

Country of Origin Effect in International Business

Strategic and Consumer Perspectives

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Chapter 5

Communicating the Country-of- Origin in Advertising

Semiotic Persuasion

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5 Communicating the Country-of-Origin in Advertising

Semiotic Persuasion

Ewa Szczęsna

Introduction

The definitions of commercial advertising, regardless of whether they present an economic, sociological, psychological, or linguistic perspective, define it as messaging of a persuasive nature. Traditionally, advertising is perceived as a message informing about a given product (or service) and encouraging its recipients to make a purchase (or make use of a service). However, in the case of modern advertising, information on the object of the ad is reduced to a considerable degree, and it is becoming increasingly uncommon to openly encourage or persuade the recipients to undertake a given action. The development of modern advertising is moving towards concealing the persuasive nature of its messaging, avoiding direct, overt persuasion, and concealing the fictionality of the messaging by blurring the boundaries between advertising and other forms of textuality and reality itself.

Shifts in the ways of functioning of persuasion are not a phenomenon limited to advertising. Other changes pertain to the place and form of persuasion in modern culture in general, as well as in social life and, in effect, in different messages, including those in which persuasive influence was not considered thus far to be one of the main components. The hybridisation of culture at a time of the development of global commerce, digital communication, social media, cultural convergence (Jenkins, 2016), destabilisation of blurred genres (Geertz, 1983, p. 19), and remediation (Bolter, Grusin, 2000) results in the creation of multimodal discourses (Leeuwen, 2005). Boundaries are blurred between media forms, discourses, genres, and functions of messages. Thus, texts previously considered to be informative or aesthetic are imbued with persuasion, while those created to be vehicles of persuasive messaging resign from overt persuasion in favour of soft, indirect persuasion, in which the vehicle of encouragement and the creation of specific connotations is the semiotic dimension of the message, which operationalises elements from different genres and discourses.

Persuasion in advertising takes on variable forms. It is conditioned by the nature of the medium, the recipient, and the object of the advertisement. Of significance for the form of the messaging and the persuasive effectiveness are also economic matters, the technology of messaging, as well as considerations tied to shaping the brand image, product, marketing policy, or political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. These conditions intertwine and permeate one another, thus shaping persuasion in advertising.

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One distinctive feature of modern advertising is that it “conceals” persuasion with acts other than encouragement, which are realised through language, image, sound, movement, and interactivity. These are adulation, offering friendship, offering help, guaranteeing something, offering, thanking, and promising benefits. These become persuasive tools and vehicles of advertising persuasion. Of significance for advertising is connecting its objects to such values as beauty, goodness, or truth, i.e., values that, for centuries, were considered by our culture to be prized and worthwhile. Advertising changes the existing way in which values manifest themselves by anchoring them in the offered objects or even equating them with these objects. The juxtaposition of facts and values present in philosophy, between which there is no logical path, is being abolished. In advertising, this connection is either suggested or pointed out outright, and it takes on the marks of an actual event. Displaying values in objects becomes easier thanks to the engagement of cutting-edge messaging technologies in the creation of advertisements. Modern technology, which Heidegger calls a way of revealing (1977, pp. 12–14), is not only instrumental in nature but also participates in the collection and creation of meanings. The computerised creation of moving images and sounds, which makes use of cutting-edge digital technologies, allows for the creation of simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994) – representations rooted in reality, albeit more perfect – ideal.

Modern persuasion is polysemiotic and polysensory in nature. Advertising can influence to the same degree as the written word, sound, smell, or moving, multidimensional pictures, as well as interactivity, by engaging the senses of sight, hearing, smell, and touch. The recipient is influenced by the interaction of multiple systems of signs. For instance, images with rich, warm colours have the effect of idealising the object of the advertisement and depicting it as friendly to the recipient. By the same token, by using light and shadow on the surface of an image, we can evaluate and hierarchise the presented looks, hierarchise them with slow motion, tie specific emotions to an object of the ad with the use of music, or even turn the messaging into the world of the recipient with the use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies.

