

Divertising, the Product of Change in Society and of Grasping Consumers' Attention

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Abstract: *Taking into consideration the importance of advertising in the recent years, it has achieved a significant exposure in human life. The subject covered by this paper deals with unconventional advertising, to which I will refer to as divertising. The way in which society has changed regarding the life of consumerism has affected and influenced advertising, forcing it to be updated to a more effective means of communication. Besides this aspect, the research will lead to the second aspect of this topic, which is the impact it has upon the consumer. To sum up with I will analyze some recent examples of divertising for a better understanding of the key concepts of this study.*

Key-words: *divertising; unconventional; advertising; society; consumerism.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Context of the Research

It is an undeniable fact that advertising improved remarkably over the years but, do all its forms have the same impact over the consumers nowadays? A more efficient and powerful way of grabbing consumers' attention is unconventional advertising, taking into consideration the overwhelming and conventional type of advertising that we are surrounded by everywhere. To describe this type of advertising, I chose to use the term of *divertising* proposed by Eduard Jakabhazi in his book [Unconventional Urban Product Advertising]², which represents the main source of inspiration for this article.

The article starts with a foreword on guerrilla's marketing communication, followed by a short introduction of the evolution of unconventional advertising based on technological and social changes – to build a bridge to *divertising*, defined as “[...] advertising as an aesthetic act that is made in such a way that it defies all rules in its behavior, be it a prop, situation, image, placement, dimension, message, finality.”³ All of this is leading towards defining the impact of *divertising* upon consumers' minds and showing some concrete examples of a better understanding. The purpose of this article is to bring forward the effectiveness of unconventional advertising in contradiction to conventional advertising, considering society's necessity determined by technological development

1.2. Objectives

The main objective of this article is to discuss about the impact of *divertising* upon consumers. But for this, it is important to focus on some changes that influenced and amplified the need of this phenomenon. Today the face of advertising is changing very fast, as it needs to keep up with technological and social development. Taking into account the free-spirited nature of *divertising* with it's creative, unique and unusual means that burst out

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² Eduard Jakabházi. 2013. *Comunicarea publicitară neconvențională urbană*. Timișoara: BrumaR.

³ Eduard Jakabházi. 2013. *Comunicarea publicitară neconvențională urbană*. Timișoara: BrumaR, p. 10.

of anonymity and entice the public in a very well-established game, the resulting impact is inevitable and much more powerful than if it were made in a conventional way.

2. The roots of *divertising*

If we take a short trip in time, we can mention that unconventional advertising has its roots in guerilla marketing the tactics of which concentrates on non-traditional methods. The term *guerrilla* appeared most probably in the eighteenth century to describe a type of ‘warfare’ in general. The story of how it was later introduced and made popular speaks by itself in defining the more effective principles of this type of advertising. During the Cuba Revolution, Che Guevara and the people who supported him and wanted to bring his political concept in Cuba, did not possess so many resources. So, finding themselves in minority against weapons and money they fought by sabotaging and using the element of surprise.⁴ The term *guerrilla* was borrowed by advertising as a need for a change, when the market started to be over-saturated and made the consumer familiar with their strategies. The meaning of it was transferred immediately into the advertising filed, by following not only the name, but also the principle of its foundation.

Ana Jankovska gathered in her Master Thesis⁵ more definitions of guerilla marketing. Summing up the essential ones led to the following aspects: strategies focused on low costs or minimum costs, the effect of surprise, creating social buzz, being funny, memorable and unexpected. Taking everything into account, guerilla marketing communication generates a more positive and efficient way to strike the consumers and grab their attention than a traditional form of advertising. Guerilla marketing has some characteristics that stand out, such as: being unexpected, drastic, humorous, unique, cost effective, customer beneficial. It happens when and where the target people least expect it.

