

# Influence of media on the social significance of design products

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**Abstract:** *The advertisement went from promoting a product for what it does, or what it tastes like, to its social significance. Relationships between people are transferred to the level of alienated relations between objects, because objects become powerful emotional symbols of the way individuals want to be perceived. The products have always had an emotional significance; what is new, is individuality. The design products are a representation of the self, ways in which people can tell the world who they are. Even children are educated that what they consume is what will define them as individuals. Influence of media is stronger among them, manipulating parents that their children will become "better" if they consume a certain design object or brand. In the context of acceleration of the change, when technology overpass education, our attitude against objects reflects fundamental value judgments.*

**Key-words:** *advertisement; design products; social significance; media manipulation.*

## 1. Introduction

Tendency of acceleration in a society goes beyond the ordinary, daily experience of each and it shortens the duration of situations, which now go through the channel of experience much faster, thing that implies deep transformations in human psychology. The invasion of new into our existence makes it more difficult for us to adapt to life. The acceleration of change modifies the balance between new and familiar situations.

Transience, concept analyzed by Alvin Toffler in "Future Shock", is the new "instability" of everyday life. It is expressed through a feeling of non-permanence. Still, not only our relationships with people are becoming more and more fragile and transitive, but also the relationships with objects, or places, or with the institutional and organizational environment, as well as relations with certain ideas or with the information's flow in society. These five relationships plus time, represent the structure of social experience. Therefore, things, places and people, organizations and ideas are the basic components of all situations. The specific relationship of the individual with each of these components is what structures the situation.

However, objects have a great significance, not only because of their utility function, but also because of their psychological impact. Relationships that exist between people and objects influence the sense of continuity and discontinuity. Those relations play a role in the structure of the situations and shortening the duration of our relations with the objects, accelerates the pace of life. "Our attitude towards objects reflects fundamental value judgments"<sup>2</sup>, so that the contrast between the past and the future, between the permanent and the new society, which is moving with fast steps, based on transience, is highlighted. This develops a consumer mindset that uses and throws, a mindset appropriate to the products on the market. In the past, permanence was the ideal - whether it was a pair of boots, or a cathedral was being built, all of man's creative and productive energy tended to maximize product durability.

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<sup>2</sup> Toffler, A. 1973. *Șocul viitorului [Future Shock]*. București: Editura Politică, p. 13.

## 2. Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to emphasize the influence of media on social significance of design products, which according to previous studies, is bigger and bigger and it transforms the relationships between design products and users. „*Desires, projects, requirements, passions and relationships, translate into objects to be bought and consumed. As a result, not the objects are consumed, but the relationship with the objects. Because the objects become objects of consumption, they must first be signs, symbols of desire, passion, requirements, etc; In this context, human relationship suffers alterations, becoming a consumer relationship - in other words, tends to consume the double meaning of the word: to fulfill and abolish the objects that mediate, and ultimately become an excuse for the human relationship*”<sup>3</sup>.

This research is going to present the evolution of this relationship and the social significance of design products on the media background which facilitate the transience of everyday experiences.

## 3. Kitsch mentality

Initially reserved for the upper social classes (at least financially), it is spreading to the so-called middle class, who wants ADIDAS footwear, but at a lower price. The convenience store will satisfy this demand by selling the imitation, the replacement product, at the same time broadening the field of its possibilities of use (ADIADS).

The supermarket is the sign of kitsch; it aims to satisfy all the requirements; is the carrier of the fundamental idea of the kitsch civilization: *there are better things, but they are more expensive*. The individual became an economic being: “*The distance between the value of use and the will of buying, places the kitsch phenomenon as a distance between the “socialized” demand and the real demand.*”<sup>4</sup> The kitsch mentality, produced by a socio-cultural situation characterized by the aspiration to happiness, conditioned by the prosperity of the middle class which increase continuously, reaching most of the society, changes the culture's fundamentals.

Kitsch is a mode of access to culture for the majority. It represents a way of promoting the society and one of the social mobility elements, a system of popular pedagogy of learning the art of living, where the supermarket became the way of communication; “*the medium is the message*”<sup>5</sup>.

