



Advertising or not Advertising: Representations and Expressions of Advertising Digital Literacy on Social Media

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Abstract. Brands are ubiquitous for the last years, they are present in almost every space on the web and especially in social computing, social networks, and social media. Their presence is linked to different aims and accompanied by comments. Mainly, the professional point of view focuses on the idea that social media provide the possibility of a conversation based on transparency, equality, and proximity. These professional discourses stress the fact, whenever it comes to social media marketing, that these devices enable brands to speak directly with consumers and, thus, avoid communicating only with traditional advertising, or “paid media.” These transformations seek to ensure advertising to be in the most frequented and wanted media spaces. These hybridizations and all the inventiveness actors can put in the process are limited in many ways, beginning with the trust they have to ensure with their audiences which are used to media spaces as they practice them and the possible saturation of the same spaces.

We intend, with a socio-semio-communication based method rooted in the scientific frame of French information and communication sciences, to question the grand metamorphoses all brand messages are undergoing under the strain of many different rationales. On the go, years after years, metamorphoses and hybridizations coming one after another, web users are developing skills and abilities regarding advertising and market discourses on the web. They build experience in the ability to identify and appreciate brand discourses; they do differentiate discourses and show a growing ability to identify the traits of marketing and advertising discourses as such. In this respect, the advertising show and the hybridizations can both benefit or be threatened by this growing mastering.

Keywords: Brand · Advertising · Digital literacy · Social media · Consumption

1 Introduction

We intend, with a socio-semio-communication based method rooted in the scientific frame of French information and communication sciences [33, 34], to question the grand metamorphoses all brand messages are undergoing under the strain of many different rationales. On the go, years after years, metamorphoses and hybridizations coming one after another, web users are developing skills and abilities regarding advertising and

market discourses on the web. They build experience in the ability to identify and appreciate brand discourses; they do differentiate discourses and show a growing ability to identify the traits of marketing and advertising discourses as such. In this respect, the advertising show and its hybridizations can both benefit or be threatened by this growing mastering.

The analysis we intend to develop here is based on the part of French Communication Sciences contemporary approaches [34, 35] that are mainly focused on the conceptualization, description or analysis of social discourses as well as media and market discourses [13, 14, 40, 43]. These analyses embrace all discursive elements, based on an extensive definition of discourse including speech, images and all kind of media products. One of the main concern is to comprehend the circulation of all these elements between different social and media spaces. This implies a specific point of view about media, commercial, advertising and brand speeches considered as social discourses carrying out market mediation processes. In this respect, these market mediations are entirely taken as a system of signification, at the same time social and symbolic and economic [4, 6, 7, 22, 25].

Our method tends to design or craft, on a socio-semiotic base, the appropriate mix to deal with signs and meanings linked to consumption items and speeches in a specific sociological, economic, cultural and communication background; mixing microscale approaches and macro analysis. The present paper is based on researches conducted, together or in parallel, for more than ten years, with a collective will to analyze at the same time and with the same depth communication processes and products (commercials, brand movies, museums, websites, social networks, and so on), escort discourses from marketing and advertising professionals and actions of audiences. In this respect, we reach the possibility to find an analytical way to uses, representations, and users creative appropriations.

This paper will focus on brand discourses on the web especially since brands tend to reach and take advantage of all web spaces. Discourses promoting brands pervade the web whether it is in dedicated websites, paid space in web media, online presence on “forums” and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and so on. Some of them are frankly what we can call traditional advertising occurring on paid media spaces. They also mix with web media discourses in all kind of hybridizations that appeared in the last decade, due to a rising criticism against traditional advertising as too present and obviously seeking selling. The kind of communicational uncertainty linked to the Internet as a system and its blurring effect on the identification of the enunciator tends to emphasize the phenomenon. This kind of jamming should be positive for brands since it enables their display and minimize bypass, thanks to contents (texts and images) presenting cultural interest whether as entertainment or information.

This explains why contemporary marketing, advertising, and branding professionals are so willing and eager to shape brand discourses with social and/or aesthetic appearances as different as possible from regular, classic advertising.

2 Advertising, *Unadvertization*, and *Hyperadvertization*

2.1 In Search of New Brand Expressions

Since more than ten years, advertising and brand managers are trying to find new ways to advertise, that they generally name branded content *that* tries to go back to a strong distinctiveness serving a brand [13, 43]. In this respect, professionals try to build a new demarcation between a good, transparent, non-manipulative communication, not far from information and a bad, opaque and manipulative one, in other words, advertising.

