
ABUNDANCE VS. DEFICIT IN CONTEMPORARY ADVERTISING

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(Received 17 June 2016, revised 25 August 2016)

Abstract

We experience the nowadays world almost entirely via a screen. We may be starting to lose reality, tangibility and real social networks (real contact with real people). Advertising, as part of our culture, responds to people's deepest needs and desires. In a digital and connected online world, advertising has discovered a new medium – reality – and it is trying to make contact with consumers via authenticity.

Keywords: multi-screen world, 24/7 connectivity, representation, authenticity, contemporary advertising

1. Introduction

One of the very important trends in contemporary advertising is the focus on authenticity and the various aspects of reality. Advertising is not only an economic activity, but also a socio-cultural phenomenon, associated with society's cultural, value-based and ideological codes.

This is why it can be assumed that this trend of using reality as a medium in contemporary advertising is a response to the current needs and desires of consumers. This implies that in today's technological world in which practically everything takes place by proxy, re-presented and re-created on a screen, there probably exists among consumers a need and desire for realness, reality and authenticity.

In the study we used global surveys, contemporary specialised literature, and we compared the findings and insights from these sources with the 'conceptual gesture' which contemporary worldwide advertising takes in this direction, working with reality and authenticity.

2. On 24/7 multi-screen connectivity

Globally, across the world, people spend many hours a day in front of a screen – research of 30 countries worldwide shown that daily distribution of screen minutes across countries varies from 300 to as much as 550 minutes a day

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[V. Woolaston, *Next year's big trend?*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/nsciencetech/article-2875997/Next-year-s-big-trend-ANTI-TECH-2015-set-year-people-forsake-gadgets-social-networks-simpler-life.html>, accessed on 16.12.2014].

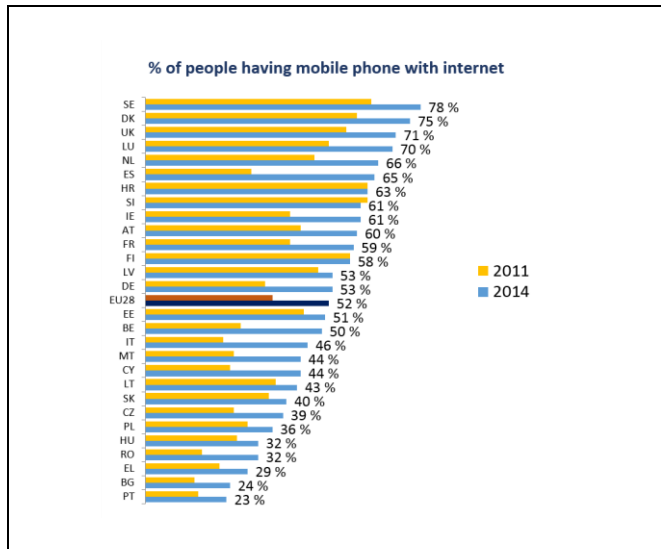


Figure 1. Mobile phones with internet [Eurobarometer Wave 81.1., *E-Communications and Telecom Single Market Household Survey*, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_414_en.pdf].

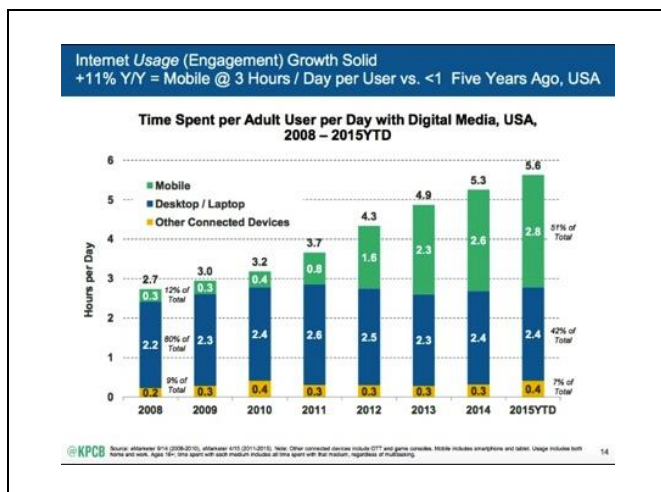


Figure 2. Time spent with digital media [R. Allen, *Mobile Internet Trends Mary Meeker 2015*, <http://www.smartinsights.com/internet-marketing-statistics/insights-from-kpcb-us-and-global-internet-trends-2015-report/attachment/mobile-internet-trends-mary-meeker-2015-1/>].