The development of semiotic persuasion operationalising different codes of signs enables us to turn the form of the message of advertising into vehicles of aesthetic messaging. The use of well-selected computer-modelled looks, correct lighting, and shadowing allow us to communicate that, which is in the sphere of prized values (e.g., beauty, goodness, nobleness, or safety), or messaging that is welcome with respect to the advertised object. Textual representations of the structures of human thought (e.g., metaphorical or narrative thinking) used in advertising also have a multivariate form. Polysemiotic communication allows us to concurrently affect different senses and reach the consciousness of the individual. In effect, the persuasive effect is strengthened and more efficient. The recipient has “learnt” to analyse and critically approach persuasive content anchored in the written word, particularly referring to the rational sphere, but he or she is decidedly less resilient to the concurrent influence of complex forms of polysemiotic persuasion (textual-graphical-sonic influence) and aesthetic-emotional persuasion.

These principles also pertain to visual advertising based on the country-of-origin effect (COE) of a given brand. The analysis of such messages shows that they are efficient because their persuasive strategy is anchored in the structures of human thought. These are: metaphorical and narrative thinking, using repetitions, symbols, stereotypes, mythisation and accompanying aestheticisation. Depending on the strategy of a given advertisement or the entire campaign, these structures can combine and mutually strengthen one another; it is also possible for one of them to dominate. They work with a view to communicating the COO, creating a desired image thereof from the perspective of a brand, and tying it to a brand. As such, they become persuasive strategies. What is crucial is that they are realised with the use of the semiotic organisation of the message – the semantics of the written and iconic dimensions (and in the case of audiovisual messaging, also sound and moving pictures) – and the relationships that these codes enter into and which turn them into vehicles for advertising persuasion. The combination of both of these factors – the use of structures of human thought and different semiotic codes for messaging – leads to persuasive advertising strategies based on the COE concealing, on the one hand, overt persuasion and, on the other hand being more influential thanks to engaging different senses. These factors participate in the creation of the COO as a non-material brand factor (Balabanis, Diamantopoulos, 2014). They model consumers' knowledge of a given country and shape their emotional attitude thereto, then tie both to a brand as an epithet, influence its perception and evaluation, and shape their intent to make a purchase. They are therefore actants – actors-network (Latour, 2015), which both influence one another and co-create a network of relationships, in which the product (brand) and its consumer (target) enter into the extra-textual reality. In effect, they exert actual influence on the social, commercial, political, and cultural spheres, but they are also shaped thereby themselves as actors in a network of relationships. This leads to such messages, which are in fact fictional, and the effect of persuasive creation, obtaining the valour of truth and becoming genuine actors in marketing discourse and social life.

The Metaphor Strategy

Metaphor is one of the basic structures of human thought (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980). This term pertains to the creation of mutual relationships between the semantic and connotative fields of two textual elements so that a third meaning emerges. The juxtaposed and linked elements have no direct semantic ties; however, as they enter mutual relationships, a joint feature is foregrounded in the field of denotations and connotations, which enables us to transfer the other meanings from one element to another and allow them to interact with each other, so that a third meaning is created. The textual elements juxtaposed in advertisements based on the COE are, e.g., the country's flag and the brand's product alongside the other elements of the image; the name of the country in adjectival form in an advertising slogan along the product (e.g., the slogan: *Italian style* alongside the image of shoes of the advertised brand; the slogan: *German quality* alongside an image of a car from the

advertised brand). Elements that trigger metaphorical thinking belong to different systems of signs: iconic (photographic representations, images, symbolic signs), verbal, and graphical (signs). In the process of reception, they are forced into multi-directional and mutual relationships, which allow for the emergence of different semantic ties between the product and its COO.

