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Consumer Life and User Generated Content in the Age of Social Media

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Abstract. *The rise of social media and the emergence of globalization has changed the relationship between brands and consumers. The aim of this paper is to discuss how is this relationship affected by user generated content (UGC) and user generated brands (UGB). Consumers tend to look for products and brands in order to construct and sustain their social self. In this regard, the brand can define a person with respect to others. The brand constitutes a vital entity in the consumer's mind, acting as an enlivened partner in a relationship, and contributing to the initiation, maintenance, and destruction of the consumer-brand bond. In this context, the paper insists on the idea of brand personality, as developed by Jennifer Aaker (1997), connecting it to consumer culture studies. The research is based on a set of semi-structured interviews with 10 advertising creatives working at some of the most important Romanian advertising agencies. The investigation instrument used was the computer-assisted interview (CASI). The results point in the direction of a constructed brand personality, promoting an active and involved consumer. Advertisers have the power to define brands personality, inviting users to create content as well. The meaning of the brand is linked with the culture in which a particular sign is decoded. Advertisers give people hints of who is the brand, what is its core activity, its cultural references, set of values or personality traits. Brands have a personality and by communicating it, the character is build up gradually. In fact, brands tend to build a reflection or an image of the consumer which it seems to be addressed through the advertising messages.*

Keywords: *user generated content; user generated brands; brand personality; social media; consumer culture.*

Introduction

The emergence of globalization and reterritorialization has changed the relation between meaning and place, cultural experience and geographical territory. According to Thompson (1995, p.32), we live in a world of *despatialized simultaneity*, which makes it possible to "experience events as simultaneous despite the fact that they occurred in locals that were spatially remote". This phenomenon made possible the further integration of distant events, processes and relationships into local worlds, *cultural synchronization* thus becoming an unprecedented feature of global modernity and *non-places* the icon of this synchronization.

For instance, a foreigner lost in a country he does not know can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, malls. For him a well-known international brand is a reassuring landmark, an element of familiarity, which, shared with others, gives birth to an *interpretive community of consumers,* "who's traditional – alimentary, linguistic – habits induce them to relate in a peculiar way with the objects and information that circulate in international networks" (Canclini, 2001, p.43). At the same time, we find international communities of consumers, such as fashion enthusiasts or exotic cuisine fans, which provide a sense of belonging where national loyalties have eroded, this kind of "common fate" or sense of belonging becoming possible in modern societies with the aid of what Thompson (1995) calls *mediated historicity.* Thus, brand communities have "shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p.412), even though they have a non-geographically bound community.

By altering the perception of place and of the past, the sense of belonging is no longer derived (as it is the case with the *anthropological place*) from the feeling of sharing a common history and a common locale, a common trajectory in time and space. As the sense of the past becomes increasingly dependent on mediated symbolic forms, people become attached not so much to groups of people with which they share a common origin or a common path through space and time, but rather to groups of people which are constituted through the media, people whose interest and taste have been shaped by the media to resemble their own.

Instructions and remarks that emanate from commercial centers ("thank you for your custom", "we apologize for any inconvenience", the cash dispenser`s advice "please withdraw your card", the information on product labels) are addressed simultaneously and indiscriminately to each and every customer. This leads further to "the average man", the man who temporarily obeys the same codes as others, the man who receives the same messages (although decodes them differently), the culturally synchronized man.

Today's increased use of computer and information technology affects the brand strategy as well. The public imaginaries are now shaped though *transmedia engagement*, which goes beyond the notion of a single content adapted from one media format to another, unfolding "across multiple medial platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins, 2006, pp.97-98). For example, the 2010 Tourism Australia campaign, "There's Nothing Like Australia", was a 'crowd-sourcing' initiative encouraging citizens to share photos of their holidays in Australia via social media networks, "claiming to empower them in the construction of a more democratic and authentic image of their country" (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2016, p.6).

In this new context, "buying decisions are always about self-representation against a background narrative of appropriate cultural style (How do I want to be perceived? What cultural images do I want to conform to or contrast with?") (Ritzer, 2007, p.354). With the increasing local penetration of global symbolic forms, the notion of "location" itself comes to integrate distant events and changes. Through such

changes, globalization reaches deep into individual cultural worlds, whether it is the understanding of what counts as home and abroad, or the implicit sense people have of their relevant environment.

According to Ritzer (2010), there are three forces influencing the globalization of consumer culture: capitalism, americanization, and mcdonaldization. In this sense, mcdonaldization refers to the process in which "the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (Ritzer, 1993, p.3). This leads further to a standardization of products and services, so the consumer experience is the same, regarding the place of consumption. A successful brand is already part of the consumer culture if we take into account examples such as Coca-Cola, Starbucks or Wal-Mart. Thus, we can notice a tendency to brand non-places (such as Niketown), non-persons (Disney characters such as Mickey Mouse, the Snow White, etc.) and non-services (for instance "You've Got Mail", AOL). This is linked to the increasing need for brands to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market.