This is not exactly a new turn in contemporaneous communications, especially regarding brands. Nowadays, brands managers are confronted, especially in developed countries where advertising started back in the middle of the nineteenth century as a professional activity, to a social, economic and social context we can describe as complex and unfavorable towards brands in general and advertising in particular. People tend to be increasingly suspicious and even opposed to traditional media advertising. Brands are judged in the light of their actions, how and where they produce and how they speak. More and more people state they do not like advertising; they try to avoid it and do not believe in it. It is mainly an anti-advertising feeling we can describe especially in countries like France and the USA [16, 36].

At the same time, we live in societies where advertising is ubiquitous in everyday life. We wake up with it, have breakfast, go to work, watch TV, surf the web, and so on with advertising. Thus we encounter numerous advertising messages in just a single ordinary day. This situation produces mainly a saturation of space with advertising. Every single media, or so-called media, seems literally packed with advertising.

Working inside and outside these constraints, marketing, and advertising people both in agencies, announcers and media companies, have developed a strong shared belief in the fact that traditional advertising is more and more inadequate, based on the anti-advertising actions, the saturation of space and an economic need for this sector to find growth areas. This last point is particularly crucial since advertising agencies have to face that communications providers are more and more numerous, coming from different fields like media, design or web agencies. They also enter international competition. This is why advertising people try to find the proper pace to keep leadership and work on formats that fit and pre-empt media transformations as well in TV, radio, magazines, and papers or digital media.

In this context, at least two solutions have occurred in professional uses: one is about erasing a maximum of classical advertising features, called *unadvertization* [13, 14, 39, 41]; the other one is about optimizing advertising quality and/or trying to find new media or transforming things into a media for advertising, called *hyperadvertization* [13, 14]. These names come from research results that give afterward point of view giving logic to a broad set of professional practices mainly known as branded content, product placement, sponsoring, and so on. For example, what professionals call brand conversation is currently a case of *unadvertization*?

2.2 Unadvertization: Playing with the Limits

More precisely *unadvertization* refers to communications strategies used by advertising people whenever they want to avoid traditional or regular advertising or downsize it. They mainly use three sets of ways:

- They can enter an already existing media production as in product placement in TV shows, and series, movies, games. They also sponsor broadcasted programs.
- They can imitate existing media products as we can see with consumer magazines, branded web series as Ikea *Easy to Assemble*, brand games, or imitate existing cultural products as brand movies (“*Prada presents A Therapy*, by Roman Polanski, starring Ben Kingsley and Helen Bonham Carter), books as Recipe books around *Philadelphia*, *Oreos* and so on.
- They can try to benefit from new forms of communication supposed to redistribute communication parts such as blogs, co-produced content and social media. The brand conversation takes place in this last.

2.3 Hyperadvertization: Enhancing Advertising Features

On another hand, *hyperadvertization* is the counterpart of *unadvertization* and acts as hypertrophy of advertising aspects. Nothing about trying to hide the advertising nature of the message, the main point is to maximize advertising presence either in a qualitative way, working on the message and its forms, or in a quantitative way, trying to find or create new media spaces.

In the first case, the work will put the stress on the semiotic densification of the message, mainly through work on aesthetics and creativity. New creative formats are explored as very long TV commercials, exceptional work on very expensive sheets of paper, sophisticated finish, highly studied and unexpected billboard locations.

In the second case, the work is mainly the continuous creation of new media set, trying to use still non-used spaces as street furniture, buildings, café tables, metro tickets, and credit cards. Thus, every space can become an advertising media, such as flagship stores, media, and smart cities. Streets or city areas can be transformed, for a short time, in a massive advertising display.

Advertising, *unadvertization* and *hyperadvertization* messages multiply the presence of brand messages in everyday life. One at a time, these transformations of advertising messages seem only tactical but, as a whole, they become a great strategic renewal of modes of existence for brand discourses.

3 Equality, and Proximity

3.1 Conversation

All actors on the market usually fantasize about direct access to their targets. Regarding the context of industrialization of offers and their dissemination via marketing strategies, marketing people seek to mimic proximity with their prospects and customers instead of trying to generate it. The mass consumption makes individual exchange

difficult if not impossible even if people still dream about it under new devices and names such as “one to one” marketing and, more recently, conversation.

The marketing and advertising professionals have practically jumped on the idea of conversation in order to name all kind of verbal or written exchanges that social networks and digital interactions enable. Many research or professional press papers stressed, during the 2000s, how it was necessary for brands to enter the conversation and many specialized agencies appeared.

In these cases, marketing and advertising people commonly talk about markets as conversations. This idea was first presented in 1999 in what is now widely known as the *Clue Train Manifesto*. Published on the web by four professionals, this text became a book one year later. Whenever it comes to brands and conversation, professionals regularly quote this text as the main reference and, up to a certain point, as the one that put into shape the setting of marketing conversation.