One good example is the visual advertisement of *Bertolli* sauces, which refers to the COO – Italy and Tuscany in particular (for its visuals, similarly as for other discussed examples, see links indicated within the “references” section). This region is known not only for its architectural landmarks, paintings, and sculptures but also for its flawless wines and delicious and healthy cuisine. This last association was used in the *Bertolli* ad. In the foreground, we can see two packages of traditional *Bertolli* pasta sauce, one in a glass bottle and another in a packet with text in Dutch, *traditional Tuscan pasta sauce*. Both packaging items are set on a wooden counter in the central part of the image. They take up 1/3 of its surface area. In the background, we can see the highland landscape of fields with silhouettes of single village homes, typical for the Tuscany region. This identification is further strengthened by the text on the packaging in the central part of the image (Tuscan sauce). The following colours dominate: red (sauce in the bottle, the image of tomatoes on the labels, the dominant colour of the brand logo), green (light green packaging, dark green in nature), yellow, and brown. The image is overlaid with a yellow-red light filter resembling the light of the setting sun. The image invokes a feeling of peace, rest, and safety; it invokes associations with nature, warmth, ripe fruit, and good taste. The colour palette and elements of the image lead the recipient to interpret the ad’s elements (landscape, products, and brand name) as being connected in a meaningful way. The recipients set the elements of the messaging in mutual relationships by way of association by proximity (Eco, 1991) and transfer meanings and associations invoked by some elements of the image (here, e.g., the landscape) to others (e.g., the COO, followed by a brand) in the process of semiosis (Peirce, 1956). This act of interpretation creates multidirectional metaphoric meanings, which are then tied to the actual object and the given country. In effect, the Italian region of Tuscany becomes a warm region of fields of tomatoes and herbs growing in the sun, which are used in the traditional recipes for Tuscan pasta sauces from the *Bertolli* brand, a brand associated with traditional, proven recipes, Tuscan nature, and a hot Italian climate.

This advertisement (along with most advertisements based on the COE) makes use of the human ability to think metaphorically, the effect of which is the creation of new meanings that are not present directly in the messaging itself. This mode of thinking is triggered when the elements of the messaging have no direct relationship (highland landscape and the labels on sauce packaging), but this relationship is suggested indirectly by that which connects both elements in the field of their existence as signs or in the field of denotations and connotations. In the analysed case, the implicit shared elements are: Tuscany (its landscape and sauces), Tuscan tomatoes (planted on fields and enclosed in the sauce packaging), and the palette of warm colours on the packaging and its surroundings. The common elements

(suggested similarity) allow recipients to initiate the interaction between the semantic fields of both elements (sauce packaging and the Tuscan landscape), so that a third meaning emerges: *Bertolli* sauces are prepared from tomatoes ripening in the hot Tuscan sun, in the Tuscan landscape, in accordance with the traditional Tuscan recipe.

The relationship between the sauce packaging (brand) and the landscape is created through the intermediation of the COO – the “warm” (presented in warm colours) Tuscany. In other words, the COO is of key significance – a factor that triggers the transfer of meanings and associations tied to elements of the image to the object of the advertisement and the creation of a new sense ascribed to a brand.

Metaphor as an advertising strategy is very persuasive. It takes the form of a riddle, which attracts attention and engages the reader intellectually. On the one hand, it provides the recipient with a feeling of interpretative freedom; it does not state anything directly but encourages independent interpretation of the meanings of the messaging. On the other hand, it does point to a specific meaning. With the help of metaphor, advertisement synthesises the messaging and engages the recipient in the process of interpreting meanings, which helps in remembering a brand. It also leaves the recipient with the belief that the meanings ascribed to the advertisement are fully true and believable, as they are the result of their own interpretation. The use of a metaphorical strategy in advertising is conducive to camouflaging overt persuasion. By setting an image or a story against the advertised object (brand), the messaging limits itself to suggesting to the recipient a certain association between both depictions. The strength of the influence of this strategy rests in the fact that it is the recipients who make the association between a brand and different notions and emotions that arise from the presented image. The metaphor is a “talent of thinking”, a “transaction between contexts” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 92). It is not just an embellishment of discourse, a new statement on some part of reality, or its creation. For this reason, metaphorical actions in advertisements encompass not only the textual dimension but also the visual dimension, the sonic dimension, and the presented stories themselves. Reading the abstract concepts included in the structure of the metaphor provides satisfaction to the recipient and thus leads him or her to more easily accept the content of the advertisement itself. In the case of advertisements, the satisfaction of successfully reading the metaphor is even greater, given the fact that the metaphor is “explained” by the advertised object and the elements of analogy and similarity that it is based on are easily noticeable.

One crucial element of the art of persuasion in advertising is strengthening metaphorical structures with trans-semiotic repetitions, analogies, symbols, and epithets, which allow for the intensification of the influence on different senses and make the messaging more suggestive and more efficiently enshrined in memory. In the case of the analysed example of *Bertolli* sauces, the Tuscan nature of the product is repeated in different sign systems: stated outright in the name itself (*Tuscan sauce*), tied to the typical landscape of the region, and tied to the brand itself. The use of colour and the selection of elements of the image epithetise the product, while the trademark included in the upper-left-hand corner may be interpreted as a regional symbol.