The rise of social media "have made user-generated content one of the driving forces of online experiences today" (Denhardt, 2014, p.3). According to Constantinides and Fountain (2008), it is also one of the most influential sources of online information today. Since consumers spend more time on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or Twitter, an increasing share of the interaction with and the new experience around brands should occur within these new communication environments (Henderson & Bowley, 2010).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the relationship between brands and consumers in the age of social media. As we will see further, the brand constitutes a vital entity in the consumer's mind. Acting as an enlivened partner in a relationship, it contributes to the initiation, maintenance, and destruction of the consumer-brand bond. Susan Fournier (1998, p.366) argues that the consumer-brand relationships are more a "matter of perceived goal compatibility than congruence between discreet product attributes and personality trait images." In fact, meaningful relationships are characterized more by the perceived ego significance of the chosen brand. Put simply, brands give meaning to consumers' life.

Furthermore, the relationship between brands and consumers is affected by the development of user generated content, a concept that is discussed extensively in the next section. Further, we will discuss the idea of a brand personality, referring to the Big Five model proposed by Jennifer Aaker (1997).

User generated content and user generated brands

User generated content (UGC) is defined as content that is publicly available and created by end-users in a creative effort (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Keller, 2009).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.63), social media is a "group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". The term also covers other Internet-based applications such as blogs, social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.), content communities (YouTube), virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds (Kim, Kwon, & Lee, 2009; Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012).

An interesting fact is that it is possible to create brands with user-generated online environments. These brands are called user-generated brands (UGB), defined as "brands that are created – originally unintentionally – by communities of users or single users outside of their professional routines in social media environments, where their products are publicly available and show a creative effort" (Denhardt, 2014, p.5).

For instance, brands like Apache and Linux are produced by communities of users sharing a specific interest. For Ozuem, Pinho, and Azemi (2016, p.58), the 'voice' of the consumer has evolved, with consumers no longer limited by geographical boundaries and consumer generated content (CGC) becomes more mainstream. This happens because "social media favors relationship and community building as well as it promotes active engagements of consumers" (Denhardt, 2014, p.12). Marketing activities within social media environments have to take into account and work with the increased power of consumers.

On the other hand, the dark side of consumer power leads further to the rise of the consumer antibranding efforts, aiming to deconstruct the credibility of the brand. Kucuk (2015, p.244) proves that antibranders use strategies such as drama and humor to demonize, criminalize, dehumanize and "Hitlerize" the targeted brands. In this way, they create strong antibrand voices in order to shape consumers' perceptions. The idea behind antibranding efforts is to create noise in the corporation-to-consumer socio-cognitive semiotic communication processes (Kucuk, 2015, p.246).

User generated content is also connected to a dark side of consumer behavior as related to technology use. Consumer misbehavior has received increasing attention in recent research (Akhbari, Absolvand, & Ghaffari, 2016; Daunt & Greer, 2015; Grove & Fisk, 1997; Grove, Pickett, Jones, & Dorsch, 2012; Harris & Daunt, 2011), signifying undesirable acts of consumers and violation of social norms in consumption situations (Fullerton & Punj, 1993). One can notice here the negative aspect of consumer behavior, which can harm the company, the employer, and other consumers. These effects are related to a dystopian view of the technological society, claiming that "technology fragments society and isolates people, resulting in loss of strong bonds among consumers" (Fisher & Wright, 2001). The culture of availability develops the habit of constantly checking digital devices, so consumers find it unpleasant to be disconnected.

Comparatively, this paper takes a different approach, insisting mainly on user generated content and brand personality in the age of social media, from the advertising perspective. This is also a limit of the research because only one aspect

of the problem was investigated in-depth. Future research should take into account the reverse of the medal in what concerns user generated content. The next section deals with the concept of brand personality, understanding the dynamics of consumer-brand relationship nowadays.

Brand personality in the age of social media

In today's digital age, brands can also serve as social symbols (Fischer, Volckner, & Sattler, 2010) and cultural resources (Holt, 2002). These attributes confer brands the ability to help consumers create and build their self-identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Consumers are no longer perceived as passive participants, they are actively involved in the advertising process. The creation of brands is now an ongoing social process (Fuller, Schroll, Denhardt, & Hutter, 2012; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), while the value is co-created in the interplay and negotiations of various stakeholders (Merz & Vargo, 2009).

Consumers often give brands human personality traits, so the personality traits of the people associated with the brand are transferred directly to the brand. In this regard, perceptions of brand personality can be influenced by any direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand. For Azoulay and Kapferer (2003, p.15), "brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands".

Foremost, a possible explanation to understand the relationship between brand and consumers is to be found in animism theories. According to them, the brand is somehow possessed of the spirit of a past or present other. Spokespersons who advertise brands are seen as strongly effective, because "the constructed self makes the celebrity a kind of exemplary, inspirational figure to the consumer." (McCracken, 1989, p.316). In fact, the brand becomes the spokesperson with the repeated association over time.

Continuing this idea, the target audience identifies with the qualities promoted by the prototype celebrity. Champion brands make a lot of sustainable value promises to the market. They also generate superior returns, because "there is an implied rite of passage to achieving brand champion status, a change journey bridging the old brand culture and the aspirational culture." (Buckingam, 2011, p.17).