3. What determined the need of *divertising*

According to Dimitry Todoran, advertising had reached the “totemic phase” between 1965 - 1985 during which the product had been viewed as an element representing a way of life creating social and cultural identities in which the image of the products became a social group symbol.⁶ But, the human beings are so different today, it is not only how we now interact that has changed, but also the where and the when, which have led advertising to be updated related to society’s expectation. The incoming information is received and processed through a subjective filter by each individual, but if we refer to the impact of it seen as a big picture, the results can be measurable regarding some specific type of audience. But today the “focus is shifted from the paradigm of understanding, interiorizing and valuing the cultural phenomenon upon viewing and consuming it.”⁷

The best word to describe *divertising* would be *unexpected*. It highlights the power of persuasion and the element of surprise. Finding new ways to present a piece of information by avoiding the obvious brings the shock element in forefront triggering the *wow effect*. *Divertising* places relationships above emotions and counts on “human reaction, attitude, behavior and the act of decision.”⁸

When we think about this type of publicity, the image and its quality come to play a secondary role, the first place being taken by artistic commercial creations, which seek to

⁴ Ernesto Che Guevara. 2006. *Guerrilla Warfare*. New York: Ocean Books.

⁵ Ana Jankovska and Vesna Žabkar. 2015. *The Impact of Guerrilla Vs. Traditional Marketing Communication on Consumer Attitudes*. Ljubljana. Master Thesis

⁶ Dimitrie Todoran. 2005. *Psihologia reclamei*. București: Tritonic, p. 18.

⁷ Eduard Jakabházi. 2013. *Comunicarea publicitară neconvențională urbană*. Timișoara: BrumaR, p. 15.

⁸ Eduard Jakabházi. 2013. *Comunicarea publicitară neconvențională urbană*. Timișoara: BrumaR, p. 12.

encompass aesthetic satisfaction, humor and even the playfulness. *Divertising* is based on imagination and on associating creativity with a message, by exploiting the surrounding medium to its limits in order to place the advertising, surprising and triggering questions in the minds of the passer-by.

By seeing the common places as a potential stage to create a new way of communication between brands and consumers, *divertising* demonstrates that creativity can be found anywhere and everywhere. Thinking out of the box and using imagination to find analogies between messages and different ways to present it, not only reduces the costs, but also increases the efficiency of its impact. A place that once looked like not having any potential, seems to reborn now and find the best way to catch people's attention. It must be mentioned that not all unconventional advertising can be named *guerilla*, not all of them are *divertising*. For a better understanding of the need of this type of advertising we would have to mention the two main major factors that determinate it. Mainly these are:

3.1. The Consumer

If we take a look at the current consumer of the XXI's century in depth, we can concur that one can be described as a person without time, always on the run, always physically present in one place, but with the mind connected at distances never before imagined. The Technological Revolution is the reason why major changes have altered, not only the way that humans interact with one another, but also their interaction with materials goods. All these traits are amplified even more in the case of millennials with their needs resumed to the phrase „I want it fast and I want it now”. With this kind of attitude, it is becoming harder and more challenging for service providers and goods to capture the consumers' attention with conventional advertising. They have to create more than just a simple outdoor print; they need to provide more direct contact between the audience and the ads. People tend to easily remember interactive activities that engage them in doing something, activities that evoke emotions and participation.

3.2. The Information

The main function of publicity or advertising was to inform and persuade people of ideas, products or services. In the era of the Information Revolution, the numerous amounts of visual messages that we are receiving every day increased considerably. From the moment we are outside, promotional messages tend to come to us uninvited, they are everywhere, streets, buildings, radio, TV, and phones, disturbing our attention and invading our time and privacy. All this evolution of human activities led to a huge necessity of advertising, generated the boom of it and created the so-called information noise effect. This effect caused a low level of attention regarding advertising. People see the ads, but they also forget them easily, some of them are even neglected or unnoticed.