This is why it is necessary to analyze this specific piece of business literature to understand the roots of the idea of a conversation between brands and customers. It gives access to what advertising producers think and/or claim they do with digital conversation branded content. Firstly, they try to transform the mass of consumers into a collection of individuals to go towards the next step, re-gather them in a new mass, an audience they will be able to observe and qualify. The professional metadiscourses tend to present these productions as an Eldorado of brand-client relationship.

Thus, conversation appears in professional discourses as an ideal of communication. We get a glimpse of collective professional representation of conversation, reinterpreted nostalgically, related to a pre-industrial Eden of communication: the old farmers' marketplace. This pre-capitalistic conversation is depicted as real and direct far from the description linguists can give of conversation, as a “battle for dominance” [14].

Hence, the marketing conversation is a hybrid production, highly consensual and paradoxical, at the same time innate for consumers and to be learned for brands. It is based on an idea of without hierarchy. Instead of speaking of a “top-down,” vertical way, imposing the brand and its advertising messages, marketing conversations are supposed to enable brands and consumers to be equals, in a horizontal way. Thus, marketing and advertising professionals redefine the concept of conversation, without a balance of power and hierarchy, as an irenic and idealized mode of communication. In this respect, professionals give a new demarcation between a good, transparent, non-manipulative communication, not far from information, and a bad, opaque and manipulative one, in other words, traditional advertising.

The conversation was and is everywhere, in chats, digital forums, brands websites and social networks such as Twitter or Facebook. The very idea of conversation implies a dialogue, or everything next to it like co-something (co-authoring, co-participation) and appears as a proof of good professional behavior [40, 42]. These discourses on behalf of brands at the same time defend their reputation, promote their products, act as consumer service. Moreover, brands sometimes called “friend,” talk to Internet users who can happen to be consumers, willing to interact, and even to personalize their relation to consumption as explained by Baudrillard [6, 7]. They are part of a mix of complex interactions difficult to qualify since they change from one brand to another.

Whatever goodwill was at work, this marketing conversation happens to exist only metaphorically, since its typical characteristics disappear in digital conversations which

are mainly anonymous or anonymized by the alias or profile name, giving no knowledge or a low one about characteristics of the interacting persons. No real exchange is possible because a real person is interacting with an entity, representing, the brand, that is a mock individual acted by one or many community managers. Instead of spontaneity, they are working mainly with the support of legal departments, top management guidelines, the history of previous digital exchanges.

3.2 A New Paradigm?

The widespread desire among marketing and advertising professionals to have “conversations” with Internet users and consumers gives us a clue as to the metamorphosis of corporate communications. These communications are often criticized because it can serve any offers, support any cause thanks to its rhetorical power and even impose views, representations values. In this context, conversation appears to be able to exonerate marketing and corporate communications since it seems more spontaneous, horizontal and respectful, even selfless or altruistic.

This occurs in a specific context, the emergence of digital uses that emphasizes and multiplies reputation risks since consumers are more easily able to take action to denounce bad market practices or publicize their choices. In this respect, consumers feel a kind of empowerment. This is why conversion is, in a way, for marketing and advertising professionals, to resume control on the relation in the very same space where Internet users express themselves. The primary goal is to collect Internet users speeches and try to master them under the guise of symmetry rather than to endure them. Behind apparent selflessness, centered only on interaction for the sake of it, everything is recorded and “categorized. Engagement is taken into account with the numbers of “like,” “share” and “comments.” Conversation is transformed with these performance indicators.

“Like,” “share” and “comments,” emojis like a heart are so part of everyday life for Internet users that they are partly or wholly naturalized and one can forget how and why they are produced, how they rise and why. So people enter the flow of comments and shares of opinions. The overall market dimension of digital space is rarely disputed and is, most of the time, accepted as a prerequisite to being able to participate in it. As a result, the integration of market players within interactions is regular, especially when brands are sometimes initiating the conversational platforms directly in order to keep control of information and comments.

4 Trade-Offs and Balance: Protecting the Brand

4.1 Entering Publishing Space: “Native Advertising”

The presence of brands on social media is sometimes a low profile advertising insertion, melted in publishing spaces. Let us take the point on the case of “native advertising,” a digital descendant of good old “advertorial” in print media. “Native advertising” aka “sponsored content,” “proposed advertising,” “contextual advertisement” mimics digital media discourses. “Native advertising” looks like digital press

discourses, aesthetically it looks like the rest and matches, thematically, with the global editorial line. It enables brands to appear as possible topics for journalistic discourse coming together with well-orchestrated public relations. “Native advertising” provides a rather inexpensive exposure and enhances credibility since the information seems journalistic. Even if this kind of blurring is not new, it increased in the last decade. The advertising content is integrated into editorial texts. Recently, marketing and advertising professionals started to show a new concern, trying to differentiate old advertorial from “native advertising” as a more sophisticated production, hence more efficient to seduce consumers and keep their attention. The main idea is based on the fact that the context benefits to the brand since the reader is concentrated on the interest of the content more than in the questioning of the source of information.