Brand personality is a psychological projection (Zbuchea et al., 2015, pp.54-55), sometimes linked with human personality. It is also described and measured by those human personality traits that are relevant for brands. Since 1970, brand personality has been the focus of brand advertising. Like a person, a brand is eager to be perceived as being upscale, competent, impressive, trustworthy, fun, active, youthful or intellectual. These personality traits can create a stronger brand by emphasizing a self-expressive benefit that becomes a vehicle for the customer to express his or her own personality.

That is why Susan Fournier (1998, p.368) defines it a "set of trait inferences constructed by the consumer based on repeated observation of behavior enacted by the brand at the hand of its manager, that cohere into a role perception of the brand as a partner in a relationship dyad." In completing Fournier's (1998) perspective, Jennifer L. Aaker (1997) considers that brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand.

In Aaker's (1997) vision, the most important five dimensions of the brand personality are Sincerity (Down-to-earth, Honest, Wholesome, Cheerful), Excitement (Daring, Spirited, Imaginative, Up-to-date), Competence (Reliable, Intelligent, Successful), Sophistication (Upper class, Charming) and Ruggedness (Outdoorsy, Tough). Some of them are to be found in human personality as well, but in this process, brand personality has a symbolic or self-expressive function. Demographic characteristics such as gender, age and class are not to be excluded. For example, Virginia Slim as a brand is considered to be feminine, while Marlboro spreads masculinity. In what regards the age, Apple is known as a young brand, while IBM is quite older.

In addition to this, the five dimensions of the brand personality are eager to operate across cultures. Human personality is the same across a variety of cultures. Thus, the Big Five factor has some limitations and it has not been proved if it is applicable worldwide. It's not the same thing with brands, because there are big differences between cultures. In fact, the symbolic use of brands differs considerably depending on the context. For example, in individualistic cultures, characterized by independence, autonomy, and uniqueness, consumers are more likely to use brands to express how they are different from members of their in-group. On the other side, in collectivist cultures, based on values as interdependence, conformity, and similarity, consumers are more likely to use the brand to express how they are similar to members of their in-group (Aaker, 1997, p.322).

While purchasing a brand or a product, individuals are inclined to maintain, enhance or seek social approval of certain aspects of their self-concept. Most probably, they will choose those brands matching their own personality (Bosnjak, Bochmann, & Tanja, 2007). In particular, a brand can be described by demographics (age, gender, social class, and race), lifestyle (activities, interests, and opinions) or human personality traits (such as extroversion, agreeableness, and dependability). Consumers tend to look for products and brands in order to construct and sustain their social self. In this regard, the brand can define a person with respect to others, and when social identity is involved, what is expressed can be very important to the individual.

A brand is like a person and what consumers think about it is the result of its identity and image. The name, logo, slogan, color, and shape form the brand "Gestalt," which means that the whole is more important than the sum of its parts. In addition to this, the brand image is "the public perception of the company or the brand." (Drewniany & Jewler, 2009, p.53). A brand is also a culture, meaning the set of values feeding the brand's inspiration. The basic principles governing a brand are very important and

stand for the core of the brand. Major brands like United Colors of Benetton, Coca-Cola, and IBM are certainly driven by a culture.

Brand cultures play an essential role in differentiating them. It indicated the ethos whose values are embodied in the products and services of the brand. For others, branding is marked by homogenization and sameness, because of globalization. So, "the public realm is turning into uniform commercial *brandscapes* dominated by the same global brands and their branding of images." (Pike, 2011, p.10)

A brand has a personality and by communicating it gradually builds up character. Furthermore, the way in which it speaks of its products or services shows exactly what kind of person it would be if it were human. *In extenso*, a brand will always tend to build a reflection or an image of the buyer which it seems to be addressing.

Consumers indeed use brands to build their own identity. In fact, the brand has great latitude and a lot of possibilities, even though it has already planted the seeds of its potential identity in the memory of the market. Like a person, a brand can exemplify different personalities in different context and roles. For example, an Apple computer may be thought of as friendly, fun, and relaxed at home, but at work, this personality may be inappropriate because it suggests laziness and unprofessionalism. So, consumer's feelings toward a brand can differ depending on the context. Thus, one important relationship for many brands is a friendship characterized by trust, dependability, understanding and caring. According to Aaker (1998, pp. 190-191), "a brand personality can help a brand in several ways. First, it can provide a vehicle for customers to express their own identity. Second, the brand personality metaphor suggests the kind of relationship that customers have with the brand, a relationship modeled after person-to-person relationships."

The brand personality scheme proposed by Aaker (1997) illustrates a new way of understanding brands. The "Big Five" provides a valuable insight into the variables that influence brand personality, as well as those that are influenced by brand personality. Also, the brand personality scale has important implications in the perceptions of brand personality across cultures. On the other side, "this pattern suggests that brand personality dimensions might operate in different ways or influence consumer preference for different reasons. For example, whereas Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence tap an innate part of human personality, Sophistication and Ruggedness tap a dimension that individual desire but do not necessarily have." (Aaker, 1997, p.353).