In visual advertisements based on the COE, the function of a symbol is often played by the image of a national flag. One interesting measure associated therewith is the use of paraphrases of this symbol as well as allusions that maintain respect with regard to the sign identifying the country, all the while imbuing it with new meanings that are also tied to the brand itself. For instance, in the case of a visual advertisement for *Festina* brand clocks, the face of a young, beautiful, and modern woman on a photograph was painted in such a way that it became a canvas with a white Greek cross on a red background. The photographed girl with short, light-coloured, spiky hair, a nose ring, an original woven necklace, and interesting face paint combines in her look tradition with modernity, as well as universal beauty with intriguing individuality, and those attributes are transferred in the act of reception of the advertisement to the nearby watch of the *Festina* brand, as well as the COO – Switzerland. The method of using the country's symbol allows for a positive association with this country, also associated here with such features as modernity, attractiveness – beauty, and individualism, which are then transferred to the nearby *Festina* clock.

The Use of Stereotype, Mythisation, and Aestheticisation

In the case of advertisements based on the COE, a crucial role is played by references to stereotypes. Stereotypes are simplified images in our heads (Lippmann, 1956), formulaic perceptions of reality (e.g., ethnic groups, professional groups, and countries), created in our consciousness on the basis of the opinions of others. They are social beliefs that have their specific representations in the text or are silently assumed therein. They influence our decisions (Bodenhausen, Wyer, 1985). The use of stereotypes places not only the object of the advertisement but also the messaging itself in a space known to the recipient and common to a multitude of recipients. Stereotypes refer to the “cognitive frugality” and “good mood” associated with having sure knowledge of a given subject – a belief that is included in the structure of a stereotype itself and triggered in anyone who succumbs to its power. For this reason, advertisements, on the one hand, eagerly make use of existing stereotypes and, on the other, equally eagerly modify them or create new ones.

References to stereotypical thinking in advertising aim at economising messaging and ensuring that the recipient will make associations between the product and specific beliefs; stereotypes are reality-simplifying beliefs on a given topic, tied to the comfort of having readily available knowledge. Stereotypes allow us to tie products and their COO beliefs that are viewed as commonly held by multiple participants of a culture, sure, and no longer in need of verification. In the case of advertising messaging, positive or neutral stereotypical beliefs are commonly used. Furthermore, these beliefs are modified in such a way as to invoke only positive connotations in the recipient.

For instance, when the recipient of an advertisement for *Costa* Coffee sees a representation of the Colosseum in the centre of the image, filled, as if it were a cup, with coffee with foamed milk in the shape of a heart, he or she automatically ties the product to Italy and sees it as something that is its product (the brewed

coffee is surrounded by a Roman building – it is in its middle). This is possible because the Colosseum is one of the most commonly recognised architectural landmarks in the world and a symbol of Rome, and for people from other countries, it clearly invokes the uniqueness of antique culture and Italy as a place where one can experience this uniqueness. The Colosseum, therefore, is a crucial component of stereotypical beliefs about Italy, in particular among those who never had the chance to visit the country and know it mostly from, e.g., tourist guides or educational and cultural materials on its antique roots. The slogan accompanying the iconic representation – *Feel the Italian taste. Feel costa* – noticeable at a second glance, reinforces the recipient's belief in the validity of their interpretation. The third element confirming the COO and its tradition is the use of a font with letters designed to resemble uncial script, used in early Greek but also Latin inscriptions. In different sign systems (iconic representations, the shape of the lettering, the meaning of the slogan), analogous meanings are carried – the taste of Italian coffee and the sense of Italian style – both in the best possible way. In the textual dimension, this is invoked by the word *taste* itself, which combines both terms in the visual dimension: the image of the brew, which is tasty, as well as the landmark, which is tied to the traditional, refined taste of classic antiquity.