4. Material and Methods

Eduard Jakabházi corelates Tom Himpe's eight techniques of *divertising's* interaction with humans with specific items, for a better way of measuring the performance of it. Thus, *Intrusion, Transformation, Installations, Illusion, Infiltration, Sensation, Interaction, Effort* are taken through the following filters of analysis, being connected with the beneficiary, motivation, context, idea, effects, strengths and weaknesses.⁹ The analysis of the following

⁹ Eduard Jakabházi. 2013. *Comunicarea publicitară neconvențională urbană*. Timișoara: BrumaR, pp. 18 - 19.

divertising examples will be based on these principles to which I want to add *Interpretation*, as a personal point of view and also as a conclusion for each one, meant to sum up the purpose of this article, proving the effectiveness of the impact of *divertising* compared advertising.

4.1. The Crossing Fence¹⁰

Published/Aired: December 2019

Client: Societe de l'assurance automobile du Quebec

Motivation: The need of respecting pedestrians at crosswalks.



Fig. 1. *The Crossing Fence*

Context: It seems that in Quebec, drivers never stop for pedestrians at crosswalks, so they came up with this notable idea, improvising a crossing fence to stop the cars. In general drivers may forget that sometimes they are pedestrians too and they should be able to cross the street safely, so this marketing idea has proven to be very effective.

Idea: Drivers had to face the event itself, where the action is taking place, more specifically on the road where an improvised crossing fence was placed at crosswalks. It was designed to stop the cars no matter what and make drivers read the message. Maybe next time drivers will think twice before hitting the gas ahead of crosswalks.

Effects: The produced effect was the expected one; drivers were stopping their cars while pedestrians could cross the street. We also have the element of surprise producing a visible effect for both drivers and pedestrians.

Strengths: Without a doubt, the biggest advantage of this environmental advertisement is that it can't be avoided due to the strategic space where it was implemented and the way it was "packaged".

Weaknesses: It may be the higher cost of designing and implementing this type of installation.

Interpretation: This environmental advertisement is incorporated in the *Installation* technique of *divertising*, which is about endless possibilities of inspiration. It can be made out of different materials, have different shapes and be placed in the most unusual places. We wonder why we can't just put a sign over there or a printed ad, wouldn't it be simpler? It would, but the effect will be meaningless, probably the majority of people will ignore the

¹⁰ *The Crossing fence.* Ads of the World. Retrieved March 28, 2020, from www.adsoftheworld.com/media/ambient/societe_de_lassurance_automobile_du_quebec_the_crossing_fence

signs and a part of them will not even notice them, taking into account the numerous amounts of printed messages presented in our daily lives. This placement cannot be avoided which makes it more efficiently. Considering its uniqueness, which is remarkable by itself, we can assume that the message became more eye-catching for the targeted public. It differs from conventional information methods by creating an interaction between the audience and the message, capable of evoking emotions, be them positive or negative. To summarize the above, *The Crossing Fence* is about having a great idea, choosing the perfect place and creating an impact.

4.2. The Homeless Castle¹¹

Published/Aired: February 2020

Client: Raising The Roof



Fig. 2. *The Homeless Castle*

Motivation: A huge number of people from around the world experience homelessness every day. Accustomed to our daily routine we pass by without noticing them and sometimes we ignore them purposely, judging or even making fun of their situation. The reasons why people become homeless are so different, determined by social causes or life events. The subject itself will not be discussed here. Only a few essential ideas will be presented in order to understand the meaning of *divertising* solutions. In Canada we can find 235,000 people leaving on the streets, having no job or income. The organization Raising The Roof started a campaign to raise awareness of homelessness. The ignorance of humans on this issue is visible, so the way to engage them into at least seeing it, became a substantial challenge.

Context: The creators decided to bring the problem closer, so a 25-foot-tall castle was installed at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto. It was called *The Homeless Castle* and was build out of cardboard signs such as the ones held by the homeless.

