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Patriotism in Romanian Advertising – A Means to Recover National Identity

Abstract

The way advertising campaigns develop patriotic feelings has become an interesting issue in Romania since 2010. In brief, the topic is connected to concepts such as national identity, responsibility, tradition, and national spirit. This study analyzes the way advertising messages express patriotism to encourage consumers to accept their own identity. Specifically, research reveals the way campaigns successfully appeal to consumers by using a local rather than global strategy. This market dynamic is investigated through a comparison between advertisements and the industry view on national consumer attachment; the former has become very different from the recent past, when public displays of patriotism were either denied or hardly expressed. The following paper aims to present patriotism in the context of advertising from two perspectives: interviews with professionals working in the Romanian advertising industry, and investigating the message of patriotic ads. The study concludes with the main features of a so-called “patriotic” advertisement: such ads are designed to revitalise and appreciate national conscience, local values, and belonging to a cultural space in the context of globalized communication.

Keywords: advertising; patriotism; consumer insight; brand reputation.

1. Introduction

Creatively, patriotism is a strategy to (re)construct brand reputation in order to achieve retention in the minds of consumers. Therefore, defending brand reputation involves managing its qualities and capital, which rely on authenticity, credibility, and reliability. In the following paragraphs, we will explain the increase of patriotic ads during the past two years by gauging advertisers’ opinion of the economic crisis and the war between globalization and localization.

In the context of advertising, patriotism is strongly associated with national identity, consumer ethnocentrism, a decrease in consuming global products, and the empowerment of local brands.

To start this research, we must first understand the relationship between patriotism and globalization, as well as distinguish nation – from national brands. Therefore, we will now review the most adequate elements of patriotic feeling from the point of view of “consumer ethnocentrism.” Our findings are based on content analysis, which reveals aspects of patriotic ads expressed by target audience, positioning, brand reputation, as well as visual and verbal com-
munication levels. To this we add the perspective of advertising professionals on encouraging domestic-brand loyalty. Equally important, it enables us to compare research findings.

2. Framing patriotism

At first glance, patriotism is directly connected to people’s attachment to their countries of origin. In brief, patriotism consists of emotions and positive feelings towards one’s country of origin that determine loyalty and sacrifice. Throughout history, this sentiment turned into national pride, fight for political autonomy, and even religious independence. Adorno and others identified healthy patriotism, similar to loving one’s country, and ethnocentric patriotism, “blind attachment to certain national cultural values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing group ways, and rejection of other nations as out groups” (Adorno et al., 1950, p.107). More recently, researchers such as Schatz et al. (1999) and Staub (1997) differentiated between blind- and conservative patriotism, characterizing the first as a deep attachment to one’s nation and the second as critical loyalty and positive change.

The levels of patriotism asserted by Stearns, Borna & Oakenfull (2003) also deserve mention. These researchers identified three levels of patriotism based on country- or nation-directed emotions. The first level is extreme patriotism, which implies superiority toward other countries. This type can easily be recognized throughout history in Nazi ideology, Colonialism, even Communism. The next level is moderate, “characterized by a concern and willingness to act on one country’s behalf, but only in situations where the citizen believes the country is acting within the limits of morality” (Stearns et al. 2003, p.512). In this case, citizens are aware of belonging to a culture and geographic space and agree to the way their country behaves from a moral standpoint. Many nations adopted this type of patriotism, especially in relation to developing their economy or image in the global world. For instance, Asian culture is highly specific, and advertising strategies emphasize respecting local consumer insight. Consequently, McDonald’s introduced the McRice, served between two fried rice patties, which is very popular in Singapore. The brand decided to create a new product because consumers are loyal to local cuisine and will not alter their customs. Similarly, the chain has recently introduced non-fried foods in China, based on food research of the geographic area.

The last level is based on a universalist philosophy that consists in denying the existence of any country in itself or of belonging to a specific nation. However, Nathanson (1993) argues people may still be emotionally connected to their countries because they cannot forget the place they were born and spent their childhoods. Regardless of current residence or citizenship, it is the first emotional ties with the birthplace that define people’s memories, religious behaviour, and consumer attitudes. This description of patriotism applies to global market principles, and, implicitly, to the globalization era.

Post-communist Eastern-European countries experienced all these levels of patriotism. In Romania, extreme patriotism started before the 1989 Revolution, but maintained its grasp for a few more years. Afterwards, the nation tried to forget its past and, as soon as it entered the EU, strove for universalist perceptions. This paper does not exclusively embrace one of the directions mentioned above, because it outlines an increased adherence to tradition, cultural issues, present and past ideological beliefs, popular culture, sense of humour, and everything that makes consumers feel unique. Rothi’s argument (2005) partially supports the way national identity includes traditional-cultural content; however, the importance of this issue varies
according to context. We strongly support Rothi with regards to advertising communication, because its visual representations can be very convincing. Therefore, a range of aspects indicates patriotic attitudes, the individual’s interaction with the community, and, consequently, positive or critical views on society.

