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## Redefining the Concept of *Advertising* in Romanian: Between Need and Reality

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**Abstract.** Advertising is an undisputed reality of the contemporary world, being a form of communication present both in and beyond mass media. With the evolution of the society, new means of expression have emerged and determined an expansion of the range of advertising products offered for information, persuasion and, why not, for enjoyment. However, as advertising expanded its scope, the meanings attributed to the concept began to change and broaden at the same time. In the Romanian cultural space, this evolution of the concept, as well as the increasing presence of English in all instances of communication have led to a dynamisation of the process of defining advertising, especially due to the new meanings revealed by the definition of the concept in English. In this context, the present article aims to highlight the existence of some discrepancies between the definition of the concept and the terminology already established in Romanian, on the one hand, and to offer solutions that smooth the way to a better equivalence of the meanings assigned to the concept in the process of translating it from Romanian into English, on the other hand. Considering the problem statement, our own observations and the data collected from the online survey carried out among the students pursuing a bachelor's degree at the Faculty of Communication Sciences, two definitions of the Romanian concepts of *publicitate* and *reclamă* are put forth in order to bridge the conceptual gap existing in the Romanian cultural space.

**Keywords.** Advertising, advertisement, publicity, communication, public relations, marketing, redefining, concept.

### 1. Introduction

At the crossroads between several fields such as communication sciences, marketing, sociology, psychology, linguistics, to name but a few, advertising is not only a source of information and persuasion, but also of delight and admiration for the way in which it uses human creativity to achieve its goals. The more creative the advertising, the more myths it debunks, the more it attracts attention and intrigues, arousing the interest of researchers, practitioners, and ordinary people alike.

The multitude of forms currently taken by advertising are tightly linked to the evolution, especially to the technological evolution, of the human society, the latter contributing to the rapid development of the field and to the constant transformation of the concept [1], [2] (pp. 15-71), [3], [4] (pp. 143-147), [5] (pp. 25-34), [6] (pp. 18-41), [7] (pp. 7-8), [8] (pp. 187-207), [9]. Once goods started to be produced, the need to advertise them arose in order to facilitate their trading on the market. Thus, the first verbal and nonverbal advertising messages were recorded in Antiquity. For example, the Babylonian clay tablets, the papyrus scrolls of Thebes,

the wall paintings announcing theatrical performances, sporting events, and gladiatorial shows organised in the Roman Empire are just a few examples of promotional messages that have survived to this day. Other examples, also from the Roman territories, are pieces of stone or terracotta on which a symbol announcing the profile of the shops was inlaid: a ham represented a butcher, a cow a dairy shop, a boot a shoemaker and so on. In ancient Egypt, there were announcers, sometimes accompanied by musicians, who announced the arrival of the vessels carrying wines, spices, and metals. Also, among the first advertising forms were the family names that referred to different crafts: Mil(l)er, Carpenter, Tai(l)lor, and so on.

The invention, in the fifteenth century, of the movable type printing press by the German Johann Gutenberg changed forever the way in which communication happened around the world. Soon after that moment, flyers, posters, and newspapers containing advertising information appeared. In the eighteenth century, but especially in the nineteenth century, during the Industrial Revolution, with the diversification of the market and the formation of a new social class, the petty bourgeoisie, with great purchasing power and strong desire for self-assertion, advertising started to become more and more innovative and to explore new possibilities of expression and display. Thus, in the 19th century, well-known artists of the time agreed to create advertising posters. In this sense, the pioneering role was taken by the French painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec who at the end of the 19th century conceived a series of advertising posters for the Parisian Moulin Rouge. Also, the French painter Jules Cheret, after succeeding in mastering the lithographic technique in London, transformed the boulevards of the big cities, covering them with very colourful advertising posters [1], [2] (pp. 15-71), [3], [4] (pp. 143-147), [5] (pp. 25-34), [6] (pp. 18-41), [7] (pp. 7-8), [8] (pp. 187-207), [9]. The ice being broken, the premises were thus created for developing a new perspective on designing creative advertising materials.