The close link between neokitsch and the distribution system through chain stores, which encourages more and more shopping, offers a new way of studying the psychological factors that determine the concrete sign-bearing object, with which the prosperous citizen will maintain a relationship, possibly alienated, but nonetheless very possessive. Man collects objects in his home, objects that will condition his way of life. Kitsch rejects excesses, it is tailored to all bags, all minds, all consciences. Mediocrity is a term closely related to kitsch. There is no man, artist, hero, who does not have something kitsch in it, since it is a daily phenomenon.

With the ruling class, the dictatorship of kitsch is also required, and the thesis of the German psychologist Ernst Dichter becomes a philosophical thesis: if there is an object for any kind of problem, then any kind of tension, any kind of conflict - individually or collectively, it must be able to be solved through an object. The relations between people are transferred to the level of the relations between objects, all conflicts being resolved in the

<sup>3</sup> Abrudan, A-M. 2018, May 29-31. *Consumerism - a paradigm of contemporary design*. Proceedings of the IX<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Symposium “Education, Research, Creation”. București: Ed. Muzicală, VOL 4, No1, p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Elias, N. 1998. *The Kitsch Style and the Age of Kitsch*. Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) - literary historian, philosopher and sociologist.

same way and establishing an ecology of people and things. *“The consumer maintains a possessive relation with the concrete object, bearer of signs, an object that will condition his way of life.”*<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. Emotional and social significance of design objects**

Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew, was the first to take Freud's ideas about human beings and use them to manipulate the masses. He showed American corporations for the first time how to make people want things they didn't need, by connecting mass-produced goods to their unconscious desires; people could be persuaded to behave irrationally, if their emotional desires and feelings were connected to them, which meant that irrelevant objects could become powerful emotional symbols of how you wanted to be perceived by the others.

From this came a new *“political ideal of how to control the masses: by satisfying their inner selfish desires, which could make them happier and thus more docile. It was the beginning of the consumer ego, the ego that dominates our world today”*<sup>7</sup>. A precedent has been created for the manipulation of the masses through the mass media, in directing the irrationality of the people towards an increasing consumption. *“Eddie saw that the way to sell a product was not to sell it to the intellect who think you should buy a car, but that you would feel better in general if you owned this car. He came up with the idea that people didn't buy anything until they were emotionally or personally engaged in that product or service. You don't need a new item of clothing, but you know you'll feel a lot better with that garment. That was his contribution in a very true sense. We see it everywhere today, but I think Bernays was at the origin of the idea, namely the emotional connection to a product or service”*<sup>8</sup>. *“We must change,” he wrote, from needs, to a culture of desires. People need to be taught to want, to want new things, even before the old ones are gone. We need to model a new mindset. Man's desires must shadow his needs”*<sup>9</sup>.

He was, he stated, the first person to tell auto companies that they could sell cars, as symbols of male sexuality. He hired psychologists to report that the products were good and then claimed that they were independent studies. He organized fashion shows in universal stores and paid celebrities to repeat the new and essential message: “you bought things not only out of necessity, but also to express your inner self in front of others.” The products had the power, both to satisfy their inner desires and to give people a sense of common identity with those around them. It was a strategy for creating a stable society. Dichter called it the strategy of desire. In order to understand the consumer, it must be understood that the modern man often tries to escape his frustrations by investing in self-satisfaction. The products could express the individuality of the consumers, their differentiation in a conformist world. *“The modern man is constantly ready to complete his self-image, by purchasing products that compliment him. If you identify with a product, it may have therapeutic value. It enhances your self-image, you will become a secured person and you will suddenly have this confidence to go out into the world and do what you want successfully”*<sup>10</sup>.