4.2 Towards Brand Journalism? [21]

“Native advertising” requires specific writing style and abilities that combine journalistic qualities and what could be called the “sense of the brand,” that is to say a way of writing that values the brand. We can even say that nowadays this specific way of writing knows a constant demand and growing under the urge of advertising agencies and advertisers who want to find new spaces to promote brands. This new profession brings together freelance journalists and dedicated agencies. Advertising agencies for major news companies manage the system in order to increase, in all cases, their turnover. If this new market is a great source of enthusiasm for [4], it globally triggers problems for the whole inter-profession since it legitimizes journalism dedicated to brands, something in between journalism and public relations running counter to journalistic ethics. For advertising agencies, “native advertising” enables to couple the sales of traditional advertising spaces and Internet advertising spaces instead of display advertising, too obvious and less efficient. Brand managers prize and value “native advertising” as a relevant tool attract their targets. They tend to think that “native advertising” productions will retain attention and convince better because they are more credible. They are especially known because they do not suffer from ad blockers.

4.3 The Delicate Issue of Trust

Trust is the key of the success of “native advertising,” and trust is deeply linked, in order to establish and sustain it, to specific writing skills that ensure that readers will not feel these contents sponsored by brands as manipulative. This would be extremely bad for the brand and the entire media platform. For this reason, marketing and advertising professionals have set, for each kind of digital media, guidelines, and course of action in order to avoid any damaging confusion in discourses categories while maintaining the enunciative blurring. Thereby journalists are rarely authors of these contents sponsored by brands. Some semiotic distinctions are established in order to draw the line between journalistic text and “native advertising,” such as snippets, typographic effects, a slightly different color of the background or the presence of the brand logo. These elements are light enough to enable a possible mix-up at first sight but then a differentiation.

The enunciative blurring works together with the preservation of demarcation between advertisement and journalism. It is necessary to manage the significant risk of discrediting journalism and brands that try to invest it as a place. Even if advertising does need new media spaces, there is a strong precautionary principle in order to protect journalism as an economic necessity.

5 Interlacing Brand and Vernacular Discourses

5.1 Variations and Enunciative Blurring

The digital presence of brands can also be an advertising discourse intertwined with vernacular or media discourses. “#foodporn” that happened to be an international success provides a good observation point for these quite unprecedented interlacings on different platforms and social media, and, more specifically on Instagram.

The name “#foodporn” raised a surprising enthusiasm, its transgressive quality raises questions and interests audiences supports virality, encourages to look at it and share it even if the content is much more innocent than suggested by the suffix “porn.” In fact, the images show streams of dishes, with colorful, glossy and juicy, dripping plates. People intend to share staged food with anybody crossing these images. Numerous comments and escort discourses come to these posts on social media, especially from professionals working for magazines, websites, restaurants ranking platforms.

Everything is based on the fact that this digital space enables semiotic inventiveness in a determined frame. Texts and images come together, the former being informative comments of the later, that support the culinary show whether an ordinary or exceptional one. At the heart of the system is what we can all iconic excitability even if the conditions of production and the producers are very different. Ordinary people, bloggers, specialized media, burgers sellers or restaurant owners do publish images using this hashtag. These enunciators are extremely different, and the result is very heterogeneous, from ordinary or sponsored testimonials to explicitly advertising discourses and sometimes, in between, the contribution of a well-informed amateur. Devices are very different too, from smartphones to elaborated filming sets. One can also use Instagram tools to enhance the productions aesthetically.

This great diversity becomes one because they all seek “sharing” or spread. They are all willing to respect the architext of Instagram, its iconic rules and frames and its text regulations such as a short description and the blue color for the hashtags. Every Instagrammed message can be evaluated with “hearts,” and everybody can see the counting, comments and recorded. On a rhetorical point of view, this discourse is always concise and descriptive. The hashtag “#foodporn” is a metatext that adorns the message. It towers over the dishes the Internet users display as media valued culinary maker’s marks, advertised burgers and highly elaborated dishes from great restaurants. Everything is gaining a mediatic and advertising value, due to the effect of the hashtag and its power to inscribe the message in a chain. As we can see, all of this is not due to communicants working for brands, and it is not even the result of advertising strategies.

It is, in fact, the result of publicizing, a display in a digital kind of public space that goes back to the roots of advertisement.