The growing use of the internet, social networks, as well as smartphones with internet access, shows that the number of hours spent online has a growing trend (Figures 1 and 2).

At the same time, it seems that one screen is not enough for us, and that multi-screen multi-tasking becomes the norm: “The second, third and sometimes fourth screen is becoming a fundamental extension of the viewing experience” [*The battle for eye space in a TV-everywhere world*, Nielsen Global Digital Landscape Survey Q3 2014, *Screen wars*, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2015/screen-wars-the-battle-for-eye-space-in-a-tv-everywhere-world.html>, accessed on 01.04.2015].

The screen and its medialisation, re-presentation and often re-creation of the world, of information or life situations has become not only a decisive cognitive means today, but also a basic communication, social and economic tool: “We are living in a world of 24/7 connectivity. We access content on our own terms, and we like it that way. Across the globe, more than three quarters (76%) of respondents in a Nielsen online survey of digital attitudes and behaviours say they enjoy the freedom of being connected anywhere, anytime. While this flexibility can be a benefit to us, it represents a huge challenge for brands and content providers vying for our attention.” [<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2015/screen-wars-the-battle-for-eye-space-in-a-tv-everywhere-world.html>]

3. Trend vs. counter-trend

Social media, the digital world and infinite multi-screen connectivity are without doubt the dominant trend of contemporary civilisation and most certainly shape the basic approaches (and challenges) behind business and marketing strategies. However, they should not be the only direction for corporate thinking to take, for the following two reasons:

1. When everyone does the same as the rest, brands fall into a cluster with mutually interchangeable advertisements. This is a situation which the dominant market player usually draws from as a result of the “double jeopardy law”: “brands with less market share have far fewer buyers, and these buyers are slightly less loyal in their buying and attitude” [1].
2. Relying too heavily on one dominant trend (an activity which is being played out on the majority of the market, called “the conquest of cool” [2] by Thomas Frank) usually means other opportunities are ignored. This amounts to ‘disregard’ for potentially very relevant consumer needs and desires which are ‘hidden’ behind the dominant trend. Unveiling them and using them in advertising and marketing is called a ‘cultural innovation’ by Douglas Holt and Douglas Cameron [3], which is the basis of the ‘cultural strategy of breakthrough brands’ in their concept.

Clotaire Rapaille [4] writes about the need to unveil not the apparent, but the deepest ‘cultural code’, which the brand could use to try to make a strong connection with consumers. Phil Barden writes of the need to ‘decode human

behaviour' [5] from the points of view of neuroscience and behavioural economics. Margaret Mark and Pearson write about finding and revealing "the missing link between customer motivation and product sales" [6]. In political marketing, the term 'hidden agenda' is used by academics as well as by practitioners in a similar context [7-9].

The trendspotter and business consultant Robyn Waters works with the concept of the fundamental contradictory nature of human lives in relation to consumer needs which are not 'visible' at first glance, hidden behind the apparent dominant trend, since "for every trend there is a counter-trend, and both are equally valid" [10]. And this also applies to the *constantly switched-on multi-screen world*.

4. The other side of the multi-screen

The positive and gratifying facticity of 24/7 multi-screen connectivity has also its own downside. Neuro-scientists and psychologists write about its negative impact on our cognitive capacities: "In this 'always on', wired world in which most of us exist, termed the 'look down' generation recently...consumers are frequently in a state of cognitive impairment and continual distraction, multi-tasking and trying to process ever growing amounts of information online" [C. Hollingworth, L. Barker and J. Halliday, *Understanding how we behave differently online: Part 1 - Decision-making shortcuts in our digital world*, <http://www.warc.com/Content/ContentViewer.aspx?MasterContentRef=977301ab-ee03-454a-a29d-207cc3415546&q=understanding+how+we+behave+differently&CID=A105244&PUB=WARC-RESEARCH>, accessed on October 2014]. Another – equally interesting – expression for the 'look down' generation is given by Faris Yakob: "Digital platforms have given rise to a new kind of media consumer who rarely gives their full attention to any one channel. Rather they give 'continuous partial attention' to a number of different streams." [11]