However, Aaker's scale has received criticism on several issues. Some of them emphasize the non-generalizability at the respondent level (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003), while others criticize the non-replicability of the five factors across different cultures (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Furthermore, Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf (2009) believe that the Big Five Model should be continued with a new scale to measure brand personality, consisting of twelve items and five factors: responsibility (down-to-earth, stable, responsible), simplicity (ordinary, simple), activity (active, dynamic, innovative), aggressiveness (aggressive, bold) and emotionality (romantic, sentimental). In their opinion, this new scale can be used for

studies on an aggregate level across multiple brands of different product categories, for studies across competitors and for cross-cultural studies.

In a study on the impact of brand personality and functional congruity on cars, Nikhashemi and Valaei (2018, p.99) show that "brand personality is a great indicator of cognitive loyalty formation", so marketers should identify the positive response of consumers towards the brand by considering rewarding them.

One can notice that today brands engage more with the costumer and their main focus is on creating a valuable relationship. Furthermore, the brand concentrates on building a relationship with the audience, and not just on persuading them to buy products. Once a relationship is established, customer expectations also develop. That is why brands are concerned about jeopardizing the relationship in a way that enhances, rather than detract from their authenticity.

In fact, the meaning of the brand is linked with the culture in which this particular sign is decoded. The cultural background of the audience is fundamental in constructing and also maintaining a brand image. Advertising gives people hints of who is the brand, what is its core activity, its cultural references, set of values or personality traits. Today, the brand values must be made palpable and tangible. Therefore, the values must transform into acts at 360 degrees. Brands can increase choice, enhance freedom and provide enjoyment.

Recent research (Seunghwan & Dae-Young, 2018) use the concept of brand personality to determine how travelers perceived Airbnb as a lodging brand and investigated the effect of involvement on view of brand personality. The dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, and ruggedness as developed by Jennifer Aaker (1997) were proved to be very helpful in the study, proving a higher level of involvement in female travelers, compared to male travelers.

In this paper, the focus is on user generated content in the age of social media, discussing whether we can talk about a brand personality in Aaker's terms (1997). Furthermore, we will see how advertisers deal with the growing uncontrollable influence of consumers (Bernhoff & Li, 2008), which they exert through user-generated content or user-generated brands.

Methodology

This research aims to reveal the influence of the user generated content on the way brands communicates. As we will see later, the development of new technologies helps the brand to communicate on several channels in order to reach the consumer on-line and off-line. Also, the paradigm of integrated communication makes the advertisers think of more innovative ways of putting the brand closer to people.

Another dimension is brand personality, and one of the main assumptions is that consumers tend to look for brands in order to construct and maintain their social self. Furthermore, we will insist on the meanings embedded in commercial brands.

In this way, symbolic and expressive attributes that people perceive in brands should adapt to the culture in which wants to advertise. We will see whether the cultural background of the target audience influences the way individuals perceive brands.

In order to study the importance of brand personality in consumer life, I propose the following research questions:

RQ1: How does *user generated content* affect the way brands communicate in the age of social media?

RQ 2: How is brand personality linked with *human personality*?

RQ 3: Does the cultural background of the target audience influence the way people perceive brands?

The research is based on a set of semi-structured interviews with 10 advertising creatives working at some of the most important Romanian advertising agencies. Eight of the respondents were copywriters, one was an art director and other was Creative Director at a digital agency. The investigation instrument used was the computer-assisted interview (CASI), so the interviews were distributed online, through Google Forms, on the advertisers' email addresses.

The interview guide was a very useful instrument in dealing with the ten interviews. The fifteen questions were based on the themes of integrated communications, brand personality, brand image, cultural background of the target audience, engagement and the relationship between the brand and the consumer.

Results and discussion

First of all, the interviewers revealed some important aspects regarding the influence of integrated communication on the way brands communicate. For example, a copywriter from an interactive agency considered that "a brand which is visible on every channel and takes advantage of the medium, even if we talk about ATL, BTL or digital and which communicates in an intelligent way, non-invasive, bidirectional, knowing and anticipating the consumer needs and expectations will have all the chances to succeed" (A.C.).

In addition to this, another copywriter considered that integrated communications affect the brand because they have to think of innovative ways to communicate. Similar to the first perspective, A.O. emphasized the fact that even if brands communicate everywhere, that doesn't mean they have to irritate the consumers. Furthermore, in A.O.'s opinion, the channels must be explored in the brand advantage, focusing on things that bring the consumer closer to the products. In analyzing this topic, the perspective of a Creative Director is also very interesting. As a matter of fact, C.I., Creative Director, said that "the fast development of technologies and the increase of the rhythm in which innovation creates new contact points with the consumer put pressure on advertisers and communication agencies. If there is know-how, budgets and especially courage, the brand can initiate conversations with the consumer all day long, online and offline. Otherwise, the communication will be fragmented, incomplete and characterized by monologue.".

Another perspective about the way integrated campaigns affect the way brands communicate is the link with efficiency. A.B., a copywriter, thinks that a brand has to be relevant for a consumer. In fact, they should communicate on every channel only if it is efficient both for the brand and the consumer. Also, this constant interaction between the two entities affects the brand in a positive way, according to S.L. (copywriter) opinion.

