
TRADITION AND DOGMA IN ROMANIAN ADVERTISING

Mădălina Moraru (Buga)^{*}

*University of Bucharest, Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies, Department of
Cultural Anthropology and Communication, 1-3 Iuliu Maniu Blvd, 061071, 6th Floor, 6th district,
Bucharest, Romania*

(Received 25 August 2012)

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to reveal a controversial relationship between tradition and dogma in advertising, regarding the religious aspects which are developed as strategic ideas to better appeal to Romanian consumers. First of all, the research is driven by identifying different approaches of religious influence on a conservative market. Second, the dilemma of dogmatic vs. non-dogmatic features is also a matter for discussion of this compelling subject and constitutes the relationship between *glocal*, local and global in advertising from a cultural and religious view.

Keywords: advertising, tradition, globalization, celebration, religiosity

1. Introduction

Any kind of discussion related to religion and rituals implies taking into consideration the concept of 'tradition' as differently understood over the years. Actually, it is impossible to live in this world by neglecting religious behaviour, because this reveals an ontological difference, according to Veress Károly [1]. Tradition seems to be the easiest way to express this difference. Therefore, Christian theologians debated this term and came to a simple conclusion embraced by Isidor Todoran and Ioan Zăgorean: tradition is the second source of the Divine Revelation after the Holy Bible, but orally transmitted by Jesus Christ and the Holy Apostles [2]. There are two dimensions to this theological concept: the steady apostolic tradition and the dynamic tradition that is preserved by the Church and continuously developed according to Christian needs over time. Obviously, the latter respects the apostolic tradition, but stays closer to present time.

Further, Richard P. Heitzenrater clarified opinions about this concept, and presented five perspectives of 'tradition' and the difference between the singular and the plural of this noun: tradition vs. traditions [3].

^{*} E-mail: moraru_mada12@yahoo.com

Heitzenrater described each type, establishing a permanent relationship between tradition and history. First of all, tradition means “a repetitive practice of a certain activity” [3], then this word could be easily associated with a celebration of a special event (like marriage, birthday) and particular customs. The third meaning regards the traditions shared by a group of people belonging to specific categories like religion and cultures. We may speak here about Orthodox Christian traditions, for example. The next acceptance is meant to weave tradition with stories, legends and myths. The last aspect refers to the verb form ‘to tradition’ and it reveals the dynamic process of celebration. This paper is very interested in the second and third meaning, in terms of focusing on religious events and their celebrations and considering that people enjoy them most and advertising successfully develops brand identity.

In a profane sense, dogma may be understood as a conformist way to live without any flexibility or autonomy of mind. Making the connection with the theological approach seems to be very complicated, especially when we think about advertising. Without opening the deep doors of Dogmatic theology, we believe that Wittgenstein’s approach regarding this subject is very clear: “a sound doctrine need not take hold of you; you can follow it as you would a doctor’s prescription” [4]. In fact, he explained what dogma and dogmatic tradition should represent for average people in order to stay away from life temptation. Following a doctor’s prescription means nothing more than to live in a rational and healthy way. The Dogmatic Orthodox Christianity has a single meaning: to preserve the truth about Jesus Christ and to make people aware of its unchangeable relevance. What is the dogmatic impact on daily life? Answering this question may sound strange, but there is no other way to make us understand: dogma’s relevance consists of identifying the dangers of committing sins caused by a very simple contemporary temptation named consumerism. This was Kate Loewenthal’s opinion in terms of religious psychology, given the fact that sin is a consequence of any sort of uncontrolled freedom [5]. Linking this discussion with the previous one about tradition, we notice that the aim of this paper is to make the difference between profane traditions and dynamic tradition by recognizing the dogmatic truth. This is the way we could explain and maybe translate the title of this study: profane traditions vs. dogmatic tradition, reminding of the difference between the singular and the plural of this noun.

The next step of this brief discussion related to all these latter aspects is given by Christian consumer behaviour and their response to market temptation. Researchers like Taylor et al [6], Essoo and Dibb [7] analyzed in which measure religious influence justifies and determines purchase decision. Taylor asserted that Christian symbols might help consumers buy more, while Essoo and Dibb debated that casually religious consumers make better decisions and are more practical than constant church attendees. However, buying a product depends very much on market homogeneity or heterogeneity, because people tend to be influenced by the general context. Romania, for

example, like many other Orthodox countries is a very homogeneous market, whereas the USA supports the religious, racial and ethnic diversity. From a theological view, the fall into sin was the moment when human knowledge was deeply reduced to simple rationality, which means understanding the world only as an object, according to Dumitru Stăniloae [8]. Hence, people fall into temptation so easily because the bodily pleasures often bring them temporary happiness and this feeling nourishes consumerism nowadays.

