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Social representations of family in Romanian advertising

Summary

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Annex I. Charts and tables resulting from the quantitative analysis

Keywords: social representations, family, advertising, gender roles, commercials analysis

This paper is based on a constructivist approach to family study, which is avoiding the trap of a simplistic determinism, of a cause-effect type. Instead of a direct study of the social group, the thesis presents an analytic-descriptive approach of an important and omnipresent product, advertising. Advertising is a speech that simplifies the reality to very stable and hardly contestable considered facts. It often works with representations of stereotypes, capturing in a very condensed manner what it thinks is essential about the characters it presents.

The main objective of the thesis is to determine all the traditional elements, but also the modern and postmodern elements that define the representation of family in Romanian advertising. From this very reason are resulting a few more particular objectives: determining different distribution patterns of tasks between genders in Romanian advertising, determining different marital sexuality patterns and extramarital temptations in Romanian advertising, determining different love patterns in Romanian advertising, determining the representation of the third age person's role in the family, in Romanian advertising, the description of using the word "family" in Romanian advertising slogans, the description of certain advertising representations that provide family care models.

The first hypothesis of the study, the one that involves most of the data, is that *Romanian advertising is dominated by traditional representations of gender roles in the family* (H1). From this assumption derive other working hypotheses, which will be tested in the paper.

Secondary, there are other testable hypotheses on the commercials sample, which refer to sexuality, love, growth and education, old age and new family models:

H2: *sexuality presented in advertising is transient, with no obligations and a weak connection with love and stable relationships, or married couples.*

H2.1: *adultery is treated with humor and represented as acceptable.*

H3: *of all the three love patterns (companion, romantic, passionate), the romantic one is the most frequently represented*

H4: *in Romanian advertising there is a model of balanced growth of children, focusing on healthy physical development*

H5: *senior members of the family are represented as physically frail and isolated*

H6: *in Romanian advertising there are no detectable representations of any new family models specific to postmodernism (homosexual family, mono-parental family, the coexistence model)*

Chapter 1. Representations – a fundamental concept in Social and Human Sciences

The first chapter of the thesis aims to bring into focus a theory that can provide a conceptual framework for further research. It's about *social representations theory*, meant to unify several approaches and concepts with similar orientation in social psychology. Synthesized for the first time by Serge Moscovici in the '60s, the theory now has a somewhat limited distribution area. The chapter describes the starting point of the theory, and identifies it in an article written by Emile Durkheim, in the late 19th century, after which it brings together multiple features of the concept of social representation, in order to formulate a definition. Also, the role of representations in communication processes is described, as well as the detailed processes involved to establish it (anchoring and objectification).

Later, based on a scientific debate between Jost and Elejabarrieta, the way that representations influence the dissemination of scientific knowledge is described, because of their strength to create concrete images for abstract theories.

The social representations theory is very popular in French and Latin areas, but its success is limited in the Anglo Saxon areas. Countries like Germany, England and USA have relatively few texts on the subject, or in vast sociology encyclopedias.¹ In this cultural area, social representations are seriously lacking. It is applicable for Borgotta and Montgomery's Encyclopedia (2000, 2nd edition), an impressive work of 3,500 pages, as well as for Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology by Johnson (2000/2007 translated into Romanian, although the latest has a short description of the *collective representation* term, where Durkheim is quoted as the only source, with his text from 1898).

¹ Although it is seen as a concept related to social psychology, there is sometimes the idea that social representations are much more related to sociological social psychology than psychological social psychology.

This lack of interest towards social representations theory in some contexts can be explained through the fact that many authors could have blamed the redundancy of the concept. The acceptance of representation as a term is apparently difficult to explain from a conceptual point of view. There can even appear overlaps of meaning with other established concepts of sociology and social psychology, such as: attitudes and opinions, ideology, stereotypes, value systems or cultural systems. Even *framing* theory, established by Goffman, has common points with what *social representations* means, because it shows that we understand the world through thinking schemes “taken for granted”, of some pre-existing patterns. The function to adjust and understand the reality is, as well, claimed by the social representations theory. The paper clarifies the conceptual distinctions towards ontological realism, stereotypes, ideologies, opinions and attitudes, value systems and cultural systems, terms which somewhat resemble representations.