Three new means of mass communication emerged in the twentieth century, becoming excellent channels for the dissemination of advertising messages: the radio, the television, and the Internet. Thus, invented in 1895 by the Italian student Guglielmo Marconi, and initially used for sending Morse Code messages, the radio transmitted the sound of the human voice for the first time only in 1906. Then, in the 1950s, the advent of television led to fragmented audiences and the need for producers to invest more and more money in advertising to cover as large a market segment as possible. The Internet emerged in the 1980s, competing with the radio, television, and, most recently, with the print media. In the 21st century, advertising has crept into all forms of life, being present in the traditional media, in the new media, in and on public transport vehicles, in and on buildings (wall advertising, advertising meshes), on the road surface, in intersections (billboards, banners, representations of real oversized products), in the sky and so on [1], [2] (pp. 15-71), [3], [4] (pp. 143-147), [5] (pp. 25-34), [6] (pp. 18-41), [7] (pp. 7-8), [8] (pp. 187-207), [9].

Advertising has therefore become, without a doubt, a constant presence in today's society, and with the diversification of the forms it takes, the concept defined by advertising has undergone changes to incorporate all the meanings acquired along the way. Some languages, for example English, quickly adapted to this dynamic of meaning, but others, such as Romanian, failed to be so versatile, which led to an unbalanced relationship between the meanings attributed to the concept in the specialised literature and the way in which the concept is used in the daily interpersonal communication. Taking these aspects into account, the article analyses the meanings attributed to the concept of *advertising* in English and Romanian. Finally, in an online survey, the meanings ascribed to the Romanian concepts of *publicitate* and *reclamă* are scrutinised by one hundred and twelve students pursuing a bachelor's degree at the Faculty of Communication Sciences (Politehnica University of Timișoara, Romania). Considering the

results of the survey, the concept of *advertising* is redefined to bring it into line with the terminology currently used in Romanian.

## 2. Redefining the concept of *advertising* in Romanian

### 2.1. On the concept of 'advertising' in Romanian and English

In Romanian, the concept of *advertising* is rendered by two words *publicitate* [advertising, publicity] and *reclamă* [advertisement]. Although they are totally different concepts, the two, *publicitate* and *reclamă*, are often confused with each other, because, even today, in Romanian, there is no clear conceptual delimitation between them [4] (pp. 141-142), [5] (pp. 18-20), [10] (pp. 34-37), [11] (pp. 13-15). [4] (p. 140) underlines that the Romanian word *publicitate* comes from the Latin *publicus*, meaning *public*. Initially, the term was used in Romanian "in the legal sense, as publicity of debates, open, public deliberation, in opposition to secrecy, and in the 19th century it acquired commercial significance" [„în sens juridic, ca publicitate a dezbaterilor, deliberare publică, deschisă, în opoziție cu secretul, iar în secolul al XIX-lea va dobândi și semnificație comercială”] [4] (p. 140). The Romanian word *reclamă* comes from the Latin *clamare*, meaning *to shout, to call, to proclaim*. The advertisement had taken the form of the announcement in the Romanian territories until the 19th century, when the printing press was introduced. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two was made only at the beginning of the 20th century [4] (p. 140).

Unlike Romanian, English has three terms to define the concept of advertising: *publicity*, *advertising*, and *advertisement*. The American Marketing Association describes them as follows:

- *publicity* refers to the placement, free of charge, generally in the media, of informative messages about a company or a product;
- *advertising* refers to the placement, for a fee, in the media, of informative or persuasive messages about certain products, services, organisations or ideas, in order to inform and/or persuade members of a certain target market or a certain target group, with a message design made by firms, not-for-profit organisations, government agencies or individuals;
- *advertisement* refers to any informative or persuasive message placed, for a fee or because of time and/or space donation, in the media, being prepared by an identifiable person, company or organisation [12].

Therefore, if we take into account all these conceptual delimitations, we can say that, in Romanian:

- *publicitate* (with the meaning of *publicity*) is the act of placing free informative or persuasive messages in the media, being the strict prerogative of public relations, if by public relations we mean “the practice of promoting a good reputation for a company, a governmental body, an individual or a public entity or, in other words, the action of presenting, explaining and maintaining their favourable image” [„practica promovării unei bune reputații pentru o firmă, un organism guvernamental, un individ sau o entitate publică sau, cu alte cuvinte, acțiunea de a prezenta, explica și menține o imagine favorabilă a acestora”] [5] (p. 21);

- *publicitate* (with the meaning of *advertising*) refers to the act of placing advertisements for a fee in the media;

- *reclamă* (with the meaning of *advertisement*) is the actual advertising material to be placed in the media (through advertising).