The products have always had an emotional significance; what was new, was individuality. The products are a representation of the self, be it a small car, a special sound system, clothes, etc. These become ways in which people can spend their money in order to tell the world who they are. In other words, we have moved from an industrial economy to the individual person, to personalized products according to the consumer's preferences, from the

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<sup>6</sup> Abrudan, A-M. 2018, May 29 - 31. *Consumerism - a paradigm of contemporary design*. Proceedings of the IX<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Symposium “Education, Research, Creation”. București: Ed. Muzicală, VOL 4, No1, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Curtis, A. 2002. *The century of self*. Retrived April 15, 2020 from <https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-century-of-the-self/>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Paterson, M. 2006. *Consumption and everyday life*. UK: Psychology Press.

single-price store to the supermarket, which emphasizes diversity, in order to be able to meet all consumer preferences.

## 5. Consumerist propaganda made by advertising and the media

Consumerism is a myth according to which the individual will be satisfied and integrated in the society if they consume goods, products, services. The emotional connection to a product or service, causes people to act irrationally, and to buy what corporations want to sell.

While consumerism offers a tangible purpose of owning a product, it deprives the fulfillment of other cultural needs. Consumerism offers short-term self-gratification for those who afford it, and frustration for those who do not. The egocentrism of the western society determined the transition to a consumer society; people were easily influenced by consumerism, due to advertising and media manipulation, concepts that are based on Freud and Bernays theories that man is irrational, easily to manipulate. *“In the middle of a major crisis of identity, will humanity realize the lack of morality and humanity in a world based on media image and the satisfaction of passing property, rather than the ontological value of cultural experience, significant?”*<sup>11</sup>.

In our “enlightened” society, the reduction of cultural values to economic value has become an ethical justification for our actions; *“... the purpose excuses the means, as the immortal Gambetta said”*. The media maintains the myth of consumerism as a priority for contemporary society. Media advertising sells an image - a package.

Behind the slaughter of symbolic values by advertising and the media, the profit machine smiles folding “the green”. We are what we wear, the individual personality is identified with advertising fantasies and consumer ideals. Who we are merge with roles and images portrayed in the media. Sometimes, so subtly we lose the ability to act independently of consumerism's justifications. This is a qualitative loss of the individualization process. *“The affront over human values through media advertising has left a well-updated consumer, but a poorly individualized personality”*<sup>12</sup>.

Consumerism and advertising have become possible threats to the conscience. Prolonged exposure to media advertising has deteriorated the power of understanding in terms of subjective knowledge of being. The perception of the essence of reality has diminished in quality; and the result is the spiritualization and commercialization of culture. For example, the use of Beatles anthems of the 1960's as background music in commercials for Nike shoes: *“the attempt of a symbol link, is broken. The admonition deceives and removes the symbol, corrupting the illusion of a timeless ideal. By associating the symbol with a product, rather than letting it exist as meaningful for its framing experiences, advertising deprives the symbol of meaning and feeling, of its truth. The commercial exploration of culture is the widening of the tear between ideal and being, between word and truth”*<sup>13</sup>.

For the general public, the experiences based on culture that had a role in the integration and transformation of the individual as part of society, were replaced by the experiences of collective visioning and by participating in the consumption trends. The public has been assaulted by a lot of manufactured products and television shows that keep the public concerned about the ideals and values of consumerism.

<sup>11</sup> Cronk, R. 1996. „Art on the Rebound. A collection of Eays on Art and Culture, Part I: Cultural Mythology in America”, 3, *Consumerism and the New Capitalism*. Retrived April 15, 2020 from <https://www.westland.net/venice/art/cronk/contents.htm>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Cronk, R. 1996. „Art on the Rebound. A collection of Eays on Art and Culture, Part I: Cultural Mythology in America”, 3, *Consumerism and the New Capitalism*. Retrived April 15, 2020 from <https://www.westland.net/venice/art/cronk/contents.htm>.

Automatic behavior patterns usually make us extremely vulnerable to anyone who knows how they work. Automatic human behavior usually develops on the basis of psychological principles or stereotypes that we have learned to accept.