The reduction which thus arises in our cognitive abilities has an impact on how we obtain, process and understand information and we are aware of it ourselves: "41% of people feel overwhelmed by the wealth of choice on the web, making it hard for them to make purchase decisions. Meanwhile 26% of people feel there is so much information on the net that it is hard for them to find what they are looking for when shopping online" [J. Bainbridge, *Internet users turn to friends' recommendations as choice becomes overwhelming*, <https://www.research-live.com/article/news/internet-users-turn-to-friends-recommendations-as-choice-becomes-overwhelming/id/4013167>, accessed on 13.04.2015]. Barry Schwartz devotes a whole book to this phenomenon, *The Paradox of Choice: Less Is More*, whose basic thesis is that too much choice and information and numerous stimuli can destabilise consumers, or even paralyse them to the extent that they 'choose not to choose' [12].

People are trying to minimise potential distractions and information overload: "More than half of internet users (55%) use only two or three trusted sites when looking for content and product purchases, turned off surfing the net

because there's too much choice and information. As people feel overwhelmed with the volume and choice of information on the web, they are increasingly looking to friends' recommendations on social media rather than searching for content themselves." [<https://www.research-live.com/article/news/internet-users-turn-to-friends-recommendations-as-choice-becomes-overwhelming/id/4013167>]

5. Marketing of abundance vs. marketing of deficit

The same survey in which 76% of global respondents expressed that they enjoy and welcome the opportunities of today's multi-screen and always connected world showed that the huge opportunities – possibly a surplus – of connectivity and sharing which this world brings, also brings about contradiction, deficiency and discomfort. We are beginning to miss real human contact: “Technology is dramatically transforming the way in which we interact with the world, including how we live, work and communicate. From keeping tabs on friends via social media, to skipping lines at the store by shopping online, technology continues to reshape our everyday habits. In fact, nearly seven-in-10 (69%) global respondents think face-to-face interactions are being replaced with electronic ones. More frequently, real-time conversations on social media are replacing physical gatherings around the water cooler. And the digital landscape is only getting more crowded, as a new wave of digital devices, such as wearable and connected car technologies, gain traction.” [<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2015/screen-wars-the-battle-for-eye-space-in-a-tv-everywhere-world.html>]

Using the rhetoric of phenomenological philosophy, we can say that 24/7 multi-screen connectivity and the ensuing medialisation of the world pulls us away from the authenticity and facticity of our “life-world” [13] and makes our “natural world” [14] “unnatural”. And we experience it as a deficit or a feeling of being insufficiently saturated by authenticity and reality.

Cognitive (and social or analytical) psychology, behavioural economics [5, p. 160-201; 15; 16] and marketing and communication concepts inspired by these academic fields, based on deepest needs and desires (archetypal marketing and storytelling [6], or cultural strategy [3]) teach us that a very strong motivation for human needs and desires is what people are lacking, what they are not given or what is (often as a contradiction) hidden behind an apparent and dominant trend [17, 18]. *Lifestyle marketing* is the ‘*marketing of abundance*’. It focuses on the ‘*world as it is*’, and this is why its result is essentially a simple reproduction of the world and its multiplication or recounting through the optics of a dominant, apparent and major trend which the consumer is currently experiencing. *The marketing of deepest needs and desires*, on the contrary, relies on the ‘*world as we would like to have it*’, that is it saturates the ‘*deficit*’, what consumers are fundamentally missing, and these are often at first glance not apparent, hidden and thus unsatisfied needs and desires.

In a 24/7 multi-screen always switched-on world, the human universe is presented and medialized through the screen; contact with reality is often reduced to its re-presentation and re-creation on screen. Authenticity, reality, realness, tangibility are in deficit – people no longer experience them.