But the Romanian concept of *publicitate* also refers to informative messages placed outdoor: "point-of-sale advertising, promotion, fairs, exhibitions, direct mail advertising (mailing), telephone advertising (phoning) or advertising materials" [„publicitatea la locul de vânzare, promovare, târguri, expoziții, publicitate directă prin poștă (mailing), publicitate prin telefon (phoning) sau editări publicitare”] [13] (p. 147). Therefore, the Romanian concept of

*publicitate* may be defined as any type of informative message about a product, service, company, organisation, or person transmitted, free of charge, not only through the mass media, but also through other channels of communication. From this perspective, the Romanian concept of *publicitate* comprises any type of promotional activity done free-of-charge and by recourse to:

- advertising tools - direct mail advertising (mailing), telephone advertising (phoning), advertising materials;
- public relations tools - press releases, interviews with the company's spokespersons or decision makers, commercial information submitted for inclusion in mass-media articles [5] (pp. 20-21), information on anniversary events of products or companies transmitted to the media [2] (p. 11), image advertising, advertising on a certain topic, also termed 'issue advertising', and advertising that does not promote a particular product, also termed 'non-product advertising' [14] (pp. 45-46), [15] (p. 56);
- marketing tools, for example sales promotion tools – point-of-sale advertising, promotions, fairs, exhibitions, sponsorships [14] (p. 45), [5] (p. 21); [6] (pp. 509-537), [16] (pp. 29-38).

If the Romanian concept of *publicitate* is attributed the meaning of the English concept of *advertising*, then the former is any informative or persuasive message developed by companies, non-profit organisations, government agencies or identifiable persons, distributed for a fee or free of charge as a result of the advertising time and/or space donation, and targeted at a specific audience (adaptation of the definition given by [12]). This definition refers both to the message of commercial advertisements, developed by identifiable companies or persons, and to the message of non-commercial advertisements, developed by non-profit organisations or government agencies. While, in the first situation, the advertising space is purchased for a fee, in the second situation it can be obtained from the donations made even by the mass media itself, this fact being specified at the end of the print advertisement, the television/radio advertising spot, also called 'television/radio commercial', etc. This definition has the advantage of including all the types of messages circulated in the Romanian mass media and subclassed to the term *advertising*, but has the disadvantage of intersecting with public relations with respect to non-commercial advertising (image advertising, issue advertising and non-product advertising) [14] (pp. 45-46), [15] (p. 56).

If the Romanian concept of *publicitate* takes over the meaning of the English concept of *publicity*, then the former is any type of informative message about a product, service, company, organisation or person placed free of charge in the mass media (adaptation of the definition given by the [14]). But, in our opinion, free placement can also mean that advertising space and time has been donated. In this case, some of the meanings subsumed to *publicity* are found in the definition given to *advertising*, without taking into account those informative messages typical of public relations: press releases, messages occasioned by the organisation of an event such as a jubilee, anniversary, etc.

## 2.2. Redefining the Romanian concepts of 'publicitate' and 'reclamă'

Since the specialised literature keeps on signalling the existence of a conceptual void in the Romanian language, as discussed above, and since the television and radio broadcasting companies operating in Romania use the term *publicitate* to announce the commercial breaks, which in fact contain both commercial and non-commercial messages, i.e. both advertising and publicity messages, we have considered it necessary to clarify the conceptual delimitations. To find a solution that includes the terminology already popular in the Romanian society and language, we propose the following definitions of the Romanian concepts:

- *publicitate* refers to any announcement or message, be it informative or persuasive, developed by companies, non-profit organisations, government agencies or identifiable

persons, distributed for a fee or free of charge through the mass media, but also through other communication channels, and directed to a specific target audience. In this way, the Romanian concept of *publicitate* comprises, in fact, all informative and persuasive messages developed both for commercial and non-commercial purposes and made public through advertising and public relations tools.

- *reclamă* refers to any commercial announcement or message, be it informative or persuasive, created by companies or identifiable persons, distributed for a fee or free of charge through the mass media, but also through other communication channels, and directed to a specific target audience [17] (p. 174).