Researchers such as Kosterman, Rick and Seymour (1989), Druckman (1994), or Smith (1998) expanded the topic with the related concepts of nationalism, internationalism, and consumer ethnocentrism. The relationship between patriotism and nationalism is not as important for today’s consumers, because they live in a global world and seem to lose the sense of belongingness to a specific culture and geographic area. In our opinion, the meaning of patriotism has shifted from historic to economic. According to Doob (1964), patriotism is the conscious conviction that belongingness to a group depends on maintaining its culture. Over the years, this feeling was perceived subjectively and associated with heroism, even sacrifice, for an ideal. For example, Rousseau defined patriotism as “the fine and lively feeling which gives the force of self-love all the beauty of virtue, and lends it an energy which, without disfiguring it, makes it the most heroic of all passions” (1946, p. 246). Compared to patriots, who are generally moderate, nationalists tend to be extremist.

The current globalization era greatly influences patriotism due to the latter’s relationship to consumer ethnocentrism. Due to free migration and the need to adapt to new demands, consumers lose or intentionally reject their sense of patriotism. In addition, even consumers who live in specific areas of the world (that may or may not be their countries of origin) are exposed to products who cross any borders. Creative marketing strategies generally do not differentiate consumers according to local insights, and standardized campaigns run all over the world. During the economic crisis, many countries tried to balance moderate and universalist patriotism. This is highly visible in advertising and consumption, given the relationship between global and local brands. In promoting domestic brands already adapted to the markets, patriotism found a way to survive. Encouraging local production responded to global standardization, connecting patriotism and local advertising; in turn, the industry focused on conveying the brand message in a specific manner, sometimes even available to external brands that aimed to be more accepted and internalized by local buyers.

Research also addressed the relationship between brands, products, consumers, and the market from diverse viewpoints, including patriotism. For instance, Shimp and Sharma (1987) revealed a strong positive correlation between patriotism, politico-economic conservatism, dogmatism, and consumer ethnocentrism. Recently, Lwin, Stanaland and Williams (2010) stated the importance of two consumer characteristics with relation to foreign products, brand–ethnocentrism and country-specificity. Their theory explicitly discusses why consumers are very selective when buying external brands over domestic and why they are influenced by the origin of some products. According to Lwin et al., ethnocentrism “refers to consumer beliefs regarding the morality of buying foreign-made goods with the general belief that doing so is unpatriotic and harmful to the domestic economy” (2010, p.249). Therefore, the concept relates to specific feelings such as responsibility, patriotism, conservative behaviour, and rejection of new opportunities. In brief, it means people often do not buy national brands because they like or appreciate them, but because they feel it is the right decision to consume what they produce.

Consumers may also have particular reasons for denying brand credibility that may not be supported objectively but that relate to them on a personal level. Klein, Ettenso and Morris (1998) explained this phenomenon by associating products with negative connotations...
from past or present, the attitude usually being related to producers. Klein et al. defined this correlation as “the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political or economic events” (1998, p.90). In this context, brands can mirror bad experiences consumers had in different areas, making them perpetually relive such feelings. The comparison between the last two concepts expresses the influences that affect local and global brands: sometimes only global brands are rejected; other times, both categories may lose credibility. From other perspectives, country of origin may be an advantage or, on the contrary, a real burden that can destroy brand reputation. Similarly, brand rejection is seen as either a form of patriotism by supporting national economy, or is justified by brand qualities.

Further, it is important to highlight the connection between patriotism and national identity, because brands build their credibility by showcasing the local features of their market. On the one hand, patriots express deep feelings towards their countries and their beliefs are based on facts; on the other hand, having an identity implies adhering to the most relevant values that characterize a cultural and political space. What does it mean to be Romanian? Nothing except being Orthodox Christian, believing in local customs and celebrations, having a specific sense of humour, and understanding national history. This also entails sharing the Romanian lifestyle by attaining a complete view over the political, historical and economic context. Given that patriotism is a feeling, how can it be more effectively conveyed in advertising? First, this perspective entails the emotional identification of consumers with their country of origin by stating in various ways “We are Romanian;” second, it also involves developing the country’s identity. Therefore, being aware of one’s national identity means being emotionally involved in promoting its values. Advertising tries to maintain the right balance between accepting the global brand identity and encouraging local brands to properly address a rational consumer with strongly motivated choices.

Consequently, advertising always differentiates between national and global brands, and, similarly, between national and nation-brands. To avoid confusion between the former two, we adopt Dinnie’s clear-cut definition of the nation-brand as “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for its target audiences” (2008, p.15). In other words, each nation should become a brand through its tourism, economy, and local companies, because identity has become all the more desirable since globalization suffocated any kind of differentiation. This view undoubtedly explains consumer ethnocentrism and supports consumer loyalty towards national brands. In turn, these activate image values that are only regionally available (local). In brief, nation-brands help promote national brands because they rely on similar strategies and values. Delivering a message in a way that is emotionally driven by patriotism implies conceiving a list of fundamental features that define national identity. Researchers often tackled this subject by expanding its list of features from a cultural viewpoint. National identity relies on historic territory, a feeling of home, and mythical aspects for Smith (1991); in contrast, Anderson (1991) considers it an imagined community, and Tolz (1998) believes its dimensions are culture, religion, and language.

Applying this wide range of features and concepts to advertising, the current paper first focuses on the way advertisements transmit their message in a patriotic manner on both visual and verbal levels. Second, professional opinions reveal the industry’s awareness of consumer insights and local mentality. Both perspectives aim to offer a complete view of the way patriotism appears in commercials as a form of recovering and appraising local identity despite globalization. Campaigns can also appeal to the target by hybridizing their message, weaving
global and local features in response to local insights. Obviously, any patriotic reference reflects the relevance of local aspects regardless of brand origin (national or international).