For some representations there is an observable object, the basis, so there is an objective reference. Single-parent families, disabled, or a public person are objective realities that give credit for representations. These representations are not less real (although they are much difficult to be measured) than the condition object and they deserve to be studied separately.

The representation of an object tells us what are the meanings of the topic for the target, how the idea of that object is built, which are the normative pressures that such representation imposes to the objective reality etc. Therefore, for these examples is likely to have to deal with two different types of reality, the objective and the representation.

The end of the first chapter explains, in terms of structuralists like Abric or Flament, how the reality of representation is both stable and about to change. Apparently paradoxical, although the representation has a normative character and an ordering of reality one, having a fixed form, it is simultaneously a structure that is constantly integrating new elements. To explain the phenomena, structuralists have proposed a separation of the representation in the central core and the peripheral system.

Chapter 2. Beliefs and social representations of family

Chapter II is the widest chapter of the thesis, introducing the approached social representation object: the family. The family is a social unit that can take multiple forms. The chapter starts from the major theoretical subjects regarding the family study, focusing on the definition and synthesis of the family features. Beyond these matters, related to a tangible reality of the family environment, the most important subject for the thesis is to study the various representations of the family. Therefore, this chapter is not only concentrated on how the family is, but on how the family is perceived and what are the unwritten rules that create certain roles and status expectations, at its level. We synthesize three possible major representational models: the traditional, modern and postmodern family. The distinction between these three is not always consistent because of the different contexts in which the terms were used over the years. Which for some authors is a traditional family, for others, writing in a different period of time is a modern family. To unify those different points of view in a coherent classification, the thesis took the freedom to flex some previous conceptual separation. Therefore, many times during this paper, the traditional family will refer to much more than the agrarian, autarkic family model, extending the idea of traditionalism towards a conservative value (clearly separated gender roles, a strict education for children offered by the family, extended family structures and multiple intergenerational exchanges, reference to religious rules, etc.). According to the classification I mentioned earlier, the modern family is seen as one that is taking steps towards egalitarianism², balanced education, growing role of exogenous factors in education, nuclear family, family as a refuge of comfort and space, etc. At the same time, the postmodern family is the least subjected to the rules, with new family forms, independence, individualism and total freedom. The extensive subchapters of the thesis are dealing with the characteristics of the new family forms, specific to postmodernism: homosexual family, single-parent family, coexistence and other forms such as "voluntary kin".

Setting the benchmarks for the three models of representation is important for the rest of the chapter, because each variable is differently seen, according to these patterns. There are different representations of love and sexuality, the criteria and procedures for coupling, as well as the inter-generational exchange. The most developed chapter in this section is related to a matter of great interest for many researchers around the world: gender inequality, the

² For many American authors, the modern family is specific in the 50s, still dominated by the idea of segregation between male and female roles

distribution of domestic tasks and gender socialization, the given education according to standard representational references for male and female models.

Chapter 3. Elements of the family space represented in advertising

Once the characteristics of the families are reviewed, the thesis aims to identify previous studies which examine the problem of these representations in advertising. In the 3rd chapter, Romanian and international studies are grouped into subchapters dealing with gender representation, representation for the elderly, children and education representation. It also discusses about family issues neglected by analytical studies on advertising: new family forms, love and sexuality. Because of its commercial and persuasive role, advertising is an idealized type of mass-media, which tells us stories that we want to see, stories that we'd like to believe about society and the individual, not necessarily real. For this very reason, advertising is extremely relevant for studying social representations. Very often, the story that we see in a commercial strengthens the collective's memory better than the product it proposes to sell. We recognize and enjoy the dream vocabulary which commercials use, we become involved in the fiction they create, but we know entirely that those goods will never fulfill the promised fiction (Winship, *cited* Currie, 1997: 458). Here we talk about the fact that advertising is creating an unreal, charming world, but about which we know that is distorted, rather making a reference to imaginary psychosocial relationships. Going beyond the skepticism that Winship talks about, apparently advertising operates quite effective with powerful social reasons which it operates.