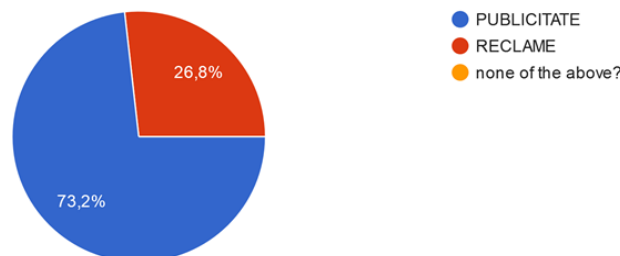
In order to test the aforementioned new definitions of the Romanian concepts of *publicitate* and *reclamă*, an online survey was carried out among the students pursuing a bachelor's degree at the Faculty of Communication Sciences (Politehnica University of Timișoara, Romania). Between 26 and 30 November 2020, one hundred and twelve persons answered the online questionnaire, which comprised five closed-ended questions and a multiple-choice question, besides some demographic questions, irrelevant for the present study.

The first closed-ended question aimed at identifying the term that describes the TV or radio commercial break. 73.20% of the respondents considered that *publicitate* is the term most often used in Romanian, and 26.80% *reclame* (plural of *reclamă*, i.e. advertisements).

**Chart 1.** The Romanian term most often used to describe a TV or radio commercial break

When you watch TV or listen to the radio, which is the Romanian term most often used to describe the commercial break

112 răspunsuri



The answers to the second closed-ended question highlighted the type of message and channel usually associated with the Romanian concept of *publicitate*. 57.10% of the respondents considered that the Romanian concept of *publicitate* refers to informative or persuasive messages about products, services, organisations, people, or ideas transmitted through the mass media, and 42.90% through any type of communication channel.

**Chart 2.** Type of message and channel associated with the Romanian concept of *publicitate*

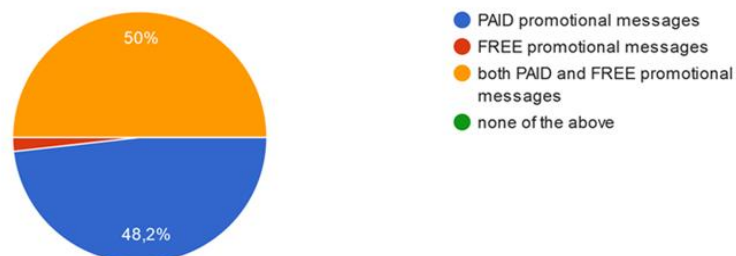
In Romanian, the concept of PUBLICITATE refers to  
112 răspunsuri



In the third closed-ended question, the focus was on whether the promotional messages referred to by the Romanian concept of *publicitate* are paid, free or both. 50% considered that the Romanian concept of *publicitate* refers to both paid and free promotional messages and 48,20% only to paid promotional messages.

**Chart 3.** Cost per promotional messages referred to by the Romanian concept of *publicitate*

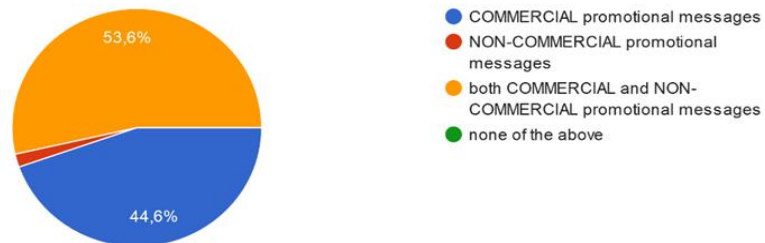
In Romanian, the concept of PUBLICITATE refers to  
112 răspunsuri



The fourth closed-ended question aimed at identifying whether the Romanian concept of *publicitate* refers to commercial and/or non-commercial promotional messages. 53,60% of the respondents considered that it refers to both commercial and non-commercial promotional messages, and 44,60% to commercial promotional messages.

**Chart 4.** Purpose of the promotional messages referred to by the Romanian concept of *publicitate*

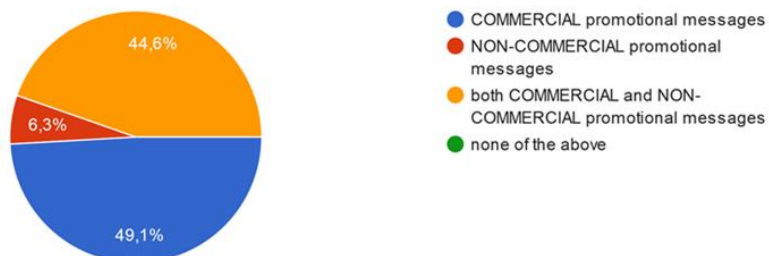
In Romanian, the concept of PUBLICITATE refers to  
112 răspunsuri



The last closed-ended question inquired about the purpose of the promotional messages referred to by the Romanian concept of *reclamă*, namely whether they are commercial, non-commercial or both. 49,10% of the respondents associated the Romanian concept of *reclamă* with commercial promotional messages, and 44,60% to both commercial and non-commercial promotional messages.