3. Purpose of the paper

This paper discusses the following research questions: What does patriotism mean in advertising? What is the connection between product features and patriotism? To what extent does brand reputation support patriotic feelings? Answering the first question involves analyzing the behaviour of commercial characters and describing facts and attitudes relevant to patriots, such as buying something special, being creative, sharing joys, and being responsible. This comparison seeks to illuminate the increase in the number of patriotic ads during the past two years. We believe it is connected to the change in general advertising message to local and specific, seeking to re-develop national awareness.

In terms of the main hypothesis, these answers could provide a pattern of Romanian national identity as reflected by advertising. As for the second question, we anticipate no special connection between patriotism and product categories, but some between product features and national feeling. In the case of brand reputation, we believe commercials reveal how brands use patriotism to recover national identity. Finally, the answer to the last question involves investigating commercials from visual and verbal perspectives to amass as much information as possible about creative strategy. The point here, of course, is that all brands constantly develop a range of values and create campaigns around them. In this case, patriotism could be termed as heroism, honesty, respect, tradition, etc. In addition, our research compares advertisers’ opinions of patriotism and advertising message with regards to Romanian specificity. In brief, we based our research on the following hypotheses:

– Essential daily goods (food and drink) most effectively reflect mild consumer ethnocentrism;
– Verbal identity differentiates global and local campaigns by revealing Romanian specificity;
– National identity is mainly expressed through historical and traditional aspects;
– Brand origin, product features, and associations with important Romanian personalities (endorsers) persuasively resonate with local consumers;
– Professionals are aware of the necessity of reactivating patriotic feelings due to brand history and consumer insight.

4. Research methods and sample

Research methods investigate commercials and the opinions of advertising professionals from copywriters to strategic planners and brand managers. For advertisements, the appropriate research method is content analysis, which follows variables such as verbal elements that represent patriotic feelings, brand positioning, target, and visual elements. Quantitative results are explained qualitatively in the second stage of our research. Conversely, the most efficient way to collect the opinion of professionals on Romanian specificity in advertising
was to conduct interviews. Interview questions were aimed at discovering product categories relevant to Romanian specificity, finding proper definitions of local brands, analyzing the way local authenticity is creatively treasured in ads, and understanding why many campaigns of the past two years focus on local products. At the end of this paper we will compare the results of both methods to highlight contradictions and similarities between advertising products (TV ads) and the beliefs of their creators.

The sample for the first part of this research consists of 40 television advertisements for various product categories (Figure 1) such as chocolate (Rom), alcoholic drinks (Cava d’Oro, Bucegi, Timișoreana, Murfatlar), drugs (Catena), or baked goods (Dobrogea Flour).

Table 1. Product categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Product categories</th>
<th>Brands</th>
<th>Ads number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alcoholic drinks: beer, wine, brandy</td>
<td>Beer: Timișoreana, Servus, Bucegi, Ursus (2) Wine: Murfatlar, Zestrea Murfatlar (Murfatlar Dowry), Domeniile Șâmburești (Șâmburești Fields), Cotnari; Brandy: Zaraza, Romulus, Cava d’Oro</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Food (pâté and meat)</td>
<td>Ardealul, Banat bun (Good Banat), Pate Sibiu, Scandia (2), Matache Mâcelaru’ (Butcher Matache)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chocolate and biscuits</td>
<td>Rom (5), Eugenia (1)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dairy: yoghurt, cheese, milk</td>
<td>Napoca, Napolact, Rarâul, Milli</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cell-phone networks</td>
<td>Romtelecom, Zapp TV, Germanos</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Electronic devices</td>
<td>Altex</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Non-alcoholic drinks</td>
<td>Adria, Pepsi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pharmacies</td>
<td>Catena</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bakeries</td>
<td>Flour Dobrogea</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cosmetics</td>
<td>Gerovital</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Spices</td>
<td>Maggi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Banks</td>
<td>CEC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following criteria restricted the research sample to the ones listed:
– All videos had to be TV advertisements broadcast on the Romanian market;
– All had to promote national identity or the Romanian spirit;
– Their products had to belong to different categories;
– Brands could either be Romanian or global, but had to have local campaigns, not ones previously adapted or standardized;
– The verbal and visual identity of all ads had to be strongly connected to patriotic issues and expressed by specific landmarks.

The selection process involved highlighting the name of the country, its specificity, and purposefully analyzing campaigns that showcase “Romanianism;” advertisements were not chosen at random. Alcoholic drinks are placed first in the table above from a frequency standpoint, as their commercials provide many examples of national identity. In addition, all are
Romanian brands and some of them (e.g. wine) sell very well abroad. Chocolate and biscuits are listed next. Rom chocolate created all its campaigns with relation to Romanian heritage and traditional aspects. Food is similarly ranked because Romanians, who trust local producers, enjoy consuming fresh meat and dairy. In addition, several global brands such as Pepsi, Maggi, Zapp, and Germanos surprised us by delivering local campaigns based on patriotic feelings. We added them to the sample because our research does not solely rely on local brands, which obviously appeal to Romanian consumers to a greater extent.