Stereotype behavior, automatically, is predominant in many human actions because, in many cases, because it is the most effective form of behavior, and in other cases it is simply necessary; those in advertising know this very well and through the advertisements they try to communicate that, of course, expensive means good. There are enough expensive and good products so that the *expensive=good* rule is as valid as possible for the consumer company and automatically respected. Through the stereotype behavior, shortcuts in actions of buying and consuming are created.

Civilization advances by expanding the number of operations we can perform without thinking about them. Take for example the loyalty card that allow the consumer to assume that he will benefit from a discounted purchase by presenting this loyalty card. The idea is that we expect these loyalty cards to save us some money, but also the time and energy required to make decisions, because if we benefit from a discount card for a particular brand (products, chain stores), we will always buy that brand's products. However, this behavior makes us extremely vulnerable to anyone who knows how it works (media).

To do this, a single well-chosen word that triggers in us, an automatic behavior, a reflex behavior, is enough. Those who exploit human behavior quickly learn how to make the most of our tendency to respond mechanically.

## **6. Media and consumers children - emotional and moral consequences**

Most often, the TV, the color of the car, the holiday destination are chosen depending on the child. Corporate marketing has studied very well the psychology of children, how they act and react when they want and demand something. These children have great power in the economy. Advertisers know this and approach it in such a way that parents may feel embarrassed if they do not buy what the child asks for.

Technological evolution has occurred much faster than education. To keep up with technological, media, cultural changes, we are bombarded with products that are successfully sold by marketing and media; the man is easily manipulated in favor of corporations, so the mentality of the consumer who buys and throws is deeper rooted.

The main function of the characters for children is to make children dependent on certain products, addressing them to the emotional part of the children. People in the media know that growing up is an intense and difficult process for children and that certain attachments provide them with some stability and continuity in this process. *Mickey Mouse* or *Hello Kitty* are characters that appear constantly in the growing up period, characters that children think they understand and feel safe with. Corporate marketing takes advantage of this attachment, this strong emotion of the children, to make money, by personalizing as many products as possible with the beloved character.

The advertisement went from promoting a product for what it does, or what it tastes like, to its social significance. Among the children, they become "better" if they consume a certain design object or brand. Children are educated that what they consume is what will define them as individuals.

Self-satisfaction, immediate reward and materialism - this is the basic identity of the consumer. It's superficial and selfish. "It's about me now," through these things; the attitude: "only I count, it's only about me", is a disservice to the children. It is well known to children that it is not a negative thing to have beautiful things, but not to confuse this with happiness and satisfaction.

Years ago, children answered the question: what do you want to be when you grow up, through trades that seemed to fascinate you: astronaut, doctor, police officer, fireman. Now, unfortunately, we are beginning to hear answers like: “When I grow up I want to be rich, to make a lot of money. I want to have many things.”

One of the essential aspects of this trend is that the adult messages of businessmen are not communicated to simple children, but separately to boys and girls. And girls are taught that they have to be cute, sexy and that what they buy determines their value and that their appearance determines their value. It is true, somehow, that the advertising agencies have always communicated this message to girls, through Barbie dolls, for example, but in recent years we see dolls with very sexy outfits, sold to 6 year old girls. In boys we find the use of violent images, of power and domination, from very young ages. The amount of violence, violence as entertainment, to which children are exposed, is impressive. They get the message that any conflict is resolved through violence, that you must fight to resolve your disagreements. And witnessing that violence is fun, it's entertainment.

What is the antidote to what the children's media does, and beyond? For a bad media, the best antidote is a good media. Parents need to divert their attention from advertisements to educational media, because children do not simply grow up, they learn to think. Advertising is a huge business and is sold to parental insecurity. They let parents believe that if they don't get those things, that if they do not confront their child with the media, early and often, their children will be left behind. And even though the industry assumes great educational merits, it actually makes even greater profits.