**Chart 5.** Purpose of the promotional messages referred to by the Romanian concept of *reclamă*

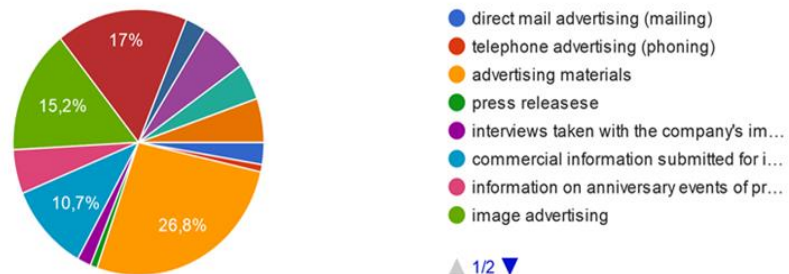
In Romanian, the concept of RECLAMĂ refers to  
112 răspunsuri



Finally, the only multiple-choice question aimed at finding out whether the Romanian concept of *publicitate* is associated with tools that are typical of marketing and public relations, not only of advertising such as direct mail advertising (mailing), telephone advertising (phoning), advertising materials, press releases, interviews taken with the company's image persons or decision makers, commercial information submitted for inclusion in mass-media articles, information on anniversary events of products or companies transmitted to the media, image advertising, advertising on a certain topic, advertising that does not promote a particular product, point-of-sale advertising, promotions, fairs, exhibitions and sponsorships. All the aforementioned tools were chosen by the respondents in various percentages. However, the most relevant responses are advertising materials (26.80%), advertising on a certain topic (17%), image advertising (15.20%) and commercial information submitted for inclusion in mass-media articles (10.70%).

**Chart 6.** Advertising, marketing, and public relations tools associated with the Romanian concept of *publicitate*

In Romanian, the concept of PUBLICITATE refers to  
112 răspunsuri



All in all, the results of the survey have revealed that the definitions of the Romanian concepts of *publicitate* and *reclamă* put forth at the beginning of this subsection are into line with the students' perception of the two concepts, offering a solution to the terminological and conceptual issues singled out by the Romanian specialised literature and presented in the previous subsection.

### 3. Conclusions

Advertising is a form of mass communication that emerged with the first bartered goods. Over time, the development of the society, especially from a technological point of view, has led to an increased diversification of the range of products offered to the public, which, in turn, has led to an increased need for information and persuasion of the potential buyers. At the same time, the technological evolution has made available to the public new means of expression that have facilitated the emergence of increasingly creative and challenging promotional materials. From the first forms of advertising recorded in Antiquity and until now, the process of modelling and remodelling the concept, but also the meanings attributed to it in English have revealed the existence, in Romanian, of inconsistencies between what the concept has come to mean nowadays in the specialised literature and its use in everyday life. Moreover, some overlaps between the meaning of the concept of *publicitate* and that of *reclamă* appeared in Romanian. All these were arguments that formed the basis of the present study, which discusses the most important meanings attributed to the two concepts by theorists and practitioners in order to redefine them and find solutions, that are supported by the online survey conducted among the students of the Faculty of Communication Sciences (Politehnica University of Timișoara, Romania) and into line with the terminology already widely used in the Romanian society. In addition, highlighting the differences between the Romanian and English terminology can be of great help in correctly identifying the terms that need to be equated in the translation process.

Thus, this redefinition of the Romanian concept of *publicitate* and its delimitation from that of *reclamă* is useful not only for communicators, advertisers, translators, interpreters, to mention only some of those who have direct contact with advertising and publicity materials in their professional activities, but also to the common people, who may experience confusion watching television and/or listening to radio advertising broadcast in Romania, which is both commercial and non-commercial, both paid and unpaid. Furthermore, the proposed redefinition of the Romanian concept of *publicitate* is of great help to the students pursuing a degree in communication or translation and interpreting as it answers some conceptual questions.

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