Our second method was interviewing 12 Romanian advertisers about local consumer insight. All of them are involved in the industry and research consumers to take the pulse of the market. The aim of these interviews was to compare professional opinions about patriotic campaigns with the findings of ad content analysis. Interviews were analyzed qualitatively because questions were open-ended and, sometimes, respondents became deeply invested in the discussion and expanded it.

5. Findings

5.1. Commercial message

For a better organisation of the results provided by our corpus, we decided to ask several research questions and present their answers according to the purpose of this paper. Therefore, their topics focus on commercial target, main ad characters, verbal and visual issues connected to patriotic feelings, brand reputation, and views of professionals. The first items belong to content analysis while the last research question will move the discussion over to the interviews with ad professionals. All of the following findings will be discussed according to the concept of consumer ethnocentrism as defined by Shimp and Sharma: “In functional terms, consumer ethnocentrism gives the individual a sense of identity, feelings of belongingness, and, most important for our purposes, an understanding of what purchase behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable to the ingroup” (1987, p.280).

5.1.1. Who are the target and the main characters in charge of conveying the commercial message?

To answer this question, we have to investigate two aspects: first, characters’ belonging to a community according to their collective or individual presence, and, second, the fact that gender may influence consumers’ involvement in delivering patriotic messages.

The relationship between individualism and collectivism in terms of advertising target is still the subject of much research, some of which connected to the contemporary dilemma of having a global vs. a local approach. Geert Hofstede (1983) outlined a model of similarities and differences between cultures that can describe a nation. This matrix consists of several dimensions: individualism/collectivism, the nation’s gender, uncertainty avoidance, and long vs. short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). For the present paper, the most important is the first dimension, which reveals the differences between self-relying types of cultures and the other dimensions that aim at social integration. Obviously, individualism means focusing on personal cultural values leading to uniqueness, while collectivism represents harmony and socially belonging to a system. According to Hofstede, individualist cultures reject global brands more than the collectivist because consumers are
more connected to their local context. As far as we are concerned, the type of ad target should be related to the balance between the individual and the collective aspects of the Romanian market without ignoring patriotic feelings. Most ads (25 of the entire corpus) appeal to a collective target, shown by the verbal and visual messages that use plural forms of verbs and pronouns. The other 15 personalize the message because they address the consumer in a different way, by presenting them as good decision-makers or as someone living unique experiences. Returning to Hofstede’s theory, we believe that a collective approach proves the Romanian market is homogeneous and strives for consolidating the identity of its consumers.

A complete answer to the first question of content analysis implies looking into the main characters of ads, the ones that deliver the brand message, because they are relevant to consumer ethnocentrism. Shimp & Sharma (1987) argued that male, better-educated consumers with higher incomes tend to be ethnocentric, while females, the elderly and the less-educated are traditional and animated by patriotic feeling. In advertising, gender depends on product type, while age describes consumer experience. Thus, the next chart presents the research sample based on gender:

Figure 1. Target and characters.

Male characters are dominant and more credible for consumers, while women are more connected to chocolate (not exclusively), cosmetics, mobile-phones, and food. A simple glance at the previous chart shows that Shimp & Sharma’s theory does not correspond to these findings in terms of education. Most male characters are middle-aged (16 of 27) but live in the countryside. Similarly, female protagonists who tell product-related stories are young or middle-aged and, except for one character (created for Sibiu Pâté on tradition), live in cities. Therefore, we strongly believe ethnocentrism develops differently according to the historical and political backgrounds of consumers. In addition, Romanian consumers tend to be conservative irrespective of gender or age because their society is still in transition, and our research corpus did not include spots created for the younger generation.

5.1.2. What are the visual and verbal aspects that highlight patriotism in the research corpus?

Brand identity relies on analyzing visual and verbal issues that should be unique and very powerful in the minds of consumers. According to Allen and Simmons, “visual identity and verbal identity are part and parcel of brands and branding... When not controlled they can do damage, so it is better to lock them firmly into the brand management of a business” (2003, p.126). Visual identity consists of logotypes, symbols, colours, and typefaces, but may also be
connected to the context of the ad and its narrative background. The visual landscape is more expressive and richer that other indices or landmarks that are supposed to be unchangeable.

Additionally, visual identity makes people more receptive to the message than to verbal indices; it appeals to consumers’ senses and helps them identify themselves with the brand image. This time, the chart below presents general topics that arose from similar image slices belonging to the same category given their broad range of aspects.

Figure 2. Visual aspects.

Not surprisingly, historical aspects top the previous chart and seem to be just as important according to Figure 3. The number of ads is greater here because visual indices can be identified everywhere, even in rapid frames. They connect the audience to the origin of the brand and metaphorically integrate the product in another era. It is quite important that the selected brands belong to various product categories: most of them are alcoholic drinks and are connected to heroism, Romania’s Latin heritage (Rome), medieval battles against Ottomans, and communism. In the latter case, landmarks are not explicit for people who were not alive at the time, because they cannot identify the visual aspects related to them—communist factories, shops, building sites. This type of commercial targets middle-aged people who remember and tell stories or jokes about their past. In contrast, Zaraza cognac makes young people aware of their ignorance about culture and history, because the brand addresses high-level, cultivated consumers, as reflected by its slogan, “For real Romanian gentlemen.”