6. Authenticity

Many social network users have recently started tagging their photographs with the hashtag #NoFilter, to such a massive extent that this social network behaviour has come to the attention of digital ‘trendologists’ (experts in trends). “Have you ever noticed how ‘unreal’ your Facebook and Instagram news feeds have become? The same type of posts, the same overly filtered photos. We’ve all experienced it, and we find ourselves hungry for a more realistic view. People are growing more aware and bored with the constant feed of people only sharing their life’s best moments and enhancing them with filters and perfect copy. People are tired of the ‘curated self’. It is a growing trend that is now reflected in many new apps that have launched and are growing in popularity. These apps help deliver that unvarnished view and are reshaping our social content. The trend is that people are craving a much more realistic view.” [The Richards Group, *Ten Digital Trends for 2016. Digital Marketing and Advertising Trends*, <http://trends.richards.com/the-real-nofilter/>, accessed on February 2016] (To this topic see also Pavlů [19].)

In the world of social networks, people are beginning to miss real human contact, what we could call *real social networks* as an antithesis to the digital ones. In the same way, people are missing a tangible world that they can grab hold of, that is a universe which can be experienced in a complex, authentic, sensuous way, in contrast to what is ‘only’ depicted, re-presented on screen.

The numerous community activities which do take place all over the world are examples and expressions of these human ‘counter-trend’ needs and desires: urban gardening, good markets, neighbourhood markets, community sharing of cars, tools, flats, etc. The number of public spaces where smartphones and communication tools are not supposed to be used is growing and growing. This is an expression of the growing ‘getting unplugged’ and ‘anti-tech’ trends.

This is an attempt to balance out the fundamental contradiction of today’s multi-screen world and an expression of the human need to bring into one’s life the missing authenticity, real human contact and add a desired, lacking naturalness to an unnatural life-world around.

One of the ways in which the lack of authenticity is shown is the overall shift in consumer preferences from global megabrands, which until recently were the user’s social and image labels (an analogy to the ‘filtered’ identity of social media), to local, craft, hand-made small brands which adopt *original, genuine* production methods and recipes, thus making them an *authentic, real* alternative to the *artificial, marketing constructs* of worldwide brands. (To the topic of authenticity and localization see also the interesting work of Moraru [20])

In this context, C. Rapaille [21] writes interesting ideas about the non-use of technology as one of the codes which expresses luxury in the contemporary world. In a universe of 24/7 connectivity, many people simply cannot afford not to be connected, so those who ‘can afford it’, experience one of the current forms of luxury. So if the use and access to the latest technology was until recently a sign of higher social status, today the fact that a person does not need to use technology is an expression of luxury, according to Rapaille.

7. Advertising and culture

Advertising is not only part of the economy, but also has a socio-cultural dimension, because in its communication content and persuasive methods, it uses cultural and social codes: “Advertising is not just a business expenditure undertaken in the hope of moving some merchandise off the store shelves, but it is rather an integral part of modern culture. Its creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas; its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions. Advertising’s discourse through and about objects is a useful interpretive key for tracing aspects of our consumer culture.” [22] For this reason, it should be the case that current advertising reacts to human desire for authenticity or for the naturalness of the life-world. (To this topic also relevantly contributes Wharton [23], McFall [24] and Mendelová & Zaušková [25].)

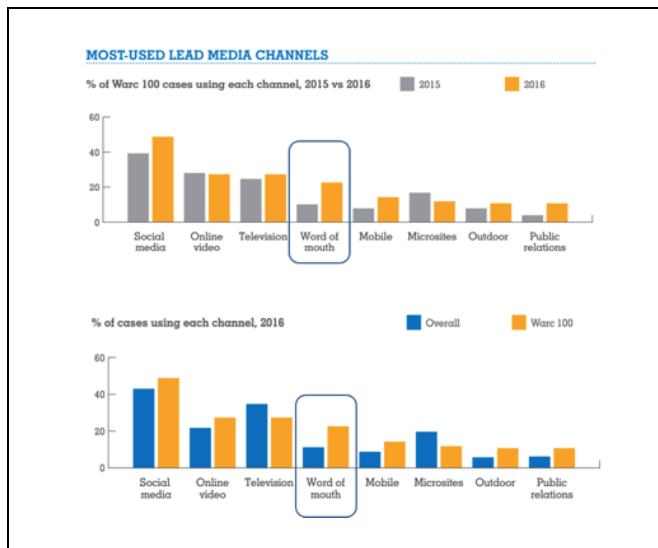


Figure 3. Most used media channels [T.J. Clif, *Warc 100 – Lessons from the world’s best marketing campaigns 2016*,