To move on to the next point of this argumentation implies researching the relationship between *glocal*, local and global from the religious view. Christianity, and mostly Orthodoxy, was the first form of globalization, but only for spiritual reasons and because Jesus Christ is just one. What happened then could be related to a kind of deterritorialization, according to Giddens [9], but at a religious level, because people started moving around and expanding their cultures and traditions. Therefore, different religions need to be reterritorialized and this is what could be called localization. Ioannis Zizioulas differentiated the local church from the universal one, pointing out that they belong to the same ecclesiastical body, and it is no reason to make a geographic separation in terms of institutional hierarchy [10].

Finally, both dogmatic and non-dogmatic traditions belong to everyday life, and people are differently engaged in their experience, depending on their religious practice. Advertising invites consumers to spend their money at Christmas, but using local traditions and Christian landmarks remind them of their religious background. Sometimes, consumption temptations dissolve religious dogma, and people weave local traditions with global ones. Coşgel and Minkler [11] assert that consumption norms facilitate communication, which gives another reason to study advertising campaigns that follow.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample description

Our research sample is made of by 34 relevant advertisements for brands advertised on the Romanian market. We focused on a qualitative approach on purpose by applying content analysis, because this article discusses two concepts (tradition and dogma) in a very debateable area, which is advertising. However, the advertisement selection was driven by very objective criteria and the purpose of this study complicated this research stage. First, we chose to analyze only TV advertisements, given that we completely support Diana Cotrău's view on this communication channel, which has the highest connotative potential [12]. Second, the sample is made up by ads related to a religious topic, a story, and a ritual. At this point, selection became very reductive, because many examples did not match this aspect. Third, this paper analyzed various product categories, even if some of them seemed to use religious appeal more than others, as Table 1 underlines:

Table 1. Product categories of the brands included in the sample.

Product categories	Brands	No. of ads
Mobile phones and communications	Vodafone (2), Orange (1), Cosmote (1), Romtelecom (2), UPC (1)	7
Alcoholic drinks (wine and beer)	Murfatlar, 7 Sins, (7 Păcate), Heaven of Murfatlar (Rai de Murfatlar), Cotnari, Romanian vine (Viță românească), Timișoreana	6
Banks and mortgage institution	Citi financial, Provident, BT, Bancpost, Unicredit, CEC	6
Non-alcoholic drinks	Red bull (2), Coca-Cola	3
Chocolate and coffee	Mika, Dots, Jacobs	3
Bakery	Boromir, Buzău Pretezel	3
Supermarkets	Lidl, Carrefour	2
Detergent	Dero	1
Fragrance	Axe	1
Cars	Dacia-Logan	1
Electronic appliances	Altex	1

Fourth, the selected adverts belong both to local and global brands. Fifth, the advertisements regarding Christmas and Easter celebrations were very recently broadcast, clearly between 2010 and 2012. Basically, the sample was equally divided into two sections: on the one hand, various Christian religious celebrations, which are Easter and Christmas, and, on the other, traditions associated with dogmatic ceremonies (i.e. baptisms, weddings). Following the current mainstream of creative marketing aims to much better understand consumer insight. In terms of religious rituals, the situation is different, because we did not have so many choices, so we could not select the most recent examples, but the ones we found were from the last 10 years.

2.2. Content analysis

According to Bryman, content analysis is one of the methods that can be well applied to a variety of media [13]. First of all, it is essential to point out the research questions, and then design a coding schedule. Definitely, content analysis should be both quantitatively and qualitatively viewed. The research questions that will drive this paper are:

- Does tradition have any important influence on Romanian consumers?
- Does advertising understand dogma and tradition in a religious manner?
- Do some topics of Romanian advertisements receive more attention than the others?

- In which measure is religious tradition influenced by the relationship between global, local and *glocal* elements in Romanian advertising?

To properly code the data, this paper focuses on a few items that justify the title of our study. This list of variables starts with identifying the product categories already presented above, and then it considers various items such as: religious events (the moment when the advertisement was broadcast), traditional aspects, conformism vs. non-conformism (respecting religious dogma or not the religious dogma) and the relationship between the global, local and *glocal* (hybridized) dimensions of advertising.

3. Results

3.1. The context of advertisements delivered on the market

This variable refers to different associations of advertisements with religious celebrations and events, which, actually explain why they belong to our sample. Based on the selection criteria, the examples did not offer so many choices.