The rural landscape and culinary aspects are just as important as the former issue, because Romanians cook a great deal, do not enjoy ready-made food from supermarkets, and respond to many ads related to peasants or farmers. Therefore, promoting eco-food is understood differently in this small Eastern-European country. Contrary to other countries, cultivating land is unrelated to encouraging a healthy lifestyle and is just a natural means of production. Brands promoted this way belong to essential daily goods, dairy, and, again, alcoholic drinks. The same observation applies to the Carpathian Mountains: they are connected to the country’s physical landscape and borders, and displaying them is meant to make consumers feel at home. Visual aspects are sometimes so meaningful they do not require any verbal background, because simplicity always supports brand essence more effectively.

How does this kind of images help consumers express patriotic feelings? It helps them recognize the very familiar context of their lives, makes them feel part of it, and turns the difference between Romania and other countries into a real advantage. Images finally reveal the great truth: the more specific, the more efficiently they encourage patriotism. Besides, according to the CETSCALE elaborated by Shimp and Sharma, segmentation based on age, gender, and income highlights the relevance of consumer ethnocentrism from two perspectives: “rationalization-of-choice and freedom-of-choice” (Shimp and Sharma, 1987, p. 281).
Verbal landmarks keep providing arguments for ethnocentrist behaviour by means of character dialogue and commercial message. To get a synthetic view on our research output, we classified verbal issues according to their topic, as shown in Figure 4:

Figure 3. Verbal representations.

The first level includes any verbal landmarks connected to words derived from the name Romania, most of which adjectives and adverbs (“Romanian,” “in a Romanian way”), and also those related to history and brand origin. Searching for the relevant past in the selected advertisements, we reached a simple conclusion: there are three historical categories connected to patriotic feelings: the Middle Ages, Communism (“The Golden Era”), and the European phase (after Romania’s integration into the EU). For example, the ad for Cotnari (traditional Romanian wine) relies on the association with one of the most important medieval personalities of Romania (King Stephen the Great). In contrast, many others remind the target audience of communist times by telling the story of the brand’s creation and using words such as “communist,” “party,” “comrades,” or “Nicolae Ceaușescu.” Irony and humour usually appear when protagonists talk to each other in old-time slang—for instance, when referring to covert activists metaphorically through nicknames such as “blue-eyed guys.”

Toponyms describe Romanian cities connected to brand identity and outline brand names. Legends and tradition appeal to consumers by means of subjective brand perception and there isn’t always a direct connection between stories and product features. A beer ad (Ursus – “a story told by real people”) was creatively associated with the first factory of the product and the city it was built in (Cluj): “[Ursus] was born in Cluj when we were building the Arch of Triumph. It was born with the ambition to become the best Romanian beer. It dreamed to be different even if all of us had to be the same no matter what at the time.” Only one ad of the sample focuses on ethnic elements that can be easily linked to real life in Romania–gypsies. Ad characters adapt to the age of new media and recycle old computers speaking a hybridized language, a combination between Romanian and English.

Obviously, the verbal level asserts little beyond the national pride expressed in commercials for domestic brands. The goal of such campaigns was to raise consumer awareness of the country of origin regarding several brands. As a result, they would feel proud to buy them, because they make everyone genuinely Romanian. Overall, all such visual and verbal landmarks dynamically express the belongingness to a very well individualized community, by embracing their Romanian values. Advertising develops a persistent communication strategy by permanently differentiating global from local, and exclusively appealing to a specific target audience: Romanians.
5.1.3. What is the brand positioning conveyed by the selected ads?

Researchers argued over positioning since Trout and Ries (1976) argued the place in a consumer’s mind makes the brand not only stronger, but also unique. Good positioning involves several aspects in order to achieve brand retention, according to the previous authors: “In communication, as in architecture, less is more. You have to sharpen your message to get into the mind. You have to jettison the ambiguities, simplify the message, and then simplify it some more, if you want to make a long-lasting impression.” (Trout & Ries 2001, pp. 8-9).

A few years later (1996) Trout (this time with Rivkin as co-author) improved his view on the concept, with reference to “new positioning” and “repositioning,” because the human mind is limited and needs help to host new information. Later, Cowley (1996) stated the best way to map a brand is to position it in relation to the competition, which is more realistic, given that to be the first in consumers’ minds became illusory.

In a broader direction, Luc Dupont studied this problem delivering 50 ways to position a product or service. Drawing a comparison with the previous discussion, his approach focuses on print advertising, which provides rich message both through visual and verbal dimensions. Dupont’s hypothesis was formulated in the first pages of his book: “The difference is, in fact, in the personality of the consumer. We do not buy products, we buy positioning” (Dupont, 1999, p. 13). Why is it so important to discuss positioning while concentrating on patriotic behaviour in the advertisements run on the Romanian market? The answer is simple: this is the way brands develop their strategy in the long-run and may involve consumers in a specific way by influencing their minds. Therefore, we chose to apply Dupont’s perspective on our sample, because it is more generous and refers to the relationship between brand identity and consumer insight, as the next chart shows.

Figure 4. Positioning types.

No wonder product qualities top this chart in terms of appreciating local food and drink, which is otherwise quite understandable on a conservative market. Positioning based on consumers emphasizes the way they relate to the brand, what they feel about it, and how they could be emotionally appealed to. Undoubtedly, ethnocentric consumers need to trust domestic products they want to purchase rationally, and, besides, national brands should find a way to highly differentiate from global brands, irrespective of the latter’s attractiveness. Additionally, the Romanian quality of any product makes most consumers feel safe and at home.

