

Is this the end of the conventional advertising in TV broadcasting?

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Resumo:

Neste ensaio exploramos alguns aspectos históricos e econômicos relacionados à indústria publicitária televisiva. O principal objetivo é destacar antigos e novos formatos que foram criados com a popularização da TV na sociedade ocidental, em geral. Nesse contexto, abordamos a ferramenta promocional do product placement (ou popularmente conhecido como "merchandising") como uma estratégia de marketing polêmica, principalmente se forem considerados códigos de auto-regulamentação publicitária a serem respeitados pelos profissionais da área. Diretrizes éticas para conceber a publicidade podem ser repensadas após a análise de práticas promocionais televisivas. Pesquisa bibliográfica e análise do discurso, considerando estas mudanças tecnológicas, são usadas como parte da metodologia do estudo.

Palavras-chave: Televisão; Regulamentação Publicitária; Discurso.

Abstract:

In this essay we explore some basic historical and economic aspects related to the TV advertising industry. Our main goal is to focus on old and new commercial formats that were created with the TV popularization in western societies in general. In this context we approach the promotional tool of product placement as a controversial marketing strategy, mainly if codes of advertising standards are considered to be followed by professionals in this field. Ethical directions to conceive advertising can be rethought after analysing promotional practices in broadcasting. Bibliographical research and discourse analysis, concerning these technological changes, were used as part of the methodology.

Key words: Television; Advertising Regulation; Discourse.

Recently, I turned on my TV to watch different types of electronic advertising and I realized that in this new millennium, new forms of TV advertisements are required. The traditional 30 second spot Ad is being replaced by "tie-in" insertions, as part of script-movies, soap-operas or by specific channels addressed only to explore and/or show advertising. Moreover, there is also the internet convergence – noticeable by allowing a more flexible time format through the website youtube, for example. Product placement

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on TV programs is often being (re)used as a guarantee for consumers' attention, recalling specific brands and products in their minds.

Considering all these changes (related to the consumer behaviour as well), it is worth to explore some historical, economic and meaningful aspects related to this new tendency in our consumer society.

It is interesting to remember that when TV was launched (around 1940), there was no possibility to record programs to broadcast later on a large scale. So, TV series, programs and commercials were live shows. It is also important to state the influence exerted by radio in this early period. The great part of early TV's programs came from radio. So, the "live" language was an intrinsic factor attached to all kinds of content broadcast.

Nevertheless, years later, the video-tape recorder allowed TV producers to record advertisements to be broadcast repeatedly over an extended period of time. Thus, the advertising industry could take advantage of this new system, offering big profits to TV channels as well. Before the era of video-recording, all commercials were live shows. The commercial-break was "inside" a soap-opera or part of an interview program.

Since the 60's the information society has been experiencing the remote control for TV and the baby-boomers were witness to the increasing numbers of TV channels in the 70's as well. In the 80's, with the new infrared technology, the remote control became even more popularized. This new scenario affected the advertising industry because a new kind of viewer appeared. Now, he/she was able to choose TV programs from a variety of channels. Several widespread cable TV channels were also becoming available and very popular at this time.

The popularization of the remote control allowed viewers to "zap" or "surf" between TV stations. Advertising that was usually shown in a specific break commercial became threatened by the possibility of a new consumer behaviour. The act of "zapping" was now a new habit that the advertising industry had to face. Moreover, this new jargon and meaning was introduced to the consumer's vocabulary. In other words, the remote control let viewers have instant command in changing channels. When the break commercial started, he/she could zap to another TV station, avoiding undesirable advertisements. This was only the beginning of the challenge to the advertising industry. They would need to establish new forms (or even recall old practices) to persuade consumers to watch commercials. Unconventional insertions were now necessary.

One way to deal with this new context was to adjust script-movies or TV series in order to allow brand appearances in set scenes. Sometimes, the movie director would also even create a new scenario, just to permit what the marketing communication started to call "tie-in" or "product placement".

In recent years, controversial products such as cigarettes and alcoholic beverages could benefit from this new situation. The industries related to these products had experienced growing sanctions around their promotional campaigns as well. Several rules were created in order to limit and regulate advertising related to these commodities. It is also important to state that since the late 70's several players, such as non-government organizations and health institutions, began to exert pressure to establish new policies regarding the promotion of these commodities. In 1970, for example, the U.S Congress approved that tobacco advertising should be banned on TV and radio break commercials. In several western countries, cigarettes and alcoholic drinks had had limitations imposed on broadcasting tobacco and alcoholic products. In Brazil, for example, cigarettes advertising have been banned in mass media since the year 2000. Like in other countries, since the early 90's, it has not been possible to advertise cigarettes in print or electronic media.

In spite of those efforts, the tobacco production was still on course. Even nowadays, it is not illegal to produce tobacco products. Cigarette corporations still develop strategies to promote their brands to future consumers. Furthermore, every product needs ways to communicate with its public. It is understood that this industry would seek alternative methods to promote their goods and brand. In other words, the logic of marketing, comprehended as a process of stimulating needs, satisfaction and desires, requires a way to communicate the industrial production. If promotional marketing is an intrinsic part of the capitalist system, it is reasonable that these industries, under certain pressure, may look for alternative tools of promotion with consumers.

In this market, the tobacco industry could manage its promotional budget in order to plan product placement and tie-in with several Hollywood movies and TV series. An intriguing example of this marketing strategy is the film directed by M. Scorsese "Bringing Out the Dead" (1999). The drama stars Nicolas Cage as a paramedic under permanent stress, related to his job. It shows several times the actor getting a pack of cigarettes as a relief to the tension and pressure surrounding him. The way that he holds and shows the brand "Marlboro" is very tricky, because the atmosphere in which he opens the cigarette pack is very elusive. From this movement, opening the cigarette pack, we may infer that he tries to escape from the stressful situation that he faces.