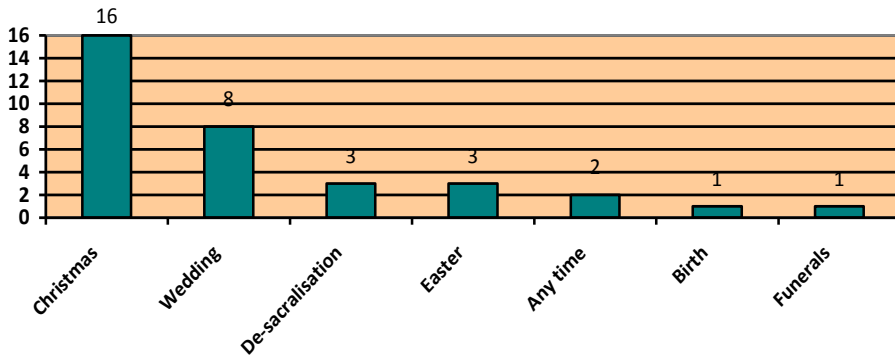


Figure 1. Time the ads were broadcast.

According to Figure 1, Christmas and wedding celebrations are seen more often in our sample. Many brands delivered special campaigns, which run before and after Christmas, for marketing reasons, because sales consistently increase at this time. Angels live with people on earth and they come down to enjoy bodily pleasure, due to the irresistible temptation of such products as perfumes and wine. There is no special occasion for this incarnation. The opposite reaction arises from people's attitude when they use some products which send them either to Heaven or to Hell. Wine is one of the products that may lead people and divinity to Heaven, Hell or Earth.

3.2. Traditional aspects vs. religious de-sacralisation

To have a better view on this aspect we should again point out which theoretical approach on ‘tradition’ was chosen to achieve the goal of this paper. Definitely, all of the following examples are related to Orthodox practice and religious events already revealed. Hence, they should be understood either as according to Orthodox rituals or traditions of Romanian Christians, which are sometimes non-dogmatic due to advertiser creativity.

The last aspect tops all other elements, because it should be easily recognized in 10 examples. Rituals and parties organized as private or public celebrations of religious ceremonies arose from 6 other adverts. Orthodox ceremonies and traditional meals (at Christmas or Easter celebrations) are placed at the third level, each with 5 ads. Obviously, ceremonies are presented in short frames and sequences of wedding ritual and funerals. From the standpoint of religious de-sacralisation, this classification offers 8 interesting and very bold examples considering that they crossed any dogmatic borders. The biblical stories of Eve’s temptation, of Jesus walking on water and of Jesus’ birth, completely changed the perspective, because such historical events are de-sacralised. The same idea is available for angels, whose behaviour was debated earlier. Losing their nature, angels fall into temptation and due to such products as chocolate, wine and fragrance reveal their human weakness.

Although the relationship between traditional aspects and religious disruption is unbalanced in this sample, the explanation is quite simple: Romanian advertising completely avoids neglecting dogmatic Christian standards because the local target is conservative and brand credibility could be seriously affected. What is interesting is that these bold advertisements adopted this creative idea a few years ago and did not return to this approach.

3.3. Conformism vs. non-conformism in developing religious aspects

To properly investigate this dimension of present research involves explaining both concepts we are working with: *conformism* and *non-conformism*. According to Mengel [14], conformism is a mechanism of cooperation in social relationships, while obviously non-conformism refers to conflicting attitudes. In our case, we chose to use these concepts as theological meanings, in terms of understanding *conformism* as a way to stay close to the dogmatic area, whereas *non-conformism* as a way to change or adjust some perspectives by means of irony, humour and parody. Hence, the purpose for the second approach is more than visible: better sales in spite of any blasphemy or disestablishing dogmatic rules. Non-dogmatic advertisements monopolized our sample with 18 examples, which did not create such a big difference in comparison with the other 16 dogmatic ads. For a better understanding of this relationship, a wedding ceremony is the best situation that points out both aspects (dogma vs. non-dogma). Vodafone, which has the

best coverage in Romania, took advantage of a couple's experience when they decided to get married on a mountaintop and not surrounded by their family. In a conformist circumstance, they would have enjoyed the church ceremony and the traditional party. So, even if they were married by an Orthodox priest, they could not follow the whole ritual, because the ceremony did not happen under a church roof. Contrastingly, the Altex brand (a very well-known electronic store in Romania) presents the party after the wedding, with all the guests, godparents, parents, sitting at the same table and participating in the biggest event of the evening: giving gifts to the bride and groom. This is an old traditional custom (still maintained in the countryside) which means presenting your gift in front of all the other guests. In fact, the ceremony was classically organized, as long as the wedding preserves this old tradition of buying and opening gifts on the wedding evening, after the church ritual.