The message received by the children is that they cannot play Harry Potter (a series of 8 films distributed by Warner Bros., films inspired by the books of author J. K. Rowling), unless they have the official Harry Potter wand, or cannot play the role of a hero, unless they have all the right accessories. And in a way they are told that their imagination is not enough, it is not enough to take a stick, saying it's a wand, but you have to have the real one. The fundamental message is that “I need something, besides me, to play”, it is really harmful and tragic, because it starts to play out of the hands of children, so it gives them more and more to be able to play, “so they can be happy” (quotation marks point out that this is just the illusion of happiness, or a temporary happiness, similar in fact to the pleasure of the moment). It's not real play. Their own imagination and previous experience do not stand out. It is merely an imitation of what they have seen. What happens is that, the opportunities to exercise their imagination, the experience of having fun with oneself or calming oneself are taken away from children, concretizes in a world with overweight children, with attention deficits and hyperactivity - ADHD, depressive children and other serious physical, mental and emotional health problems.

The important thing to remember about creative play, is that it is the foundation of learning, it is the foundation of critical thinking, it is the basis of problem solving, it is the foundation of empathy and experience of being something else, and it is the way that children make a meaning in life. *“In no case should the identity of children be defined by their consumption habits, and yet it is the main way that they are reflected in the media: as simple consumers, and the advertising agencies do everything they can to worse this completely immoral and unethical message, aimed now at increasingly smaller age categories ”*<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Michele, S. 2006. *Appetite for Profit. How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health and How to Fight Back*. SUA: Nation Books.

## **7. Results and Solutions**

Technology connects individuals with information, with other people, with physical objects through more efficient and intelligent ways. It changes the way we consume, socialize, move; it changes the way we all live and function as a society. In a global economy where the means of production gradually become decentralized, where access is more practical than holding, what does the successful business of the future need to know?

What has changed in terms of our psychology of “moving on”? Is money still the only or the most valuable currency? How can the Internet, telephony and real-time technologies continue to fuel collaboration, cooperation, sharing, distribution?

Rachel Botsman explains how digital technology gives birth to a new kind of sharing, called collaborative consumption, where every good, aptitude, money or even the backyard is shared online on an unprecedented scale. Collaborative consumption is a cultural and economic force that reinvents not only what we consume but also how we consume. The idea of eliminating waste where it is possible is undoubtedly a good thing, but let's not forget that people like to have things. We like to gather, hold, hold things. Indeed, it is better to borrow a drill than to own one, but when we rely on access instead of ownership, we are dependent and controlled by those who provide / allow access. The explanation of the new “sharing psychology”<sup>15</sup> includes the perceived benefits: real motivations, unmet demands and user barriers that brands have to overcome and what is called “reputational capital.”<sup>16</sup>

Sharing cities are online communities that through the virtual environment, share in the real environment. What does the city share in addition to the online sharing communities? In the shared city we can speak of a production in collaboration, of collective financing, and of collective learning, not only of a collaborative consumption. All this allows cities to stimulate innovation, facilitate sustainable economic growth, promote adaptability and help cities become healthy places to thrive, and it is design that facilitates all these aspects through the sustainable created objects.

## **8. Conclusions**

As a conclusion of this research paper, social significance of design products is defined and redefined much more by media and marketing, which facilitate the transience of everyday experiences, then by the quality of the products. Needs, feelings, emotions, culture, science, all have become a good for production, with the only purpose to be sold and the entire media encourages this kind of relationship in order to have material profit.

The advertisement went from promoting a product for what it does, or what it tastes like, to its social significance. Relationships between people are transferred to the level of alienated relations between objects, because objects become powerful emotional symbols of the way individuals want to be perceived. The products have always had an emotional significance; what is new, is individuality. The design products are a representation of the self, ways in which people can tell the world who they are. Even children are educated that what they consume is what will define them as individuals. Influence of media is stronger among them, manipulating parents that their children will become “better” if they consume a certain design object or brand. In the context of acceleration of the change, when technology overpass education, our attitude against objects reflects fundamental value judgments.

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<sup>15</sup> Chapman, J. 2005. *Emotionally Durable Design: Objects, Experiences, And Empathy*. London: Routledge.

<sup>16</sup> Klewes, J. & Wreschniok, R. 2009. *Reputation Capital: Building and Maintaining Trust in the 21st Century*. Germania: Springer.

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