Symbolic positioning is a matter of linking brands with legends and national symbols (the symbol of Bucegi beer is the Carpathian Sphinx) adding subjective meaning to them. As for
leader positioning, this presents local brands at the top of the market, even if, sometimes, imported products are of better quality. Gerovital cosmetics, for example, are positioned as “the most-purchased Romanian brand;” this is obviously an exaggeration, because it cannot be generalized for each product category. Consequently, Romanians need to perceive leader positioning in the context of traditional domestic products. This is another way to understand the difference between the best on global and local levels.

5.1.4. Which qualities of brand reputation do the selected ads emphasize?

Searching for an answer to this question, we should first explain the concept of brand reputation, which is strongly connected to positioning and brand image. According to van Gelder, “a brand’s reputation provides it with authenticity, credibility or reliability. A brand’s reputation consists of certain qualities that consumers ascribe to the brand” (2010, p.107). It is very important to highlight that the former features do not belong to the product, but to the brand, which is not an abstraction, as many people still believe. Considering the purpose of the current paper, this part focuses more on the idea of rediscovering national identity in the view of brand capital (i.e. strategies, reputation, history, image associations).

As for reputation qualities, van Gelder identified three types that help us analyze the core of national identity in advertising campaigns, bearing in mind consumers’ need to locally express themselves. These are contextual, intrinsic, and associative qualities of brands. The table below follows van Gelder’s directions and also includes the quantitative results of our research.

Table 2. Brand reputation qualities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Contextual-18 ads</th>
<th>Intrinsic-11 ads</th>
<th>Associative-11 ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>Pedigree brands-8 ads</td>
<td>Quality brands-8 ads</td>
<td>Endorsed brands-0 ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category specific</td>
<td>Origin brands-10 ads</td>
<td>Promise brands-3 ads</td>
<td>Personality brands-11 ads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The contextual quality lists a range of features that certify brand birthrights such as its lineage, its past or current place, and its creator or founder. Pedigree brands develop heritage around their founder, region, and connect everything to history. For instance, Ursus lager reminds consumers of its first Romanian factory in Cluj, while ads for Milli depict milk quality and the place it is produced. Origin brands are frequently associated with the region, the physical roots of the products. For example, Banat bun/Good Banat (Banat region lies in Transylvania, Western Romania) is a food brand (products are sold in cans: pâté–liver paste) that runs ads with the following body-copy: “Created by the skilful hands of a gifted man from Banat.” In this case, commercials point out loyalty towards their own country based on product appraisal. Besides, brand qualities are specifically linked to product origin, giving it authority and credibility before alternative global brands.

Quality brands do not require translation of their meaning, referring to product/service features, while promise brands focus on “the expectations that consumers are allowed to have of a brand” (van Gelder, 2010, p.117). Magi’s promise is the possibility of reliving one’s childhood anytime one eats soup or stew, as the message focuses on “the taste in your soul.” According to the previous argument, this sensitive approach should persuade consumers to
put a lot of trust in such brands because they establish a connection to their past–specifically, childhood–which, for Romanians, always has a “nostalgic taste.”

Endorsed brands do not deserve any attention in this research as no commercial of our corpus is associated with specialists or brands from other categories. In comparison, many ads feature personalities such as Romanian actors (famous comedians Daniel Buzdugan, Stela Popescu), historical characters (Cesar, Romulus, Ceausescu, Stephen the Great), singers (Paula Seling). These various personalities represent Romanian landmarks and are positively perceived, being deeply connected to the brand of our nation. Historical facts confirm brand values and the national identity of consumers in the context of globalization. All place brands very effectively in the minds of consumers, reviving the old patriotic feeling. Overall, brand reputation also emphasizes consumer ethnocentrism, giving it reasons to express the feelings of belongingness Shimp & Sharma (1987) discussed.

5.2. The industry’s opinion on Romanian specificity in commercials

The second part of our research focused on professionals who create brand images and conduct campaigns; they provided useful information during face-to-face interviews. Although interviews were semi-structured and focused on many items, several aspects stand out and deserve to be discussed. The first deals with the campaign history of Romanian brands that survived during the Communist era, while the second debates the way advertisers define local brands. We were also interested in the identity of Romanian advertising in Europe, as well as in industry opinions about patriotic campaigns created for local products and brands.

The 12 interviewees work in the biggest advertising agencies in Bucharest as Agency Directors, Account Managers, Senior Account Managers, Client-Service Account Managers, Strategic Planners, Copywriters and Creative Directors, and Integrated Communication Directors. They belong to agencies such as Leo Burnett, Graffiti BBDO, McCann Erickson, Arsenoae & Matășel, Loco Branding and Communication, Tempo Advertising, and Draft FCB Romania. Respondent names are not divulged because they are well-known in this highly dynamic industry. The most important aspect is that all respondents worked in campaigns for local brands and, therefore, attempted to make them successful.