Idea: The meaning of this construction was to bring people closer to reality, make them see what they refuse to see. A castle typically represents power, richness and luxury. Here we have a powerful symbolic message. First, we see the castle as something that the

¹¹ *The Homeless Castle*. Ads of the World. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from www.adsoftheworld.com/media/ambient/raising_the_roof_the_homeless_castle.

homeless people can't have, then we think of it as a house of protection, which should shelter you from the cold and misery. Second, the image of this castle can reach the hopes and dreams, also showing what simple things homeless need to have something because of the material used to design it. The whole idea was based on touching people's hearts.

Effects: People of different ages were stopping, looking, reading the messages wrote on the cardboards and taking photos.

Strengths: This was an unexpected way to remind people of something that happened in front of them through the design and placement of *The Homeless Castle*, so they could not pass by and remain indifferent.

Weaknesses: If the campaign ran for many weeks the cardboards must have been affected by the weather and may need to be replaced.

Interpretation: *The Homeless Castle* campaign is also using the *Installation* technique of *divertising*. The story of the presented campaign is about showing a part of humanity's problems, the homelessness. By choosing to design it in a more dynamic and impermissible way they get an effective touch. The location can be avoided, and the structure makes people curious about it, determining them to get closer, thus seeing the message. This marketing idea made me think about a hunter who laid the bait and waited for the prey.

4.3. Hijack¹²

Published/Aired: March 2020

Client: Aquafresh

Motivation: The Aquafresh Brand is one at the top in this industry. It was the first striped toothpaste formed of blue and white strips, to which they included over the years a third red stripe. The oral hygiene market has so many competitors today and it became really hard to make a difference or create some productive advertisement.



Fig. 3. *Hijack marketing campaign*

Context: Crowded places are not our favorites, but when it comes to advertising, they

¹² *Hijack*. Ads of the World. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from www.adsoftheworld.com/media/ambient/aquafresh_hijack.

made the best of it. Railway stations are crossed daily by passengers who are coming and going. The way in which it looks is of no importance here; people only care about the function and the potential or benefits of such places. Those locations are picturing a large category of people from different social backgrounds.

Idea: The idea was effectively combined with the opportunity of having so many blank advertisement spaces. After over 5,000 billboards were left empty and white at NS-stations because of a media conflict, it seemed to be the ideal moment to promote the Aquafresh White & Shine toothpaste, by only adding a little sticker shaped like the toothpaste tube and correlating the way in which it was removed with the advertising message. Stickers are easily removed without leaving residue, exactly how Aquafresh White & Shine does with your teeth, making them cleaner and whiter than before. The beauty of the idea lies in the fact that it highlights the values of the brand by using an unexpected way of doing it.

Effects: This chance was the perfect moment to put a smile on people's faces. They declared that "In less than 24 hours we claimed over 1,500 billboards, reaching 670,000 commuters. And because of broad media attention, another 400,000 people after the activation." The message is formulated in a humorous way, reminding consumers of the benefits of the Aquafresh toothpaste. We have to seize an opportunity and this brand knew how to manage it and how to play with it.

Strengths: It was a non-expensive commercial, like they said, "for a media budget of less than a toothbrush". It was also about opportunity and the simple solution with which they came out. Presenting the advertising in a direct and simple way and inserting it into the everyday world was also a valuable strength.

Weaknesses: Visibility might not be so obvious; for example, if a passer-by concentrates on his phone, the marketing campaign will more likely be missed.

Interpretation: This type of advertisement can be placed between the technique of *Intrusion of Divertising* which involves the incorporation of publicity in unexpected places which are not common for conventional advertising and the *Illusion* technique, based on changing perceptions and the need of looking twice to understand the message. Because two techniques are combined, some might not consider this example as being *divertising*, however, I am of a different point of view. The commercial presents the message in an unconventional way using a good strategy and challenging people to engage in the "game" for discovering the analogies behind it. It is also a type of *guerilla marketing* because it needed a low budget to make a great impact and it was also unique, humorous and unexpected. We are certainly talking about luck, but what is luck without a smart brain to embrace it, like the old phrase "luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity". This promotional ad combined methods of *guerilla marketing* with social media to catch the public's attention, but for me, it can be included in *divertising* as well.