Previous studies regarding the analysis of family portrait are especially concentrated on gender roles. In the thesis, results of different studies from various cultures are mentioned: Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, USA, Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, Portugal and Spain. Unfortunately, the Romanian studies don't show too many concrete empirical data. From this point of view, the thesis appears as a necessary supplement of this scientific scenery.

Chapter 4. Metodology

The fourth chapter presents the detailed analytical methodology used in the sociological study, explaining the qualitative and quantitative variables. The sampling procedure for a quantitative analysis involved a double randomly selection: to watch everyday

television programs, considering the broadcasting time.³ There have been 3080 evaluated commercials in two weeks, in order to check a particular set of variables, partially adapted after other international studies.

The variables and indicators used for the quantitative analysis of commercials are the result of consulting other similar international studies (Wiles et al, 1995, Wee et al, 1995, Uray and Burnaz, 2003), of which categories were adapted, and other new ones were added. The category system is imperfect. It can't always cover all the possible situations related to the studied variable.

35 evaluators with average experience - final year students in Communication and Public Relations - were selected to participate in the analysis of the commercials sample. In the same time, a review of all the networks - from the main cable operators (RDS and UPC) in the basic grid, was conducted, from which the networks that do not broadcast advertising, were removed (TV 1000, HBO, Cinemax, etc.). For each evaluator, a television station from the ones on the list was chosen by lot, and a time range of one hour a day (between 8:00 – 24:00), for two weeks, in the summer of 2010. Therefore, we can talk about a double-random sampling method, with a minimum target. The total number of analyzed broadcasts is 3080. The sample is representative for the advertising in Romania, during the study. As a limit for this selection method we have to mention the fact that many of the commercials from the sample are less or not at all relevant for family representations, a problem which we could have fixed through a directed sampling.

Chapter 5. The quantitative analysis

Chapter 5 represents the results of the quantitative analysis from the commercials sample. Regarding the association of gender with particular categories of products, the categories with the biggest imbalances in men's directions, are:

- Cars and car accessories (ratio 23/1)
- Alcoholic drinks (ratio above 4/1)
- Phones (ratio 2.5 / 1)
- Non-alcoholic drinks (ratio over 2/1)
- Banking and insurance products (ratio 1.67 / 1)

³ The TV programs were monitored by 30 observers, Communication and PR students, at FSPAC, UBB

If the first two categories there are no big surprises; they indicate a distribution according to the traditional role of men. For the following categories: "phones" and "non-alcoholic drinks", there is no obvious explanation for the results. At the same time, the ratio of 1, 67 / 1 seen in the "banking and insurance products", is under the values which we have normally been expecting from a traditional representation. The ratio is lower than the one obtained in USA, in a study by Wiles et al (1997), 2/1 and, according to the same study, is lower than the one obtained in Holland (5/1).

The categories with the largest imbalances for women are:

- Cosmetics (3.42 / 1)
- Cleaners and cleaning products (2.5 / 1)
- Products for children (2.35 / 1)
- Medications (1.36 / 1)

A much better indication over the type of family representation, proposed by Romanian advertising is the hypostasis study of the characters. Under this aspect, the results indicate a clear tendency towards traditional representations of gender. According to a traditional model, woman's role is to be a housewife, taking care of the children. Women are 10 times more likely to be presented as householders. 9, 96% of the feminine characters are taking part of this category, than 1, 01% of the masculine characters. The woman character is more often presented as a parent: 16, 6% of the feminine characters are in this situation, rather than 7, 26% of the masculine characters – a ratio of over 2 to 1. At the same time, women characters are approximately 2 times more often presented as an object of sexual attraction and passion, and almost 3 times more often than men characters, as well. This last aspect contradicts the traditional model, in which the woman character has a limited role in the public space.