Interviews started by clarifying the concept of “local brand” from a professional perspective, as many campaigns erroneously display global sub-brands especially created for this market as genuinely Romanian. Several responses directly addressed this difficult issue. Summed up, they conclude:

– “Local brands” were born in Romania and have a history here; they only communicate within the country’s boundaries. Old and new brands alike belong to this category; however, they usually have a Romanian name and are connected to national events. For instance, one interviewee stated premium lagers such as Timișoreana, Ursus, and Bucegi convey patriotism and a feeling of belongingness to Romanian consumers. Nevertheless, most respondents agreed local brands should not only have Romanian names, but be positioned according to authenticity and time endurance.

– Brands become “locally provided” if they are produced in a certain national space, even if they are later exported. Incidentally, most renowned brands share this characteristic, as most were originally local (such as Coca-Cola) and only later became global. Murfatlar wine and Dacia autos have already expanded beyond borders, but merely extended the market as did other local brands, without changing their roots.
The next perspective belongs to only one professional, who asserted the concept of "brand" relies on making the right connection with the target. In his opinion, a local brand is one required by Romanians’ market needs, which involves developing a communication platform according to consumer insight.

Most respondents reached a simple conclusion that helped us gather their ideas into one definition: a local brand is deeply rooted into the local context, bearing a name connected to the national language, and creating its own history according to cultural and traditional specificity. Most relevant in this discussion is the relationship between global and local aspects. They form a complicated equation that should unite producers, brands, companies, and consumers. Sometimes, consumers get confused when they purchase something produced in Romania for a global brand. Given its ingredients, they wonder, could this be a local or a global brand? Advertising professionals raised this question as well; consequently, the most effective conclusion was to distinguish between their aforementioned opinions. Regarding the connection between consumer ethnocentrism and domestic brand features, the industry develops an attachment to history and Romanian landscape to make consumers feel proud, or, at least, familiar to products. In terms of strategy, surviving old brands remind consumers of their former values, while young brands carefully build capital based on the relationship between history and contemporary landmarks.

The next level of interview questions dealt with the professional view on the identity of Romanian advertising in Europe. This research question aimed to verify to what extent national identity is confirmed on a European market. The majority of interviewees (eight) strongly believed Romanian advertising found its own place in the European industry, while three firmly rejected this idea; one opinion supports neither.

This first category of opinions reveals the relevance of getting involved in advertising competitions on European and international levels. All professionals believe Romanian advertising is a positive example in Eastern Europe, even more so since Cannes 2011, when it came to the attention of the entire world. At that time, the McCann-Erickson agency received nine trophies: Integrated Gold, Titanium, Grand Prix and Gold in „Promo & Activation,” Grand Prix and Gold in „Direct,” Silver in „Media” and two Bronze Lions in “PR.” The awarded brand was local Rom chocolate, whose strategy relies on historical heritage. With relation to that, we identified several of respondents’ keywords on Romanian advertising: “effervescent spirit,” “creativity,” “competition,” and “ambition.” Unfortunately, the core idea of the award-winning campaign focused again on communist memories; actually, these represent just a small part of Romanian identity, and one that does not exactly render patriotic feelings.

In terms of non-identity, the main argument is that Romanian advertising does not bring something unique, nor does it create personalized commercials, even if some are really good or spectacular. Some professionals observed a lack of traditional perspective in some spots and, additionally, remarked on similarities between Romanian advertising and that of other Eastern and post-communist countries.

The undecided respondent believed local advertising is still in transition, looking for its identity, which seems quite reasonable on a young democratic market. Consequently, identity in Romanian advertising can be divided between the one before Cannes 2011 and the one after Cannes, when local advertising finally emerged from anonymity.

Professionals then analyzed the focus on local products and campaigns developing national specificity from several viewpoints. Most advertisers (five) explained this creative direction by revealing Romanian values and regaining the trust in local products—in particular,
food. One respondent asserted the main audience is still connected to the past and recognizes itself in Napolact yoghurt, for instance, a brand positioned as “the taste of childhood.”

The second view of this aspect definitely supports our research, given that its main idea encourages patriotism and national pride. Furthermore, one respondent mentioned Romanians gave up the American dream, became more realistic, and rediscovered the authentic Romanian spirit after many years of communism that totally compromised the concept of nation.

Another explanation for more effectively promoting local products in Romanian advertising during the past few years lies in the economic crisis, which enables small producers to develop further. Consumers started buying from them, motivated by low prices. Initially, buyers were not aware of this selection, believing that, after the Revolution, people were very tempted by global brands that had been prohibited for such a long time. Consumers probably got over this phase and came to appreciate national food and products not only due to the global crisis, but also attracted by product qualities.

Two professionals considered this local trend is just an answer to Romania’s integration into the EU, because the identity crisis powerfully emerged on this homogeneous market. Unexpectedly, living in a globalized world encourages people to feel different; unsurprisingly, advertising encourages the return to Romanian roots.

Having analyzed this part of our research, we noticed respondents lend significance to the renewal of Romanian identity as long as advertising exposes patriotic behaviour arisen from historical and cultural values. Tradition is keyword here, and it is sometimes assumed by global brands as well due to target specificity. Additionally, creating campaigns for local producers gives advertising more freedom, as creativity is not restricted by global strategy.

