product or the relationship with the consumer, the myths identified in the analysis are: the myth of the guardian angel (exemplified by the Murfatlar Rai spot), the myth of sacrifice (exemplified by the same spot), the myth of Odysseus (exemplified in the commercial for FedEx services) and last but not least the myth of death (identified in the Green King spot). The author arrives at the conclusion that this phenomenon is not started just by using the product, but through the story, the way in which narrative is reached. The myth is considered to be an important catalyst for advertising creativity.

Nevertheless we should not forget to take a look at the ethical dimension of using mythology and symbols in advertising. Even if the author didn't include a special chapter on the ethical dimension of advertising, there are several remarks in the book. How far can advertisers go in using mythology in advertising? When speaking about advertising and ethics the issue of truth is a central one. How far can creative developers go in using historical symbols?

It is the attribute of national organizations such as the Romanian C.A.N. (*Consiliul Național al Audio-vizualului*) or the German *Werberat* to take action against advertising campaigns that are crossing the line. Not only the legal aspects are taken into consideration by those organizations but also particular complaints coming from citizens that feel offended by advertising.

Mădălina Moraru's *Myth and advertising* book gradually evolves through various relevant analyses and consistent theoretical effort. It is written in a pleasant style, based on a solid documentation, covering less-known domains. All these elements make this volume a substantial

contribution to the thematic and conceptual analysis of advertising communication. Through its originality of approach and complex themes, this book is recommended to a wide audience: from advertising creators, researchers of both the media and communication industries, to those interested in myths, mythology and archetypes.