Men's characters dominate in other situations that, as well, define a traditional model. 12, 19% of men characters are pictured as workers, while just 4, 52% of women characters are presented in similar situations, almost 3 times rarely.

The hypothesis of men with a lot of social contacts, from the woman caught in household duties is not totally confirmed, if we take a look over their relationships with other people. Women characters are more frequently surprised in familiar relationships than men

characters – who follow the path of social relationships. There still is an interesting ratio between the number of men characters represented in business relationships (9, 51%) compared to the number of women characters in this situation (5, 07%). Women characters are sensibly more often presented without any other relationships other than the ones in the family (a ratio of 2, 45% to 1 – men’s characters). Therefore, the results sustain the fact that the commercials use more of the traditional model. Women characters are represented as withdrawn, while men characters are often seen in the presence of social groups. A χ^2 value of 145, $p < 0.001$, the difference between theoretical and observed distribution is not very large but is significant. 17, 66% of the main masculine characters appear as single, compared to 37, 03% of the main feminine characters. A Kendall correlation index with a value of -0.170, $p < 0.001$ once again supports the hypothesis that men tend to be represented in larger groups. However, the index is relatively low, which shows a relatively weak correlation. Beyond the distribution of gender roles, to which we’ll offer an important analysis in the thesis, there are other family aspects to be checked, for example love representation: Love representation types were initially classified by many authors (Rughiniş, 2002; Iluţ, 2005; Salanki, 2005). Consulting them, there were synthesized the following three representations, which would have been investigated in the selected commercial sample.

- *The classic-traditional representation*, also named “appeased, companion, or quasi-platonic love”. This representation can be recognized from the man-woman relationship which suggests a partnership, but without physical contacts, or any other gestures perceived as passionate.
- *The modern-romantic representation*, usually idealized by the mass-media, is the ideal love, in which the faith plays an important role. It claims a unique couple, seen as the encounter of two soul mates.
- *The postmodern-passionate representation*, idealized through its individualism. The partners are searching for love, getting involved in any relationship that seems to contribute to their personal development. Unlike the previous representation, this one doesn’t see the couple as a condition, but the individual needs. Also, sexuality is clearly separated from the idea of love, the two not necessarily being conditioned.

Romanian advertising often presents the idea of love but according to the evaluation of operators, its representation is different from case to case. Passionate love is rarely seen in Romanian advertising (11, 68% of the cases), while traditional (companion) and modern-romantic models are balanced in the sample. Until something else proven, from the

advertising's perspective of idealizing our lifestyles, we can expect romantic model to be the dominant one. By definition, this is an idealized model which presents relationships as unique and profound. Still, an important role is given by the traditional representation of a companion relationship.

Another reviewed segment it centers the elderly. According to a classification proposed by Williams et al (2010), the elders tend to fit in a "vulnerable" category. In terms of loneliness, the numbers show that in 10% of the cases the elders are represented as lonely. Their companionship is represented by their family members and friends. In 55% of the cases, their relationships with other people is considered "social/of friendship".

Table 5.7 The elder in relationship with other people

Tips of relationship	Percentage
Family	28,3
Social/of friendship	55,0
Business	10,0
Other	3,3
None	3,3
Total	100,0

More than that, the friend stance is one of the most common in the sample (20% of the cases), more frequent than the one presented by householders (18, 3%) and almost equal with the one represented by grandparents (21, 7%). Isolation is seen as a permanent element of the later life, considering that the script does not always present the characters at home. 26, 7% of the commercials show the elders at home, while 33 % of the cases they are presented outside, or in a store, and other 28, 3% in other locations. Moreover, there is no significant correlation between the main character's age and the number of characters presented in the commercial, so the hypothesis saying that as elderly the characters are, as much they are isolated, is denied. According to the same statement offered by Williams et al (2010), the elders from the

commercials sample can be partially integrated in a “mentors” category. 50% of them are presented as giving an advice, while 15% are those who receive one.