Another very persuasive and controversial example arises from a compelling advertisement created for wine, namely Rai de Murfatlar (Heaven from Murfatlar), a sub-brand of the ancient Romanian brand, Murfatlar. The idea centres on the role of the guardian angel who is in charge of taking care of someone as long as she or he lives. The hero of the commercial goes through many adventures to achieve his mission, because the protected young man is always in trouble. What is the award after an exhausting day of running through the city? Returning to Heaven and enjoying a glass of the best wine with other angels coming back from work. Table 2 will briefly explain what dogma and non-dogma means in the latter advert to clarify these concepts:

Table 2. Dogmatic vs. non-dogmatic angel.

Dogmatic angel	Non-dogmatic angel
- has a mission on Earth, which consists in protecting people	- his mission involves direct engagement, physical participation
- is described according to the biblical image (he has an aura)	- has a body and sexuality (is a man) - gets hurt and feels pain
- returns to Heaven, because he belongs to the unseen world	- behaves like a human being, feels exhausted and enjoys a glass of wine - the final ad message does not match the holy nature of any angel, which is immortality and has temporal limits: <i>Life is hard.</i>

3.4. The relationship between global, local and glocal aspects in Romanian advertising

Dealing with this subject implies a good understanding of three concepts mentioned there. A very good theoretical and comparative approach to of them belongs to Marieke de Mooij, who achieves the idea that there is a real dilemma between global and local aspects in branding [15]. She argued that

product category, product life-cycle, and the company culture are the main reasons to make a decision on globalized and standardized campaigns. The paradox between global and local regards the way culture influences target choices and makes global brands adapt to a specific market. De Mooij debates the manifestations of culture and persuasively concludes: “Rituals are the collective activities considered essential within a culture: They are carried out for their own sake. Examples include ways of greetings, ways of paying respect to others, and social and religious ceremonies.” [15, p. 38] There is a single solution to solve this unpleasant dilemma for advertising, whose name is *glocalization*, as a result of a simple cultural equation:

$$\text{global} + \text{local} = \textit{glocal}$$

For this reason, this research is concerned with all the aspects linked with this equation that may lead us to reveal the religious impact on branding.

Returning to our sample, the quantitative results brought to light the global predominance over local and hybridized aspects in 16 advertisements. A simple explanation for this is that 15 brands of the entire sample are global brands. But it is not the only one, considering that both local and global brands develop hybridized features in their campaigns either to approach the Romanian target or to encourage products. The simplest way to achieve this goal of *glocalization* was to reinforce rituals, traditions and religious ceremonies. This fact clearly explains why some advertising stories did not completely respect dogmatic views on religious events. The latter Vodafone ad is a hybridized one, because it blends Romanian wedding traditions (i.e. the local aspect) with an Orthodox wedding ceremony (i.e. a global religious aspect) and with a very innovative style of getting married (i.e. the American model of the absolute freedom). The same case for the wine Rai de Murfatlar, in which the angel image is more global (i.e. more specific to the Catholic Church), but the wine and the visual background are local. Easter and Christmas usually give many examples of *glocalization*, because the Romanian market is very young and global perspective still very tempting. Under these circumstances, the branding strategy is quite understandable and consists of communication campaigns which answer both consumer needs: to recognize himself or herself in the cultural background and to be like any user of this world. Religious traditions and ceremonies are frequent manifestations of Romanian culture, given the very conservative market, where people could be successfully appealed to by understanding their way of thinking. Getting married, going to church, celebrating with one’s family at Christmas and Easter, cooking and not consuming pre-cooked meat are significant features of local consumers, as selected ads emphasize. From some viewpoints, the *glocalization* phenomenon may be associated with what Ioan A. Tofan called “the proliferation of the postmodern religious syncretism” [16], because it regards any kind of global influence understood in a local context and enriched by it, but respecting the genuine cultural background.

4. Discussion

The research output revealed that profane and dogmatic traditions at Christmas and Easter nourish most advertising campaigns, which proves the receptivity of Romanian consumers at this celebration time. This is not only specific to local consumers, but to global as well. Additionally, returning to knowledge based on rationality and Dumitru Stăniloae's opinion, this is the time when people consume more than they need and enjoy buying with no reason. They show their love in a pragmatic way, by making presents and making profane dreams come true. How do advertising and dogmatic tradition get on in this situation? The compromise has one choice: commercials focus more on the profane tradition (non-dogmatic), but use the dogmatic one to create a religious atmosphere.