These situations were almost always connected to the responsibility of being in charge of avoiding someone's death. Probably, the movie viewer will not pay attention to analyse the whole context, content and the moment that the paramedic has a cigarette. However, the emotional association will remain in his/her memory, as an unconscious relief of stress and tough situations. It is not our intention to explore all controversial aspects about subliminal messages. Nevertheless, if the famous North American media theorist V. PACKARD (1957) would be alive in these days he would probably state that this kind of commercial tries to reach our subconscious, persuading us to purchase the product

Some argumentative aspects concerning product placement

As mentioned before, product placement is a tendency of TV commercials in the new millennium. The traditional TV break is under threat. It is evident that the old formula is not reaching consumers as it did in the past. New technologies and the widespread choice of various channels and sources of information and electronic entertainment has lead viewers to behave differently, in contrast with the early decades of TV popularization. If product placement can be considered as a tendency for advertising, we may explore some controversial arguments about this issue.

From the marketing point of view, this tool of communication can be used to catch consumers attention. When the commodity is promoted "inside" a movie, series or soap-opera, the viewer cannot avoid this commercial message by changing channels or "zapping". The target (consumer) will be drawn into the movie plot, having empathy for the character in emotional scenes, related to the product's exposure. Moreover, he/she will not be tempted to zap anymore. Another interesting point about this promotional tool is that it does not require a lot of money to produce, compared to a TV conventional commercial. It can be fit into a suitable movie script, TV serial or soap-opera. Ad agencies costs are saved by not hiring TV producers, specializing in producing ordinary 30 second commercials. In terms of production, this work can save time and money.

Nevertheless, there are some negative aspects, related to this tendency. If we approach the advertising industry, from a critical position, it is noticeable that the official standards of self-regulation in advertising codes in several countries state that this paid message must be evidently clear to viewers. It cannot be disguised, leading consumers to a confusion of genres and or purposes of entertainment and information. In addition, this practice tends to interfere with original scripts, requiring adjustments by writers and producers. They will need to find a "gap" in their story to introduce the commodity into this different mode of advertising. It is an influence that may change the original idea of

the artistic thought. Furthermore, even the artistic thought is under strong pressure of the marketing strategies.

Following this discussion, it is also interesting that despite the fact that product placement requires a lower budget in terms of production, it is much more expensive to broadcast than a regular 30 second TV commercial. Therefore, it is admissible and well understood that in the capitalist system every producer needs to find ways to communicate his/her commodity. The use of promotional tools is an intrinsic aspect related to industries and business development. A product or a service, targeted at social groups, will also compete with other brands in the market. That is what makes advertising, public relation activities and other promotional tools so important to competitive corporations in the marketing field.

Nevertheless, it is also evident that the relationship between consumers and producers requires some ethical and regulatory standards to guide such forms of communication. In this context, transparency and clear identification is an undeniable requirement, mainly if we consider the common standards in self-regulation applied to the advertising industry. The advertising regulations in Canada, for example, state that a paid message broadcast on the mass media, must be easily identifiable. The viewer or consumer should be able to recognize an advertisement, as an amount of space or time that was bought to be broadcast. This aspect is even more controversial if we establish connections with the journalistic work. That is because a great part of the capital (income) that runs a media station comes from advertising trades. So if we consider some financial and ideological influences, there may be only a slight boundary between these two genres – advertising and journalism. For example: it is unlikely that a private TV station will cover news related to the sweatshop (labour conditions) of a big international corporation that has employees in a third world country. The probability will be even lower if this industry warrants big profits for the TV channel, in terms of advertising spots.

If product placement tends to be disguised and mixed with other media activities, such as journalism and/or movie series production, we may infer that the argument for using it for marketing purposes lacks by genre identification and correct communication correspondence. This is why product placement is a controversial issue in the media environment. To clarify this controversy even more, we cite the first two topics of the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards:

1. Accuracy and Clarity

(a) Advertisements must not contain inaccurate or deceptive claims, statements, illustrations or representations, either direct or implied, with regard to a product or service. In assessing the truthfulness and accuracy of a message, the concern is not with the intent of the sender or precise legality of the presentation. Rather, the focus is on the message as received or perceived, i.e. the general impression conveyed by the advertisement.

(b) Advertisements must not omit relevant information in a manner that, in the result, is deceptive.

(c) All pertinent details of an advertised offer must be clearly and understandably stated.

(d) Disclaimers and asterisked or footnoted information must not contradict more prominent aspects of the message and should be located and presented in such a manner as to be clearly visible and/or audible.

(e) Both in principle and practice, all advertising claims and representations must be supportable. If the support on which an advertised claim or representation depends is test or survey data, such data must be reasonably competent and reliable, reflecting accepted principles of research design and execution that characterize the current state of the art. At the same time, however, such research should be economically and technically feasible, with due recognition of the various costs of doing business.

(f) The entity that is the advertiser in an advocacy advertisement must be clearly identified as the advertiser in either or both the audio or video portion of the advocacy advertisement.

2. Disguised Advertising Techniques

No advertisement shall be presented in a format or style which conceals its commercial intent.

Finally, in the academic environment, journalism and information content in the media setting is often taught to be impartial, objective and transparent. This is an idealistic perspective and sometimes does not match with the everyday reality. The exchange of several interests, almost like commodities that can be traded, supersedes impartialism and objectivism. Human and professional roles in society are crossed by many subjectivities and each of them may have power to influence social groups to take part in their ideological and commercial intentions. We are able to infer that this also applies to the media field. Perhaps it would be more realistic and pragmatic if professionals in this area acknowledged this condition and reformulated conceptions and ethical directions to communication and media business practices.

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