Unfortunately, a more elaborate quantitative analysis of the commercials in which the elders appear is not possible under a set of data that is so limited. For a more valid analysis, it would be recommended a separate study which would analyze the commercials for a longer period of time, creating an exact sample, concentrating exclusively on the representations of elders.

Chapter 6. Qualitative analysis

Chapter 6 is focused on the relevant commercials from the sample, trying to organize them, to find new representation categories and to detail those representations that weren't clarified enough in the quantitative analysis. Also, a distinctive subchapter is referring to overusing the “family” term in advertising slogan, a powerful clue that suggests the lack of creativity in Romanian advertising, as well as the usage of emotional blackmail. The qualitative analysis shows that traditional models, although dominant, coexist with modern and postmodern models.

Models of family care are detected. Although the elders are usually more affected by health problems, their representation appears in drug commercials (the only exception is made for specific products, such as denture adhesive or the ointment for rheumatism). Based on the selected sample, but also investigating outside of it, there were no representations for intergenerational exchange in case of illness. Therefore, the cases in which a senior is cared for by his children are neglected. The drug commercials remain a specific problem of the nuclear family, with young children. This may be explained by the fact that elders are much more difficult to be treated without the intervention of a doctor, therefore, they are not a good target for OTC drugs. The representation of woman in drug commercials is stereotyped. The mother always has exclusive ways to protect and cure the family from different diseases. It is very hard to find representations of man that would show protection from this point of view.

Caring models for children's growth show equal involvement from man and woman. It appears the model of active child, involved in all sort of games played outside, but who needs protection from his mother. She is the one who's always taking care of his physical development. The advice between mothers is very common in this sort of commercials.

Some examples from the commercials sample that fit the different types of representations of elders are provided, according to Williams et al (2010).

Conclusions

The main hypothesis, H1, which requires a traditional distribution of gender roles, is confirmed, with minor reservations. The most obvious clues we have to sustain and confirm the hypothesis are: (1) the representations of the family members are significantly different, the woman character being overrepresented by the housewife role, (2) the data show that the mother is seen together with her children, having a much more participative role in their development than their father, (3) gender stereotypes are clearly represented in cooking and cleaning activities, being statistically proven, (4) there is another stereotype of men driving cars. There are other results of other hypothesis confirming the traditional representation of genders, but the correlations are much smaller: there are significant differences between the products for women, other than the ones for men, but not representative enough for any possible conservative roles. Men characters are usually presented outside the household, but the difference between them and women characters are not noticeable. The man character appears more often in social groups, social relationships and friendship, but, as well, not very different from a woman character. On the other hand, we can never determine precisely what member of the family is an employee. Against the traditional model there is one significant result that also disproves the hypothesis, the one that represents the woman character in different situations where she can offer advices. However, men characters appear more often as experts.

Therefore, as a first conclusion, Romanian advertising is using a traditional representation of gender roles in the family. It is remarkable that this representation is not entirely indebted to local advertising, a significant part of the sample being made after international commercials. The statistical tests revealed no significant difference between gender roles offered by local and international commercials, revealing the fact that the traditional model may be also encountered in other societies of Western civilization.

Apparently the hypothesis that challenges the Romanian advertising to reveal the sexuality model is confirmed. This model is individualistic, transient and outside the couple (H2). However, because of the limited data, this chapter cannot establish a conclusion regarding the dominant model. The qualitative model reveals a very common sexuality model outside the couple, of one night standing (7 Days, Bergenbier, etc.), but this model is far away from being the only one. Therefore, the results for H2 are insufficiently conclusive. The

secondary hypothesis referring to the representation of adultery in a humorous way, as an accepted act, is confirmed. There is no commercial from the sample (but also outside the sample) representing adultery in some other way.