4.4. Misfortune Cookies¹³

Published/Aired: February 2020

Client: The Trussell Trust



Fig. 4. *Misfortune Cookies*

Motivation: Food seems to be an ordinary thing in our lives, something that we take for granted, but it's not the same for everybody. Some people out there go to bed hungry.

Context: Food banks from UK decided to do something more for getting more supplies. On an alley, The Trussell Trust (the largest food bank charity in UK) and several restaurants delivered special fortune cookies which included messages about food banks, instead of bright words.

Idea: People eat peacefully in restaurants every day without thinking of the ones less fortunate. The idea was to play with your emotions and introduce the marketing concept in the most opportune moment. Receiving a cookie when you eat, containing a harsh message telling about the existence of starving people, almost cut your appetite. This is where a positive feeling took over and we wished we could do something, so we start to donate. This is how Misfortune Cookies advertisement reached so many donations, by distorting with human's emotions for committing to a good cause.

Effects: They managed to provide 1.6 million food supplies to people in need. The number was a record reached in 2019.

Strengths: The main advantage is the way of implementing the advertising by acting in a cunning way. What people expected to be an optimistic message transformed into a marketing strategy the objective of which was to raise money for the starving. Sharing these special fortune cookies in restaurants, increased people's determination to donate.

Weaknesses: A negative aspect would be the invasion of private space without permission. Shedding some light upon the fact that people are starving while somebody is enjoying a meal, may not be the most ethical way to run a campaign.

¹³ *Misfortune Cookies.* Ads of the World. Retrieved April 5, 2020, from https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/direct/the_trussell_trust_misfortune_cookiesrun

Interpretation: They used the *Intrusion* technique which is about exploring new territories and items to insert the advertising. It used all its essential features. *The Functional Value* by integrating and capitalizing on the space with the message, refers here to the connection between starvation and restaurants. Creating a fusion between the space and the message, between its form and the commercial purpose, this type of *divertising* highlights *the appearance value of medium*. It aims to make connections between the target audience and the “mise en scene” that leads to the optimum use of the interaction with the environment and offers the most favorable context for the advertisement. We speak here of *the value of connection*. The last one is *the value of the warning signal*, that identifies the most appropriate place to attract the public's attention to the message. Certainly, *divertising* had a bigger impact in this case than a simple traditional advertising, for example a poster. It was spontaneous and targeted, by choosing the right place and moment to implement the campaign.

5. Conclusions

The examples offered were not chosen on the criteria of being the best, but as recently launched this year, as well as for the choice of using *divertising* to send a message. All of them are presenting significant ideas proving the major impact on the target audience that asserts our main objective. Based on these examples and not only, *divertising* produces a positive impact, if we measure the clients' benefits, that has achieved its purpose. In this type of unconventional advertising there is always something more than meets the eye. There are the unexpected ways to put the idea on stage, to create connections between all the elements such as: the clients, consumers, message, environment/places, functionality and the communication of items that help to realize the idea. All of this should be very well established before, every scene should be “performed” naturally without mistakes. Everything is about the element of surprise that makes people want to talk about what they saw and experienced.

As a matter of fact, the entire advertising phenomenon is constantly expanding and invading our lives. Different feelings produced by advertising can be observed, from happiness to sadness, but the entire effort is made to reach the consumer of products, services, ideas, beliefs. *Divertising* has the same root values as advertising. The way of presenting the message is the only one that has been updated according to the development of technology and human behavior and expectancies. Overall, it may be said that *divertising* shows a more human face, hiding the manipulative face behind it, so people can enjoy the exhibited facts. Using a psychological impact, it manages to create a profound reaction. It is more about imagination, associativity and flexibility than manipulation or persuasion.

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