[http://www.warc.com/Content/Content Viewer.aspx?MasterContentRef=6793d6d4-3b4f-4aae-b775-313e86f70be8&q= Lessons+from+the+worlds+best+marketing+campaigns&CID=A107006&PUB=WARC-EXCLUSIVE\].](http://www.warc.com/Content/Content Viewer.aspx?MasterContentRef=6793d6d4-3b4f-4aae-b775-313e86f70be8&q= Lessons+from+the+worlds+best+marketing+campaigns&CID=A107006&PUB=WARC-EXCLUSIVE].)

As shown by an analysis of the most successful campaigns of the last two years, and by comparing them with general advertising global production, the top 100 most successful and most effective contemporary campaigns worldwide – using the WARC methodology [<http://www.warc.com/Home.aspx>] – use not only relatively more social media and digital communication and relatively less offline media (in particular TV), compared to general advertising production, but these campaigns are also significantly strong in terms of ‘word of mouth’. This means that these are campaigns which support, stimulate, but also use authentic, direct human contacts, thus leaving the area of ‘only’ media/screen communication and entering the human ‘life-world’ directly, as shows Figure 3. And it is very significant that among the hundred best campaigns, there was an important year-on-year increase in the share of ‘word of mouth’ as ‘main medium’.

8. Reality in contemporary advertising - typology

The tendency in contemporary advertising, which works with reality as its relatively new main medium, reacting to consumers’ needs and desires caused by the permanently switched-on 24/7 multi-screen world, can be divided into the following basic categories:

8.1. A social experiment

Basic method is an authentic, real event in the real world and participants are not paid actors, but accidental real people. Examples:

- **JetBlue:** Social experiment as a way of bringing people together in a divided country, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPurzKVTIU4>;
- **Roc Ronaldo Disguise/Selfie:** Social experiment with a celebrity, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8H_DSErYUZk, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHz82I8Vv88>;
- **We Love Bikes Škoda:** Social experiment with minimal branding, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yTFiP_co0U;
- **States United To Prevent Gun Violence:** Social experiment with a personal experience of gun violence, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nAfWfF4TjM>;
- **Volvo:** Technological social experiment, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4x0w7juhtw>;
- **Patron:** ‘Blind tests’ as a wide-ranging social experiment, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7manblwav2g>.

8.2. (A record of) the real world

A record of the real world as seen by an industrial or security camera, the use of a camera in real time, or the use of existing footage made by people –

consumers. Advertising thus makes clear that it is directly connected to the reality. Examples:

- **Frijoles & Frescas:** Real burglary becomes an advertisement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzdv4FUHQp8>;
- **Harvey Nichols:** Real robberies and catching culprits, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfdiClhlLZk>;
- **Android:** Existing footage of real life. ‘Friends Forever’ has been shared more than 6.4 million times across Facebook, Twitter and the blogosphere since its launch in February 2016. That makes it the most shared ad of all time [T. Nudd, *The Most Viral Ads of 2015*, <http://www.adweek.com/news-gallery/advertising-branding/20-most-viral-ads-2015-168213>, accessed on 19.11.2015]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnVuqfXohxc>;
- **McDonald’s:** A real event from the real world, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMjRSnokms8>;
- **Tesco:** Authentic freshness broadcast live, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnRWR_VgFLI.

8.3. Communication focused on the tangible aspects of the product

It is interesting to note that the same can be achieved by communicating the authenticity, mastery and reliability of the product’s perfect elaboration, as by communicating its imperfections (imperfection helps create the concept of authenticity). Examples:

- **Steinway & Sons:** “Hand-made in a machine-made universe.” Tangibility, originality, precision – all this in a campaign targeted to Millennials, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRlfpH-uJGE>;
- **Puerto Rico Tourism:** Giving away a ‘tangible’ product: sand from a beach in Puerto Rico in the middle of the winter in Chicago, <http://creativity-online.com/work/puerto-rico-tourism-puerto-rico-defrosts-chicago/45674>;
- **Cristian Dior:** The production of a product, not wearing or using it, becomes the story, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=im_Ux8RoMPQ;
- **Hennessy:** Focusing on the product and its ‘chapters’, which is its sensuous nuances. The video was shown on the ‘minimalist branded content’ website Nowness, which only acknowledges the brand minimally, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2T8JCapevxM>;
- **Herbert Sirupy:** The production of a product, not using it, becomes the story, <https://vimeo.com/125600861>;
- **Dove Chocolate:** ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) creates the feeling of the product’s tangible authenticity or realness, <http://creativity-online.com/work/dove-chocolate-asmr-video-angelababy/44057>;
- **Glad Cling Wrap:** Reality, tangibility, the product and its performance in real time, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=090afIfeyoU>;