If we talk about the predominance of a romantic love model (H3), the results refute this hypothesis. The romantic love model is less presented in the sample than the companion love model. This establishment reinforces, once again, the general idea of a constant traditional representation of human relationships, complementing the modern representation. The qualitative analysis reveals that the romantic love model is reserved for young couples, while stable families don't show this kind of sentimental relationship between partners.

Regarding the type of education that parents offer to their children, the representations from the sample show a distant approach from the traditional model of the obedient child. Therefore, by these representations, taking care of the children means a healthy development, protection and control over the food they eat. The mothers prove to be powerful protectors, being the first parent to choose the way she wants to raise her child. This model leads to the concern of creative learning, by playing. H4 is confirmed.

The subsample of another category, the elders, is quite smaller. Therefore, the quantitative results are less relevant in this chapter. The clues we gathered from the statistical analysis, doubled by the establishment of certain representation categories in the qualitative analysis, prove us that the representations of the isolated and fragile elder is not a rule. This model is sometimes taunted, the representations from the sample showing more of the mentor, healthy or active elder, than the lonely and sick elder. Also, the data show us that this category is not deprived of family or friends. Therefore, the 5th hypothesis is ruled out. Intergenerational exchanges are not very frequent, and the grandparent's role in grandchild's life is not very significant. Extended family models that live under the same roof are isolated. This area of study deserves to be extra investigated, but there is the possibility that the elders represented in Romanian advertising are going to be completely separated from a traditional representation.

Finally, the attempt to identify new family models, specific to postmodernism (or post-structuralism), such as single parents, cohabitation, the homosexual family or the family voluntary kin, didn't show any results. First of all, single parent families are very hard to identify in advertising. Although the family representation is sometimes dominated by the mother, who appears with her child, the absence of the father is only temporary. In the absence of additional evidence offered by the ad text, this is an investigation that does not lead to any conclusion. Cohabitation models outside marriage are very hard to identify. The

voluntary kin and the homosexual family are easy to recognize, but they are completely missing from the social representation proposed by Romanian advertising, therefore, the 6th hypothesis is confirmed. Overall, Romanian advertising presents a model inspired by the traditional family, but it has important elements of modern representation. The elements that belong to postmodern family representation are more likely to be neglected.

Once the responses clarified the assumptions initially established, it remains to add that the research has revealed a side issue of family presence in advertising. It's about using the leitmotiv of the word "family" in the ad text, with focus on slogans. The analysis have shown that the number of commercials using the word, sometimes inappropriate, is very big. At some point, the thesis presented the "emotional blackmail" technique, characterized by phrases like: "your family", "what is best for your family", designed to produce an irrational reaction to the customer, leading him into buying the products.

Beyond the undertaken limits in the full text of this thesis, the paper might seem to have followed a feminist approach. Indeed, the way the question was put has much in common with feminist approaches. However, throughout the paper, we tried to avoid falling into a trap of militant feminism. Along the way, we supported any statements based on statistical data, or qualitative and objective analysis. We especially did not neglect the indicators that contradicted the presence of sexist elements, in gender role distribution. Although the conclusions sustain a representation of roles in disadvantage for women characters, it is specified that this unbalance is not represented under any circumstances. Furthermore, a militant feminist approach would speculate over the abnormality of any representations that have as a center the segregation of gender roles in the family, but this paper isn't judging if these representations are acceptable or not, and does not criticize the traditional model. Overall, this is an analytical-descriptive study, with a powerful orientation towards the qualitative approach and symbolic interaction, which aims to understand the social representation of a major concept.

The representations described in the thesis give an idea of how Romanian society is thinking, feeling and believing about the meaning of family.

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