A lot of brands use integrated communications and the others should align with the trend in order to be top of mind. In what concerns the definition of the integrated concept, only one interviewer came with a detailed opinion: "Integrated communications means that when a brand wants to communicate he should take into consideration all possible places and mediums. For example, in the 1930s there was no Internet and very few persons had television. Thus, there was a lot of advertising in the press, outdoor or at the radio." (V.P., copywriter).

On the other hand, an art director from a digital agency (S.C.) considers that brands often benefit of channels which manage to reach their target audience. The financial costs of an integrated campaign are not justified if the experience and the past demonstrate that communicating on certain channels is successful. Similar to this perspective, a copywriter speaks about studying the target and adapting the information to the channels where they activate. Furthermore, S.G. emphasizes the fact that integrated communication is a smart tool, but it is not used properly by advertising agencies.

In what concerns the parameters which contribute to the success of the advertising campaigns, the answers suggested that success depends on adapting the message to the target audience. In addition to this, a copywriter (A.C.) revealed the fact that the coherence in communication and the campaign unity are primordial elements for a success recipe. Continuing this argument, another copywriter (R.F.) considers that there are three factors that guarantee the campaign success. The first one is defined by coherence, which implies that brands should have the same tone-of-voice on every channel, while the second factor is satisfying the public's needs, knowing who the target you want to communicate with is, when and how. The third factor is interactivity.

Another opinion relies on the fact that success is when a brand manages to create a buzz around it: "When you manage to create a buzz around a brand the success is a guarantee. That is why Rom has won two Grand Prix at Cannes Lions. And there are a lot of other examples. Unfortunately, this buzz does not come as simple as that. On the other side, in online, the success can be measured. Facebook Ads or Google AdWords campaigns are efficient instruments in measuring the success. This does not mean they will generate sales. At least, they will manage to impose in the consumer's mind. The real battle is at the level of perception, not of numbers." (A.O., copywriter).

Regarding the success in online, a copywriter (A.C.) considers that a good community management, strategies for increasing the engagement rate and talking about this on Facebook would really help. Completing this idea, a Creative Director (C.I.) thinks

that the most important parameters are the idea, the execution, the budget and the media-plan. Another opinion reveals the fact that positioning is not to be left out. It should also be relevant for the brand and for the consumer. The most important thing is to focus on the concept and then communicate on all possible channels.

Furthermore, the same copywriter (S.L.) admits that cutting a frame from the TV spot and making it a print or an outdoor is a channel waste. It is more important to understand the essence of a certain channel and to make an impact message. Similar to this opinion, another copywriter (A.D.) believes that success comes from adapting the message and execution to every channel in order to reach to the consumer in a proper manner.

Despite this, an interviewer came up with a different perspective, based on the relationship brands should have with consumers. A.B., a copywriter, says that the parameters which assure success are the same for every advertising campaign: "It is as simple as that: it moves you or not. Practically, is very hard to express this thing, because people do not enjoy advertising. They do not buy televisions so they could see the spots. That is why the advertiser should persuade them to come closer to the brand and to offer them something strong. It is a kind of seduction, a teasing. Like in a relationship, if you want.".

Brand personality

Consumers often give brands human personality traits, so the personality traits of the people associated with the brand are transferred directly to the brand. Actually, perceptions of brand personality can be influenced by any direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand.

According to a copywriter (A.C.) and a Creative Director (C.I.), one of the actual trends is brand anthropomorphization. They also insist on the fact that there is a tendency to transform the brand in a friend or a confident. Completing this idea, C.I., Creative Director, reveals the fact that "another aspect is linked with the need to communicate. Actually, the interaction evolves from monologue to dialogue and from mass discourse to web 2.0 and web 3.0 platforms which brands build for the consumers, generating future communities of brand ambassadors." (C.I.).

Another opinion is based on the fact that brands can also be feminine and masculine. A.O., a copywriter, continues this idea by giving the example of Redd's as a feminine brand and Bergenbier as a masculine one. The tone-of-voice of the brand is also important, as another copywriter (R.F.) states. Some brands have a serious tone-of-voice, while others are sympathetic, curious or crazy. Also, a big importance is given to the link between brand personality and human personality: "Probably when you choose a brand, a little bit from the brand personality reflects your personality. Actually, I think the brands are built in reverse, every time you position a brand you think at the consumer which will buy it: what is relevant to him, how would he like the brand to be. This is how the nicest brands born. And they have a strongly defined target. This is how brands with personality see the light." (S.L., copywriter).

Similar to this idea, brands and consumers share interests, passions, feelings, and thoughts in the opinion of S.C., an art director. In addition to this, the relation between brands and consumers is based on the same principles as a human relationship. If they get along with each other they will survive, if not they can separate from each other. The resemblance between brands-consumers' relation and human relationships goes further by introducing the classification of extroverted and introverted brands, as A.D., a copywriter, reveals. He also thinks that consumers could fall in love with brands and tattoo their name on the body.

The supporting dimension of the brand was discovered by another copywriter (V.P.), which says that brands have always tried to answer people's needs or dissatisfactions. Also, brands help people to solve a problem. On the contrary, one of the interviewers was not happy about the association of brand personality with human personality. In fact, the brand does not have a personality, according to a copywriter (S.G.): "The brand does not have a personality, this is what I have learned at Psychology. He has the personality that defines people behind the brand, which are influenced by mass consumption. So, if the brand would have a personality, it would be a schizophrenic one.".