6. Discussion

Comparing the results of both methods entails finding similarities and distinctions between commercial analysis and professional interviews. To begin, one respondent explained that global brands bear a sign of authenticity, borrowing the positioning of local brands. For this reason, our sample included a few commercials for global brands (Maggi, Pepsi, Milli, and Zapp). Second, historical aspects and word-families connected to the adjective “Romanian” convey patriotism. Discussing with professionals also highlighted the importance of the past in constructing brand identity, and, consequently, in developing its history throughout the years. The verbal message based on derivatives of the word “Romania” reflects the way the concept of local Romanian brands is perceived. Connecting that to the definition of local brands, one of their most important features is having a Romanian name, and, based on content analysis, highlighting their verbal Romanian roots. Very interesting in this category were the most successful and, therefore, most appealing, products, as our respondents singled out alcoholic drinks such as beer and wine. In fact, these are the most important product categories of our sample that seem to be representative for expressing patriotism in the local context.

Dominant positioning was based on product qualities and completely corresponded to the opinion of most respondents; they believe freshness and natural ingredients characterize the Romanian market, ensuring consumer loyalty. However, professionals argued that another highly effective positioning strategy is based on time and authenticity. Contextual brand reputation may also be recognized in local brands, as the majority of our respondents believe origin and heritage represent brand identity.
The main distinctions dealt with tradition and culinary aspects. Although these categories do not top respondent statistics, professionals deemed them very important, at least with regards to promoting Romanian products. Apart from this there were no significant differences between the results of our research methods. This article aims to reveal something new about the evolution of local advertising in a post-communist country, where for a long time only global brands were accepted. Furthermore, the target proves a very good segmentation on a market dominated by old and sad memories. This is a lesson of good branding that returns to the past for sensible reasons and not to reject consumer insight. In our opinion, Romanians are faced with recovering their national identity and filling in the profile of a contemporary audience.

The present research tries to reveal the past through the present in order to highlight the authenticity of local campaigns. The major contribution of this article is to investigate the context in which the strategy of approaching Romanian consumers by using patriotic landmarks was developed. Additionally, we sought to discover the main features of this patriotic feeling that are highlighted by local advertising in their respective campaigns. Definitely, this feeling has passed through prejudices and compromises, due to the communist ideology, and this explains the difficulty of trying to frame it. According to our findings, patriotism is either highly subjectively (in the case of consumers’ connection to their past and memories) or objectively described (in the case of brand association with history and heritage). We think this research raised some questions related to patriotism that could be tedious for its target, unless advertisers find new resources to highlight this feeling. Undoubtedly, many other brands could develop interesting campaigns to arouse consumer awareness on national identity, but certainly not to become a means of modern propaganda.

7. Conclusion

The high number of patriotic ads launched on the Romanian market during the past three years can be explained by Romania’s economic and social situation, as well as the necessity of rediscovering consumers’ national identity. First, the economic crisis created the proper context for national products to be branded and promoted: as competition became less active, buyers sought more affordable products. Second, global brands attempted to establish a personal relationship with consumers by localizing their campaigns and not solely relying on general messages the way they used to. Consequently, advertising developed glocalized and localized strategies to better appeal to the target audience. In fact, globalization unexpectedly produced a more accurate differentiation that led consumers to rediscover their feeling towards their country. Considering that markets became extremely fragmented due to the economic and political crisis, globalization almost completely changed its initial perspective, which relied on similar principles and general consumerism, irrespective of national profiles.

Third, advertisers focused on the local brand concept and tried to convey a homogeneous message according to it, creating a particular, yet various and dynamic profile of the Romanian consumer. Creative strategies began taking into account brand capital and its connection to patriotism, distinguishing three types of brand categories that develop national identity: old surviving brands (Napolact, Rom, Gerovital, Timișoreana, Ursus, Cotnari), new post-Revolution brands (Bergenbier, Altex, Ciuc), and global brands produced in Romania (Milli). Most of these brands tend to be traditional and conservative; consequently, communication relies on promoting a similar message: be Romanian, enjoy your country and do not underestimate
the qualities of local products. In 2011, many brands launched new campaigns before the celebration of National Day (December 1st), proving their new attachment to national pride. In fact, national advertising supports and recreates this feeling of belongingness by offering alternatives to consumers’ initial choices. Considered global consumers, Romanians are now invited to identify themselves with the most authentic and sensitive part of their lives, such as their childhoods, schools, memories, families, traditions, and entertainment. As a result, campaign strategy changed from consumers to brands, from global to local, and from a general approach to a particular.

Certainly, Romanian consumer behaviour is nowadays deeply connected to ethnocentrism, because advertising campaigns express a form of moderate patriotism that leads to loyalty towards local products. In this respect, purchases of Romanian consumers rationally balance global and local products. Both research methods confirmed brand heritage and historical events often represent patriotism and national pride. Additionally, consumers pay more attention to products as well, considering such qualities relevant to their life-standards.

Last but not least, it would be quite interesting to follow the directions in which the patriotic feeling will be developed on the very dynamic local market in the near future by extending the research sample and the number of interviewees. The recent economic context probably helped patriotism be instantly expressed, given that it was not confirmed by too many product categories in its first stage. Still, national identity is in the middle of reconfiguration and patriotic feeling could be understood in advertising in different ways.

As a last remark, this study leads to a straightforward idea: Romanian advertising makes consumers aware of their local values and encourages them to trust genuine products by promoting forgotten patriotic feelings and reactivating the national glow of pride.


Cuvinte-cheie: publicitate; patriotism; insight-ul consumatorului; reputația brandului.

References