Instagram is the main beneficiary of this phenomenon, and this brand is successful thanks to the proliferation of contents produced by others. These communication productions have an uncertain status that benefits to Instagram as a media brand always explicitly pushing for more hashtags: “If you include the right Instagram hashtags on your posts, you will likely see higher engagement than you would if you didn’t have any.”

6 Brand Contemporary Shows

6.1 The Advertising Show

As seen before, brands and their advertising messages are spectacular mediations as well as selling mediations. Through this spectacular specificity, they lavish consumers and the general public with an aesthetic pleasure that produces signification and globally impresses. At the same time, this mediation provided by brands is prone to raise the gratitude of the audience.

Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge that the spectacular nature of advertisement is neither new nor restricted to some brands. One can identify great spectacular brand shows as well for luxury brands, car brands, and even hypermarket brands or spectacular urban happenings, branded festive, sport or cultural practices. These productions, sometimes designed to enter *unadvertization* strategies usually end up being *hyperadvertization* systems. Other brands are also in small daily deliveries on social media via devices such as *Facebook* fan pages, dedicated to brands. Thus, instead of achieving some perfect *unadvertization* ideal, they create some *hyperadvertization* forms with a strong repetitive omnipresence of the brand, mainly through its totems, its name, and logo [13].

Furthermore, the advertising show is not something new, and it can be retraced through the enthusiasm for advertising posters collectors in France between 1886 and 1896 in France, as much as through the interest of major film directors. People can choose to consume advertising, and especially commercials, as a show, which is evident with *The Night of AdEaters*, first launched in France in 1981 and now available internationally and offered in adding countries every year. As Baudrillard posed it: “it (advertising) contributes nothing to production or the direct application of things, yet it plays an integral part in the system of objects, not merely because it relates to consumption but also because it becomes an object to be consumed” [6].

During the last decade, three contemporary kinds of productions can be categorized as current metamorphoses of the advertising show: branded short films, spectacular TV commercials, and daily social media advertising show.

In the first case, we can say that brand short movies belong to *unadvertization* strategies. Brands are producers of short movies, most of the time ordered from a Hollywood famous director and starring equally famous actors; they broadcast them on the Internet pretending not to seek advertising and consumption. However, advertising is soon obvious through stereotypes, intertextuality and, distortions of the narrative structure. In that respect, these short movies are most of the time genre scenes

(“car chase” for Pirelli *Mission Zero*, “psychoanalysis session for Prada *A Therapy*, “typical murder mysteries” for *Lady Dior*) and a prop seizes the forefront: a tire saves the main character, a fur coat does analyze the psychoanalyst, and a purse is at the heart of the plot. In other words, props become heroes as in regular advertising messages. Thus spectators feel the trick and can be not so happy to have been subjected to advertising without prior warning, which is not the case with spectacular TV commercials.

One main example of this last phenomenon is “L’Odyssée de Cartier,” celebrating the 165 years anniversary of the brand, internationally released on March, 4th, 2012, as commercial and broadcasted as such during prime time on major French TV channels (TF1, Canal Plus) and American Channels as well (ABC, NBC, CBS), in movie theatre and online. It was launched as a blockbuster with a press release, trailer, a world premiere in the Grand Palais in Paris and multiple steps unveiling on *vogue.fr*, TV Channels, and Cartier *Facebook* fan page. The band provided a kind of documentary movie about the making of. Online and offline general press relayed the launching explaining how amazing, out of the ordinary the movie was.

The advertising movie is presented as exceptional in all ways with a significant track record: it is supposed to be one of the most expensive commercials in the international history of advertising, with an exceptional duration (3 min and 31 s). Its director underlines the epic scale. The music was recorded in Abbey Road studio with a symphonic orchestra, and so on. The show is outside and inside this commercial. The movie itself emphasizes the luxury of the brand with a highly anesthetized making of the film, dealing with strong onirism. The semiotic densification is evident given the accumulation of cinematographic processes, shooting locations, special effects, as well as trained animals. Thanks to the gathering of all these elements in a little more than three minutes, it ends up being a precipitate of advertising show.

6.2 Daily Advertising Show Delivery via Social Networks

Big shows are essential and highly visible but small shows on day-to-day delivery too. These are new small advertising formats one can follow, once registered as a “friend” of the brand, directly on personal *Facebook* accounts.