Another issue connected to brand personality is a brand image. In defining it, multiple perspectives revealed important aspects in the analysis. First of all, A.C., a copywriter, defines the brand image as the perception of the target audience, exactly as it was positioned on the market. Second of all, C.I., Creative Director, thinks that the brand image is the common multitude of images such as the name, the logo and the positioning generated by the brand and the exterior factors of the brand, such as competition, consumers or mass-media.

In what concerns the feelings a brand image transmits, A.B., a copywriter, considers that "brand image is the brand that makes me love it, without knowing exactly why. Or, worse, makes me realize that there are better products, but I prefer my brand." Similarly, S.C., an art director, states that brand image means what consumers really feel about a brand, even if it is about admiration, frustration, hate, satisfaction or happiness. In this equation, the message communicated in the advertising campaigns is also important. V.P., a copywriter, thinks that the first words come to people's mind in hearing a brand's name are relevant. If there are few words, the brand image is strong.

Furthermore, a brand image is built through the advertising campaigns people identify with: "Brand image starts with the name, at a phonetic and graphic level, and continues with the positioning and the brand experience of the consumer before buying, but especially after buying. Brand image is also consolidated through ads in which the consumer identifies itself, through the salesman's attitude and through experiences which should necessitate using a lot of senses (multi-sensory brands)". (A.D., copywriter). On the other hand, the brand image is also linked to a metaphor such as the Sunday clothes, washed and wore every day. (S.G., copywriter).

Cultural background

One of the most important topics of the research is the cultural background of the target audience and how does it influence the way people perceive brands. The meanings embedded in commercial brands have culturally specific elements.

In fact, symbolic and expressive attributes that people perceive in brands should adapt to the culture in which wants to advertise. According to this subject, C.I., Creative Director, revealed that the cultural background is very important because advertisers should know who they are addressing to. If the target is sophisticated, advertisers can come with a pretentious copy, but otherwise not.

In order to illustrate this idea, he gave the example of Burger King, who was not successful in Romania because of the fact they did not communicate to seduce Romanians. Similarly, A.O., copywriter, came up with an interesting approach: "The cultural background is very important. You cannot come with a brand name which means something offensive in a language and try to impose it. Actually, it is very clear it will not work like that. For example, when Volkswagen Jetta promoted itself in Italy, the effect was not the one expected, because in Italian, "Ietta" means unfortunate. That is why the cultural background of the target audience is important, especially if you want to be successful on the market." In addition to this opinion, another copywriter (A.B.) thinks that in some cultures there are symbols which disturb, while in others they wake up bad memories.

In essence, the cultural background of the target audience influences the way people perceive brands. S.L., a copywriter, considers that advertisers try to build relevant brands to the consumers and this means they have to introduce understandable cultural references. Continuing this idea, S.C., an art director, gives some explanatory examples: Indians will not buy a beef burger in the same way in which Arabs will not appreciate pork meat with mashed potatoes.

Finally, in order to understand the importance of the cultural background, S.G., a copywriter, states that it matters in the same manner as people cannot sale caviar bags at a neighborhood game.

Digital brand communication

In what concerns brands future communication, the opinions of the interviewers were focused around digitalization. A perspective reveals the fact that the target's interest in mobile applications is increasing considerably. Furthermore, A.C., a copywriter, thinks that the interaction between brands and consumers must be adapted to this mobile too. The main focus should be on the visual effect, and not only in words. That is why Facebook has made considerable changes to the new timeline, Instagram has become so famous, typography is more and more used and augmented reality is a necessity for a big brand.

Continuing this idea, C.I., Creative Director, come with the "tradigital" concept. In his opinion, the future communication will be traditional and digital. Put simply, a mix between them. Also, mobile applications will gain ground and online will be in a continuous expansion. As a matter of fact, brands will start communicating more intensely in 3D.

On contrary, a copywriter (A.B.) considers that, despite the digital invasion, television will be on the list a long time from now on. Brands will also start to communicate more wisely and less invasive and they will try to involve the costumer in a special way. Similar to this opinion, another copywriter (S.G.) speaks about an effect-oriented communication of the brands, giving the example of arts. The main focus will be on creating a "wow" and on maintaining a constant communication, considering the fact that at a delta t point there will be another moment when bread and circuses are for free.

Furthermore, another perspective of the future brand's communication insists on the social idea. In consequence, "it will be less advertising and more relevance. The consumer's opinion will be very important. Along with digitalization also came the option of feedback, which is very important for the brand. We take the example of how brands communicate in other countries and behind every campaign, there is a social message. That means an orientation for something good, an orientation for pushing the customers to act, not just to buy the product. And this is the most important think for an advertiser: to see that people, after seeing the campaign, were a little bit inspired to act in a certain way." (S.L., copywriter). Completing this opinion, A.D., a copywriter, comes with the concept of holistic brands, which tend to fusion all kind of experiences a brand should offer to the consumer.

