

Book Review- *The role of language and symbols in promotional strategies and marketing schemes*. Eds. Manuela Epure & Lorena Clara Mihăeș, IGI Global, 2018

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Abstract. *Brand new and exceptionally topical for the contemporary world, The Role of Language and Symbols in Promotional Strategies and Marketing Schemes is edited by two Romanian scholars who come from different fields and who take full advantage of this difference in academic backgrounds. As such, instead of a splintered collection of self-standing articles, the volume takes shape as a fluid and cohesive perspective on a vast and difficult topic, which is most of the times hard to pinpoint. In short, the editors propose a kaleidoscopic investigation into the ever-evolving field of marketing and receive well-argued answers and pertinent examples from myriad perspectives and from researchers on four continents.*

Keywords: marketing, advertising, applied linguistics, interdisciplinarity.

JEL Codes: Y30.

1. Introduction

When the floods hit Italy in late November of this year, media outlets broadcast daily news about the situation, with hundreds of reports and pictures letting the world know what was happening in cities from the northern part of the country. As this has been happening with some regularity in Italy over the past years, the internet and the ever-important social media have naturally been ‘flooded’, if the phrasing is allowed, with images of people braving the torrents or looking dismayed, with some of their possessions about them. These are all powerful images, each advertised with a certain purpose in mind, but, in my opinion, one of the most striking symbols to come out of Italy’s repeated troubles with floods was an edited image which circulated on social media this year. Against the backdrop of sophisticated shops, the two women depicted in this image were struggling to move against the current, a task made especially difficult by the white designer bags they were desperately clutching above the waters. And if this were not telling enough, the image also read that it would be easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of consumerism.

Without much commentary on the message it conveys, I would like to underline that this image is particularly relevant in the present context, not only because it combines different modalities to deliver a strong point- an interdependence which *The Role of Language and Symbols in Promotional Strategies and Marketing Schemes* investigates in depth in its chapters, but also because it reflects one of the realities which

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made this volume vital and necessary. We are not witnessing the decline or end of consumerism. It is still soaring, and, as such, it is also constantly fuelling the adjacent fields of advertising and marketing, which are able to support it and make it grow.

2. Contents and importance

2.1. Originality of the volume

Starting from the undeniable truth that the circulation of capital from buyer to seller is one of the pillars of contemporary society, it is easy to understand how making products known to a wider public would be a central focal point in business models. The advertising and marketing of products have already become stand-alone fields, which both absorb and generate large sums of money. Consequently, companies spend impressive amounts on the branding of their products, a process which usually includes studies and surveys regarding a wide array of aspects. But these studies are mainly useful to the practitioners of the field, and, as such, they somehow disregard the broader implications of the phenomenon, namely the fact that the effects of branding, marketing and advertising have been steadily seeping into the social and cultural sphere.

Such a shift explains why researchers with various academic interests are now focusing on topics related to marketing or advertising; they independently try to shed light on something that is ubiquitous, which is a difficult endeavour to say the least. But it is precisely this which constitutes one of the greatest merits of the volume, in my opinion. *The Role of Language and Symbols in Promotional Strategies and Marketing Schemes* brings together under the banner of academic inquiry chapters and case studies which can be useful not only in the closed circles of university research, but which can also be used by practitioners working in this field.

Moreover, because the abovementioned areas of interest are so rich in material, the issues that they raise are complex and diverse: from the ethical to the semantical or the cultural. In consequence, as the two editors of the volume point out themselves in the preface, the interest advertising and marketing have garnered recently comes from fields as different as psychology, semiotics, marketing or linguistics. So, it is only natural that studies undertaken on the topic be just as diverse. And, with its multitude of complementary perspectives, this volume addresses and embraces the heterogeneity inherent in the study of advertising schemes.

This is, from my point of view, one of the most important and, at the same time, refreshing aspects of the study: the great variety in the views and approaches of the chapters. The multimodality advertising thrives on is reflected in the structure of the book. For me, the idea is novel and well executed. It would be quite easy to lose one's grip on the essence of the topic amid so many perspectives, yet the ideatic flow of the chapters converges in many instances: studies which starts from starkly different theoretical points sometimes lead to the same conclusions.

2.2. Structure and contents

This volume comprises fifteen original chapters, collated into four well-defined sections. Although most of the chapters contain both a theoretical framework and concrete examples, the sections seem to shift gradually from the more theoretically laden articles in the first half of the volume, to the very specific examples, in the fourth and final section of what the editors call 'case studies'.