We found that instead of a genuine exchange between brands and people, old branded blogs and dedicated conversational devices (ancestors of social media) appeared to be already entirely mastered by brands and were far from erasing advertising attributes such as logotypes, claims, signature, and visual charts. At the same time, on a semiotic point of view, brands appeared as the real auctorial authority. Visually the entire system took birth into the logotype of brands, extending its shapes and main colors (blue and white) everywhere. This was a first clue towards the idea that whenever advertising people try to erase advertising features from communications, they tend to extend the signs of the brand everywhere ending in *hyperadvertising* instead of *unadvertising*. The redefinition of conversation is the same on some of *Facebook* brand pages; it even goes beyond a wide spread of the signs of the brand and provides small brand advertising shows.

A semiotic and content analysis of some *Facebook* brand pages shows the actors (the brand and the public) are both on the same enunciation space, but they do not interact. Most of the time, brands offer while consumers are reacting more than

interacting. The brand gives the kick: a photo, a video, a motto, a test, and people react in parallel but not together without much feedback from the brand.

A specific analysis of posts on two analog *Facebook* brand pages: the American brand *M&M's* (sweets) and the French brand *Oasis* (fruit drink). *M&M's* USA brand page exists since 2008 and has more than ten millions followers currently; *Oasis* brand page is named *OasisBeFruit*, it was launched in 2009 and has been for several years the French brand page with the most significant number of followers (more than three million). They are similar in the cheerful tone they use in their TV commercials and their products or a part of them (fruit) appear as characters in their commercials.

A semio-communication analysis of the posts on the two brands *Facebook* pages shows that people mainly “like” whatever the brand has posted, they “share” it in some cases and they much more rarely “comment.” That is to say; they prefer to press a button rather than writing down something. Whenever they choose to write, it usually goes up to three/four words on average. As a matter of fact, most of the people’s reactions on these two *Facebook* pages do not appear as a dialog with the brands or even between participants and the architext of a *Facebook* page isolates the exchanges by automatically closing the direct access to their content and offering instead the number of “like,” “share” and “comment.” In a way, the architext create the contrary of conversation when it transforms everything into numbers showing plainly an audience counting system rather than a dialogical one (Fig. 1).

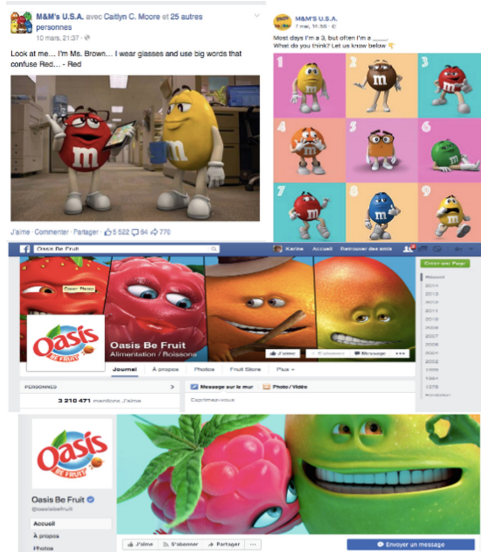


Fig. 1. M&M's and *Oasis Facebook* pages (March 2015 and May 2018.)

Thus, the only fact that so many people participate in these *Facebook* brand pages makes it essential to understand what they do, if they do not dialog as in a conversation with these brands. These brief comments look, in fact, more like answers to the brands'

various stimuli: written laugh (LMAO! Hilarious, etc.), enthusiastic appreciation as one can express during a show (“Aaawwww I love it!, “Yay,” “i like it!!so goodo-ddddddd***”), short answers inspired by these brands advertising mottos (“Go yellow,” “You go RED”), short declarations of love (“Love m&m,” “my favorite is still the one where red takes it all off I miss that commercial,” “The best ever *M&M* commercial is the one with Santa,” “the absolute best *M&M* commercial ever!!!!”).

We can conclude that people participating in *M&M*’s and *OasisBeFruit Facebook* brand pages react and behave much more like spectators, an audience watching a show rather than people in dialog. We are facing a *hyperadvertization* ‘show of brands on *Facebook* instead of an *unadvertized* conversation. *M&M*’s and *OasisBeFruit Facebook* brand pages are great *hyperadvertization* devices where we can observe a strong pervasiveness of these brand signs (names, logos, content highly linked to their TV commercials). The French brand *Oasis* does use its commercial catchword “*Oasis-BeFruit*” (in English!) as its *Facebook* brand page name.

The advertising show is so obvious that participants directly qualify the messages as advertising or marketing discourse produced by professionals: “Simultaneous faint, candle falls to the floor.... the absolute best *M&M* commercial ever!!!!.” While being *hyperadvertising*, these communications still attract many participants willing to get on a daily basis an advertising show delivered on their own *Facebook* account. We cannot know for sure that there are consumers or customers of these brands, but they consume their advertising discourses freely [15].