The impact of social media

One of the most important points of the research was studying the impact of social media on the way people perceive brands. Regarding this aspect, A.C., a copywriter, states that social media permits a real dialogue, without spatial or temporal constraints, between the brand and the consumer. In addition to this, the number of Facebook users is increasing and all advertising campaigns are integrated with digital. For example, a print refers to the brand's site, a radio ad or TV spot redirects the consumer on Facebook and so on. According to another opinion (A.O., copywriter), the impact of social media is big only if the target audience uses Facebook. The brands should also respect a communication contract.

Continuing the discussion, another copywriter (A.B.) thinks that the presence of the brands in social media is indispensable for creating awareness and notoriety. Furthermore, the content should be relevant. People will not buy a brand's products just because the brand has thousands of Facebook fans. Even if they have liked the page, they will not simply come and purchase. The example A.B. gives is related to human relationships: "It is like you would tease a girl. You can charm her virtually, but to impress her you need to do more than that.".

On the other side, some of the interviews considered that social media is just a part which defines brand communication. In the opinion of S.C., an art director, social media helps the brand to come closer to a specific target audience. Actually, if the brand concentrates excessively on this channel, the other consumers might as well be excluded.

The engagement is not very powerful and only if the brand does not have other channels to concentrate on, social media would be appropriate. Similarly, S.L., a copywriter, believes that social media is not suitable for all brands. First of all, they should analyze the target and then see if this channel best suits the audience. The most important aspect is relevance: "I think that it is not a good idea for a margarine to communicate on its Facebook page about candies recipes. The community is not so big in order to deliver a good Return on Investment and the efforts could be driven on other communication channels, such as forums. Of course, if it is relevant, Facebook is a good channel. It is very nice to see how many things you can do on a poor socializing site. Ikea Showroom is a good example and there are also infinite possibilities to play with consumers".

Brand engagement

Brand engagement is an important feature in understanding the way people perceive brands. After conducting ten interviews, the main feature advertisers relied on was involvement.

On the one hand, if a brand is not close to the consumer, he will lose his interest, as a copywriter states (A.C.). People do not want to be connected with cold brands, which communicate similarly to a corporation. Actually, engagement is defined as an interaction with the consumer, in order to build the story together. Another copywriter (A.O.) thinks that engagement is related to involvement. Considering this fact, brands should be closer to the consumers, in order to be perceived as real friends. In addition to this, A.B., a copywriter, gives more importance to the commitment. Brands are closer to the consumers and this closeness is the main issue in differentiating them from products.

On the other hand, not everyone is pleased with the idea of closeness: "I do not really know how close I would like the brands to be. Practically, I live with some of them, but I still do not want my personal space invaded. It is not just about closeness; it is about adapting the brand to the consumer's needs." (S.G., copywriter). As a matter of fact, engagement also means offering consumer valuable things and determine a specific answer. As R.F., a copywriter, says, the target audience should feel the brand and fall in love with it.

Despite this, individuality is also linked to engagement. In order to determine loyalty, brands have the mission of talking with each customer in a unique way, so the choice would be facilitated. Continuing this idea, S.L., a copywriter, believes that brands have an incredible power of storytelling, but the quality is also important for maintaining a long-term relationship with the target.

In addition to this, brand engagement is linked with customer engagement. That is why advertising campaigns determine an individual to choose a brand and no other. More than that, it is important to reward the loyalty and make the consumers feel special, as A.D., a copywriter, states. In what concerns the closeness, brands and consumers should interact as a family. At the other pole, S.C., an art director, argues that a brand which is not close to the consumer's needs and expectation will not have a long life on the market.

The relationship between brands and consumers

As for the relationship between brands and consumers, an important aspect here is creating an identity for the audience to identify with. Consumers tend to look for products and brands in order to construct and sustain their social self. Actually, the brand can define a person with respect to others, and when social identity is involved, what is expressed can be very important to the individual.

An interview I have conducted with a copywriter at an interactive agency (A.C.) revealed the fact that the relationship between brands and consumers should be based on a real friendship. Considering this aspect, C.I., Creative Director, comes up with the idea of trust. Consumers trust the brands to offer what they promise, while the brands insist on their fidelity.

Furthermore, some of the interviewers invest in the brand-consumer relationship the qualities of a love affair. Revealing this fact, A.O., a copywriter, believes that it is a win-win situation for both parts: consumer receives quality, while brand sells. He also insists on the idea that the relationship between brands and consumers is like a love story with a happy end. Hence, a perfect relationship should be based on respect. The brand should also be sincere with the customer and reveal the advantages and disadvantages of the products, as R.F., a copywriter, says.

One of the most important consequences of a good relationship between brands and consumers is generating word-of-mouth. As a matter of fact, experiences really matter, more than simple stories. Related to this, S.C., an art director, believes that in a perfect world the perfect relationship should be based on consumer's needs: "The brand should understand people's needs and determine them to buy the product. The real problem interferes when brands do not listen to what consumers want, and, as a consequence, they prefer the competition's brands." However, S.G., a copywriter, compares the brand-consumer relationship to the relation between two spines. The main focus is on love and respect, but personal space and understanding each other's needs are also important.