Starting off with a part dedicated to The Marketing Communication Process, this volume begins the discussion about marketing by focusing on both language and visual communication, as well as the ethics of the messages encompassed in advertisements. Within this section, the first chapter establishes some basic notions of marketing communication and the stages of this process, while the second chapter embeds the

focus of the same type of communication in cultural environments, emphasizing what is considered appropriate or inappropriate according to the intended target audience of an ad.

With these notions firm in mind, the third chapter delves into a realm characteristic for the twenty-first century, namely the online language of emojis and the power which they hold in today's advertising. On the other hand, the fourth chapter discusses the negative perpetuation of gender stereotypes communicated in commercials. Although the article references Indian realities, to my mind, much of the mechanisms described by the authors could be extrapolated to Occidental adverts, which have only recently and timidly started breaking away from preconceived gender norms in advertising

The second section shifts the attention to the customer and the important role he or she plays in the marketing game; this section is about Understanding the Customer's Behaviour and Speaking the Customer's Language. And in order to do so, this part of the volume begins with a quite well-documented neuroscientific chapter on the manner in which the brain processes the information from adverts. After this, in the sixth chapter, the next logical steps are to understand what happens if the consumer is given contradictory information using different media of communication, and to investigate the role of (foreign) language shifts in the translatability of advertising slogans, which is the focus of the seventh chapter. The last study of this section also has the consumer as the main point of interest, but this time it is a question of how customers' choices are influenced by companies whose product adverts are banned in India.

The ensuing section of the volume tries to put Words in Context with another four chapters centred around the idea of language and metaphor, as well as how these are used in order to aid an advertising campaign. The ninth chapter explores the factors which influence the translation of phrases or figures of speech present in audiovisual advertising, from one language to another. The tenth chapter approaches advertising in a humorous fashion by analysing the exaggerated but compelling discourse of a Romanian chocolate bar's commercials, while the next study sheds light on the link between how society sees an individual at a given moment and the advertisements it produces in consequence. The last article in this section investigates the success of Monster High Dolls by focusing on the recurring popular Gothic motifs which still exist in contemporary society.

And finally, the last section of this volume is made up by three distinct case studies of advertising, written by authors from three different continents. Starting from the premise that an advertising mascot needs to embody a certain set of positive attributes, the authors of the thirteenth article discuss the implications of popular cartoons and spokes-persons in the marketing of Taiwanese convenience stores.

With a shift from Asia to Africa comes also a shift in topic, as the author of the fourteenth chapter deals with the advertising discourse of churches in Nigeria. The local process of marketing Christianity, the author contends, relies on both religious symbols or metaphors, as well as on non-Christian imagery, which is deeply rooted in the Nigerian socio-political and cultural environment.

The fifth and final chapter of the present volume may have Turkish authors, but it seems to express a more universal and contemporary tendency than other chapters. This work deals with the concept of 'lifestyle advertising', which is gaining ground rapidly through applications such as Pinterest, and which describes an idealized online image of almost all aspects of life. In this sense, I find it a perfect conclusion to the book, since it reminds the reader one final time that advertising is a global phenomenon which has taken over most social and mass media.

In the end, if one were to state a single universal and unifying conclusion which needs to be drawn from such a variety of perspectives, that would probably be that advertising, branding, marketing and all the

strategies which have the goal of persuading someone to ‘purchase’ an item or an idea rely on a complex interconnection of language and image and are propagated or aided by the digital advantages of the age we are currently living in.

3. Relevance of the Volume

This may not seem an entirely novel conclusion to a volume in the field of advertising, but *The Role of Language and Symbols in Promotional Strategies and Marketing Schemes* brings something truly unique to the discussion of advertising. In a world ruled by the global and the local, but permanently united through the great thread of the digital world, this volume features a variety of researchers from different corners of the world, adding to this field of interest their own pertinent and poignant studies based on personal research and experience.

Although perhaps disconcerting at first glance, the wide thematic range of the volume is, to my mind, one of its greatest strengths. The interdisciplinary approach is indispensable in this particular field of research, and the more perspectives present within the discussion, the richer the implications for the topic at hand. The key is to have the perspectives complement each other, which is something I believe this book has fully achieved. With chapters that echo and build on one another, *The Role of Language and Symbols in Promotional Strategies and Marketing Schemes* is a genuinely important contribution in the area of modern-day marketing and advertising.

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