- **Intermarché:** Authenticity of imperfection in contrast to the artificiality of perfection, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQQMygivn0g>;
- **DILL-LIDL:** Instead of talking about quality, direct experience and joy of it, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgfGc4ES3IE>;
- **OPSM Penny the Pirate:** Instead of talking about benefit, the benefit is a tangible part of the advertisement itself, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8MUqnRxXrU>.

8.4. The fictional world presented as real.

This is a specific communication tendency associated with films and TV series. They are by definition dependent on the screen world. Current advertising for films and TV series enters reality and deliberately creates a message as if these were not works of fiction, but true stories from real world. In this way, advertising for films and TV series saturates in a very interesting manner the human needs and desires for authenticity, realness and reality. Examples:

- **Zoolander2:** Heroes from the fictional world of film became ‘real’ – the promotion for the film sequel began with their ‘real’ performance at the Paris Fashion Week 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRNwGimhok4>;
- **Channel 4 Humans:** Promotion of TV series new season as an advertisement for ‘real’ products of the ‘real’ company Persona Synthetics, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RAcfjsMrCk>;
- **Under Armour – The Martian:** In this co-branding communication sport brand presents a fictional hero ‘truly’ preparing for a ‘real’ mission, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5WvVytqHFc>;
- **House of cards:** Promo TV series as a real presidential campaign with media airing during the presidential candidates’ debate broadcasted by CNN, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvGL42rywPM>. To enhance the reality aspect, the TV spot is a quotation of classical Ronald Reagan 1984 campaign: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU-IBF8nwSY>.

9. Discussion

As well as the fact that each of these advertisements make use of realness, authenticity or tangible reality, their common feature is also the online medium used to share them, i.e. screen, world; once a social experiment is carried out, for example, in the real world, information about this experiment appears in the online environment. It is important to realise that this tendency in advertising is not a rejection of the screen world – in today’s civilisation such a gesture would make no sense (even though there are population segments who declare support for such a gesture). This tendency in advertising is about listening sensitively to those needs and desires, which are hidden behind the patency of the dominating online trend. Thus it is a reaction to the ‘hidden agenda’ of the screen world.

This is what differentiates it from the concept of guerrilla marketing [26]. Guerrilla marketing is – as indicated by its military name – about confronting consumers; its basic approach is an ‘unexpected’ attack on the consumer and the moment of his/her surprise and unpreparedness for advertising communication. In contemporary advertising, which uses reality and authenticity, this is not about a confrontation, but about listening to those human needs and desires which were contradictorily bred by today’s dominant multi-screen world.

10. Conclusions

The socio-cultural role of advertising lies in its ability to reveal not only how people apparently live, that is what is the main trend in contemporary culture, but also in its ability to find contradictions in contemporary culture and to use them as an opportunity to build a deeper relationship with consumers. The advertising which chooses to use reality, authenticity and tangible realness shows how relevant commercial messages which go beyond the contours of the ‘world as it is’ can be. This type of advertising reveals a counter-trend that world consumers are longing for. A comparison of such advertising with consumer surveys shows that the hypothesis that this tendency in advertising is a direct reaction to unsaturated needs and desires bred by a multi-screen world is correct.

In this context, academic marketing has a role and an opportunity to make marketing practice aware of the fact that *what people long for is usually what they are not given* and that the ‘*marketing of deficit*’, or the *marketing of deepest human needs and desires* is usually more relevant than the *lifestyle marketing*, or the ‘*marketing of abundance*’. The path to the territory of deep human needs and desires (which lie beyond the patency of the lifestyle-based advertising academic and practice concepts) proves to be relevant to brands and consumers.

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