The issue of innovation was one of the central themes studied in this research. Asked if local brands should be braver in experimenting innovative strategies, the ten people working in the most important advertising agencies revealed some important facts.

First of all, C.I., Creative Director, thinks that nowadays people are crazy about daring campaigns and local brands are experimenting a lot in Europe. Romania should also go in line with this tendency.

Second of all, S.L., a copywriter, observed that Romanian brands are brave enough in promoting themselves: "I think that Romanian brands are very brave. For example, Rom and Boromir are visible and relevant. After all, it is not very hard for a Romanian brand to be relevant because the target is well-known. We also had a lot of surprises from Romanian brands which can express themselves without constraints, as we see in big corporations." On contrary, another copywriter (V.P.) believes that brands should also understand what consumers want to become. Put simply, brands should speculate people's future needs, not just the present ones.

Finally, another dimension investigated through the interviews conducted was the public perception about brands. According to A.O., a copywriter, a good insight has the potential to change the negative perceptions people associated with a certain brand. However, the execution is also important. If the brand focuses on emotional, rather than rational, the consumer is persuaded to buy the product because of the special feeling he experiences. Regarding this aspect, another copywriter thinks that there is a special recipe: "You take a product and you study the brand. After this, you study the market and the target audience. In the end, you add a hue to the results. So, 90 percent is studied (documentation) and the rest is about how fast you can resolve a puzzle."

Besides this, it is not easy to change the public perception about a brand, especially if the brand communicated frequently the same things. A campaign is not enough to make the people think different about a specific brand. Thus, the advertisers have the mission of stating very strong what the brand wants to communicate and repeat the message as long as it takes to be remembered. Continuing this idea, S.L., a copywriter emphasizes the fact that it is more important what a neighbor says than what people see on television or in the newspaper. That is why another effort should be concentrated on influencing the neighbor in a positive way.

Conclusion

User generated content brings consumers closer to the brands, proving that advertisers have to deal with the growing uncontrollable influence of consumers (Bernhoff & Li, 2008), which they exert through user-generated content or user-generated brands.

The results of this research point in the direction of a constructed brand personality, promoting "active engagements of consumers" (Denhardt, 2014). Advertisers have the power to define brands personality, inviting users to create content as well. The meaning of the brand is linked with the culture in which this particular sign is decoded and the cultural background of the public is fundamental in constructing and also maintaining a brand image. Advertising gives people hints of who is the brand, what is its core activity, its cultural references, set of values or personality

traits. Nowadays, the brand values must be made palpable and tangible. Therefore, brands can increase choice, enhance freedom and provide enjoyment.

Brands have a personality and by communicating it, the character is build up gradually. Furthermore, the advertising messages promoting products or services shows exactly what kind of person a brand would be if it was a human. In fact, brands tend to build a reflection or an image of the consumer which it seems to be addressing through the advertising messages. This research confirms Nikhashemi and Valaei (2018, p.99) study, showing that "brand personality is a great indicator of cognitive loyalty formation", so marketers should consider rewarding the consumers for their positive attitude concerning the brands they interact with.

The ten discussions I have conducted with creative people from some of the most important Romanian advertising agencies were very challenging and they revealed a lot of valuable ideas in understanding user generated content and consumer life in the age of social media.

The interview analysis revealed how the paradigm of integrated campaigns affects the way brands communicate on the market. A close attention was given to the issue of brand personality and the relationship of the brand with the consumer. The tendency of people's identification in values promoted by a specific brand was analyzed in depth. In addition to this, the cultural background of the target audience was not left out from the equation. The topic of brand perception was correlated with the personality of the buyer.

First of all, in talking about the influence of integrated communication on the way brands interact with the consumers, the main conclusion was that brands should communicate constantly and correctly. Second of all, in what concerns the parameters which contribute to the success of the advertising campaigns, the majority of the interviewers considered that adapting the message to the target audience may be a successful recipe. As for the issue of brand personality, the conclusion was that people often give brands human personality traits.

Furthermore, another issue investigated was brand image. Half of the interviewers believed that brand image is linked with the target audience perception. In addition to this, one of the most important research topics was the cultural background of the target audience. Here, people revealed the fact that the meanings embedded in commercial brands have culturally specific elements. As for the brands future communication, the opinions of the interviewers were focused around digitalization.

Another important point of the research was studying the impact of Social Media on the way people perceive brands. Some of them considered that Social Media permits a real dialogue, while others argue that this channel is not suitable for every brand. In what concerns brand engagement, the conclusion was that people link it with involvement.

Regarding the relationships between brand and consumers, two out of ten believed that it should be based on love, another two stuck to the respect, while other two

considered that closeness is more important. Besides this, a core theme studied in this research was innovation. Two out of ten believed that Romanian brands are brave enough in promoting themselves, while the others thought that brands should speculate about people's future needs. Finally, another dimension investigated was the public perception about brands. The conclusion was that the most important things in creating a good perception are a strong insight and a competitive execution.

As for the limitations, the interview method itself has some biases because of the defense mechanism of the ego. People often try to reveal their public self, and not the personal one. There is also a tendency for performers to offer their observers an idealized impression of themselves and the situation.

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