At the same time, participants give their evaluation of these advertising messages and show an aesthetic judgment and specific ideas about what can be considered as a good commercial depending on the brand concerned. The advertising show comes with amateur advertising reviewers who demonstrate a true advertising culture. *M&M*’s took this into account and produced both for 2018 Super bowl a commercial as usual and a Critical Review *M&M*’s Super bowl movie that plays on the confusion between commercials and short movie available on their *Facebook* page and their *YouTube* channel *mmschocolate*. *M&M*’s also started to extend the range of its shows while showcasing “Sound+Color presented by *M&M*’s” during *SXSW2018* or *South by West* festival of music, film and digital. This leads us towards brands that fully play on the advertising show as their main expression.

Some brands work on turning everything they touch into an advertising show. *Red Bull*, a brand of energy drink, produces, promotes and publicizes some extreme kind of sporting or musical shows to a young or teenage audience. On its website, the brand offers many shows focused on a continuous festive lifestyle, some risky and extreme physical activities, more often borderline than not. *Red Bull* has established a strong spectacular mediation, and the omnipresence of the advertising show is obvious.

Whatever the type or the form of the show, *Red Bull* gives an extremely aestheticized version of it. Whenever the brand produces or takes part in entertainment, it naturalizes for its young audience one single message being at the same time: “*Red Bull* gives you wings” (its advertising claim) and “*Red Bull* is the best.” This is the pretty obvious result of a semio-communication analysis of the online brand communications, especially its website. The corpus has been gathered, respecting Barthes’ approach [3], using what we call a core sampling process [15], which creates a kind of snapshot of all the messages of a brand at one point.

Regarding *Red Bull*, we chose the official French (February 2017) and American (April 2018) websites that happen to be very much alike in their structures, contents, and tone. Once on the homepage each navigation sign “giving access to different disseminated texts or, conversely, to the reproduction of external texts inside clustered sites” [34]. The global advertising universe of the brand takes shape in capillary action, revealing a huge global structure. This method enables us to reach a “saturated” corpus reached whenever any new web page does not provide anything new: “these “returns” are more and more frequent until one no longer discovers any new material: the corpus is then saturated” [3]. In fact, the sole home pages enable us to reach this stage.

The *Red Bull* corpus gathers redbull.fr and redbull.com, *Red Bull* TV and radio, redbulletin.com, et Events, Cartoons, Products and company and a second range of homepages Bike, Adventure, Motorsports, Games, Skate, Dance, eSports, Surf, Musique/Music, Snow, Weightlifting, Festival, Urban culture, Art, Dance, MC battle, etc. The *Red Bull* “world” explicitly addresses mainly male teenagers and young adults on leisure activities with a heavy concentration of risk, spectacularity, and performance. The aesthetic and spectacular mediation provided by the brand is obvious almost to the extent of concealing if one does not know it, the product (an energy soft drink can). Looking at its set of home pages, one would think that *Red Bull* is a media brand, producing both sport and culture shows and broadcasting them, since most of the space is dedicated to all kind of sports, extreme sport, music, and cultural festivals, and so on. The brand messages place is as a mentor coach, providing and explaining to its audience rituals around danger and risk linked to this time of life (teenage) in a safe exploration.

The *Red Bull* case appears to be a kind of extreme commodification of the brand itself. People tend to consume more signs of the brand than its products, even its flagship product. It appears as a show producer always feeding its advertising claim “*Red Bull* gives you wings” in its the largest extension as a global entertainment factory.

6.3 On Advertisingness and Advertising Shows

Unadvertization and *hyperadvertization* strategies enable brand discourses to metamorphose, form hybrids with other types of discourses and, at the same time, extend the scope of their actions and the limits of what can be called advertising. For most of the general population advertising already names an extensive set of messages and devices as soon as they are related to a brand. Thus, we could say that every brand message, whatever the form it takes, is, at the core, advertising since semiotic predilection shapes the discourse, but *Advertisingness* goes beyond this and names both this process and a matrix dimension.

Advertisingness is defined [12, 14, 15] as a set of rationales, all at once social and semiotic, profoundly underlining every brand public speech even if it does not seem like regular advertising. *Advertisingness* is a set of forms of discourses, communication imaginaries and social, collective imagination. It is rooted in the very essence of consumption.

Advertisingness in forms of discourses originate in the initial matrix of “classical” advertising messages (see above), that is to say, specific expressive rationales and semiotic work creating highly connotated messages with apparent commercial intentionality turning *unadvertization* into *hyperadvertization* most of the time. *Advertisingness* is based on a strong, self-asserting brand status, an oversemiotization [12, 19] due to semiotic condensation, and shows a saturation of the signs of the brands, a strong stereotypy, and intertextuality.