Debating de-sacralisation vs. genuine religious aspects, we identified two kinds of relationships. First, if advertising used the frame of a biblical story, this would just be a case of inter-textuality, because the product changed its narrative meaning and the parable is only a starting point for a new narration. Second, dogmatic tradition still dominates profane (sometimes called secular) traditions in advertising by delivering Christian symbols, whose meaning cannot be completely changed. The symbols met in our sample are: angels, Christian family, Jesus' birth, Eucharist wine, wedding rings and so on. The most important is, in our opinion, the connotation of wine, which reminds Christians of Jesus' sacrifice and Eucharist. Linking this symbol to the fall of man into sin and the de-sacralisation of angels raise multiple and controversial discussions.

The relationship between conformism and non-conformism towards the dogmatic tradition revealed a reality psychologically understandable: advertisements are more compelling when they ignore moral and rules. So, the fact that even male angels may drink and female angels are tempted by a sexy man fascinates consumers more than the ancient beliefs. Besides, this era of consumerism needs incarnation ('body-fication') even for angels, because God became too abstract and advertising takes advantage of people's insecurity.

Last but not least, hybridization may be understood as a manner of blending non-dogmatic traditions with dogmatic tradition for marketing reasons. A strong reason for this is that consumers do not clearly distinguish between both types of tradition and many commercials lead them to confusion. In addition, the access to worldwide media generates a form of global integration and involvement in everything.

This debate could be more developed for further research when another market had been analyzed, and the best would be a Catholic one, because the importance of dogmatic tradition is similar for both religions.

5. Conclusions

Advertising uses religious traditions to make some brands more credible especially when people celebrate important events related to Jesus Christ's life, i.e. Christmas and Easter. For the rest of the year, commercials welcome consumer pleasure for private parties and encourage their consumerism by any means and at any price. At religious times, advertisements recreate biblical traditions and do not care about any dogmatic interdictions. Therefore, irony and many kinds of humour lead religious tradition to de-sacralisation. Sometimes, traditional rituals are innovated for the consumers' pleasure as they like to be non-conformist, especially when they prepare for a big event like a wedding.

The Romanian market broadcast some non-dogmatic adverts belonging to global brands, because their campaigns were standardized. In the case of delivering internal campaigns for local or global brands, de-sacralisation is seldom used as a creative technique which proves Romanians do not totally enjoy this non-religious approach, in which God is just a historical character and not a real presence.

To sum up, the best way to understand the controversial relationship between traditions and tradition (non-dogmatic and dogmatic tradition) is to include the consumer in this equation. Commercials sell products and services and not wishes or spiritual needs, but customers buy them because this is the only manner in which they can express themselves in a consumerist world.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/89/1.5/S/62259, Project 'Applied social, human and political sciences. Postdoctoral training and postdoctoral fellowships in social, human and political sciences', cofinanced by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

References

- [1] V. Károly, J. Study Relig. Ideol., **10** (2005) 209.
- [2] I. Todoran and I. Zăgrea, *The Dogmatic Theology*, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1991, 75.
- [3] R.P. Heitzenrater, Church Hist., **71(3)** (2002) 622-624.
- [4] L.W. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980, 53.
- [5] L.M. Loewenthal, *The Psychology of Religion a Short Introduction*, Oxford Publications, Oxford, 2000, 21.
- [6] V.A. Taylor, D. Halstead and P.J. Haynes, J. Advertising, **39(2)** (2010) 81.
- [7] N. Essoo and S. Dibb, Journal of Marketing Management, **20** (2004) 704.
- [8] D. Stăniloae, *Experiencing God in Orthodoxy*, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1993, 42.
- [9] A. Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is reshaping our Lives*, Profile Books, London, 1999.

- [10] I. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, Editura Bizantină, București, 1996, 259.
- [11] M.M. Coşgel and L. Minkler, *Rev. Soc. Econ.*, **62(3)** (2004) 343.
- [12] D. Cotrău, *J. Study Relig. Ideol.*, **12** (2005) 81.
- [13] A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, 274.
- [14] F. Mengel, *J. Evol. Econ.*, **19** (2009) 398.
- [15] M. De Mooij, *Global, Marketing and Advertising. Understanding Cultural Paradoxes*, 2nd edn., Sage Publications, London, 2005, 13-32.
- [16] I.A. Tofan, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **7 (2)** (2011) 3.