Advertisingness deals with communications professionals, researchers and collective imagination and imaginaries [3]. For the main part of the population, advertising is linked to rather dysphoric representations such as messages trying to deceive to lure into buying, the work of the “hidden persuaders” [12, 45]. As seen above, communications professionals mainly try to find a way to transform positively advertising into something like branded information. The idea is to slide the borderline opposing information and communication into a positive market branded information opposed to bad old, classical advertising messages. As for researchers, they can be attracted by the fact of presenting advertising as a matrix of communication in general.

Advertisingness is, in itself, a communication logic. Whatever is the shape of the discourse of a brand, it does step in commercial communication logic, inherent in market mediation: the logic of the aura of the commodity, as mentioned by Benjamin, the “logic of Father Christmas” and the logic of prophecy as described by Baudrillard.

The logic of the aura of commodity

Benjamin states that advertising gives access to the collective imagination: “The dream consciousness of the collective [...] awakes [...] in advertising” [9, 10]. Thus advertising takes the aura of the commodity [Baudelaire] to its zenith. The aura of commodity works like a reverse operation of the aura of the work of art [11]. The latter is linked to the authenticity of the unique work and tends to deteriorate through industrial replication. On the contrary, the aura of the commodity is strengthened by its multiplication and circulation mainly using advertising, which is the place of its exaggeration [10]. This aura is a deep characteristic of a market and commercial discourse enabling at the same time to reach a high semiotic condensation and dissemination of the signs of the brand.

The logic of Father Christmas and the logic of the prophecy

Baudrillard gives advertising several functions that build its social and communication logic [6]. Its explicit function is to promote selling; its symbolic and social value is linked to “believing,” in a logic of “fables and of the willingness to go along with them”: we do not really believe in advertising, but we care for it. Children and adults do the same when they pretend to believe in Santa Claus long after they know that the gifts come from their parents. In the same way, consumers are thankful for advertising for the care it shows. They come into a logic of belief and regression that gives way to a logic of protection and gratification. Thus, advertising is a free show but asks in return the consumer to comply with the social system. Consumption has a normative efficiency that comes from dream, imagination and it enables, all at once, each person to believe, he or she is the sole recipient of advertising and to give him or her collective desires as standard. Advertising refers to “dawnings of objects, dawnings of desires” and enables the advertising message to become a legend in all its meanings.

Baudrillard also stresses the fact that advertising is great at mythmaking [7]. It is neither true nor false; it is, as seen before, a matter of belief. Thus, it cannot deceive, all the more it gives what it says an existence through as a self-fulfilling prophecy: “Advertising is prophetic language, in so far as it promotes not learning or understanding, but hope.” This prophetic logic enables brands to exist through all their discourses and strengthen from one message to the other until they become a reality.

One of the main deep logic of the advertising matrix comes from the encounter of Benjamin and Baudrillard theoretical approaches. Then *advertisingness* starts to appear as a strengthening of the aura of the brand to the point of evicting the product for the benefit of its signs and significations. The only presence of a brand in a message ensures the spectacularization of its aura.

Eventually, *advertisingness* is deeply related to the question of mastering communication and the power of representation. In a way, *advertisingness* brings very disparate items back into brand communications. This enables us to understand how contemporary existence strategies of brands broaden the boundaries of advertising in general and extends the scope of brands towards politics. The impact of multiple modes of representation on brand lies in the intensification of its display; it more and more shows of: “To “represent,” then, is to show, to intensify, to duplicate a presence” [38] as explained by Marin.

In conclusion, brands strongly activate both types of power due to representation. Brands reach a state of ubiquity and pervasiveness in almost every moment of everyday life thanks to *advertisingness*. This power of presence is crucial since it gives them access to the second representation power effect, analyzed by Marin: “the effect of subject, that is, the power of institution, authorization, and legitimation as resulting from the functioning of the framework reflected onto itself” [38]. *Advertisingness* happens to be at the very heart of the logic of power.

7 Conclusion

Brands transformations and the hybridizations of their communications are deeply part of the way they are established in society [43]. Brands do take part, at the same time, in the transformations of culture as it is shared in digital spaces. Thus, they promote a kind of consumerism that is typical of what Bauman calls the “liquid life” [8]. Even if market players have strategic issues and try to bypass classical differences, the analyses presented in this paper show that society is watching, with attention and awareness, in order to keep the borders, to differentiate motives from one another. Most of the time people are fully aware of what is happening, how it occurs and when to state that they do not buy it or even condemn some overly advertising intrusion in digital spaces. The analyses of different strategies regarding “representations and expressions of advertising digital literacy on social media” put at the center questions of power and authorities at work on social media and social networks behind the scene, behind the show that brands offer to consumers.

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