References to stereotype and stereotypisation are made not only by the way of reaching for recognisable (often globally) icons – symbols that allow us to associate images with particular COOs of products (e.g., the Eiffel Tower, the Colosseum). Of equal importance are references to typical regional landscapes, the lifestyles of their inhabitants, and their unique character traits. Not only do advertisements make use of existing stereotypes, but they also alter them imbue them with positive connotations by introducing, e.g., elements that refresh and modernise existing beliefs. The factor that positively modifies stereotypes is often the brand itself, which is depicted, on the one hand, as anchored in tradition and the past and, on the other, as being modern, belonging to the recipient's present, or even contributing to the creation of their future. Modifications of stereotypical beliefs with a view to modernisation also use the semiotic organisation of a message. One good example is the British visual advertisement for *Jotul* fireplace inserts.

The foreground of the image contains a fireplace insert with a fire burning inside. The fireplace is placed on a background of a grey seaside landscape with a house visible in the distance, its shape resembling a fireplace insert (flat roof, two big windows lit with yellow light – a front window and a side window similar to fireplace windows – set in the grey wall of the house), along with a *hytte* – a summer house with a view on a fjord, referring to Norwegian tradition. The upper foreground part of the image contains the sign *Sale. Quality made affordable*, while in the upper right-hand corner there is a black square with the white sign *Timeless Norwegian Craft*, the *Jotul* company logo, and the Norwegian flag. Below, there is a red promotional circle resembling a sticker with the white sign *Save £200*, and underneath, there is a black circle with the white sign *25 years guarantee on all external cast iron parts*.

The influence of an advertisement and the creation of meanings were based on a reference to common knowledge, associations, and stereotypical beliefs about

Norway as a cold, rocky, desolate country with harsh, clean nature, inhabited by “Vikings”, relatively close-mouthed, practical, distant, albeit satisfied people who go skiing and mountain walking and have a summer house with a view on a fjord. The ad makes use of this stereotype of a harsh country, while underlining the element of warmth and safety, the source of which are *Jotul* fireplace inserts, produced for years in Norway. In the creation of these meanings, of key importance is the semiotic dimension of the messaging, which is rooted in the contrast between cold and warm colours. Shades of grey are tied to a landscape invoking cold and humidity. The fireplace itself is graphite-coloured. These colours contrast with the warmth of yellow, orange, and red colours. These are primarily the red and orange colours of the fire burning in the fireplace but also the yellow tint of the light coming from the house in the distance and the red of the *Sale* sign, the field with promotional information, the Norwegian flag, and the fire symbol in the *Jotul* company logo. The warm colours of the fire in the fireplace are at the forefront of the image. They are the colours of the human-controlled element of fire, which is contrasted with the elements of cold water and cold air. Warmth, or even heat and energy, are not only associated with the information on a promotion, but also with the fire in the fireplace, the brand logo, and the flag of the COO – all kept in warm colours. The semiotic dimension of the advertisement carries information about a double benefit: power and energy that one can gain, a financial benefit (the chance to purchase a high-quality product for a reduced price), as well as a living benefit of having access to a warm, cosy house devoid of humidity. Of equal importance are the cold colours. By keeping the image of the landscape in similar colours as the frame of the fireplace, the advertisement allows for the use of metaphorical thinking: the heat and glow of the fire in the grey fireplace will warm up the cold, light the sunless days, and dehumidify the Norwegian climate. The graphite frame of the insert, corresponding to the grey, cold surroundings of the *hytte*, guarantees safety and control over the element of fire.

The relationships between the semantics of the signs and the image are also of importance. The word *quality* in connection with the image of the fireplace connotes solid construction, guaranteeing warmth inside the home even during the harshest winter. This solidity and all of the connoted benefits are guaranteed by the Norwegian *Jotul* company, representing, as the sign states, *Timeless Norwegian Craft* – that is, care put into each unit of the product. Here, the reference to the COO is a reference to its climate conditions: the Kingdom of Norway lies in the temperate oceanic climate zone and the temperate cold oceanic climate zone, bordering the subpolar oceanic climate zone. Stereotypically, Norway is associated with a cold, humid climate, rocky terrain, clean, inaccessible nature, and a land under the cover of ice and snow. The harsh climate conditions of Norway are a guarantee of quality for a company that was founded in the mid-19th century and exists to this day.

Prepared for the British market, the advertisement foregrounds what is common for the COO and the target country: a rocky, seaside landscape and the temperate oceanic climate are also features of Great Britain. The advertisement initiates the following line of thought in its British recipients: since Norwegian fireplace

inserts of the *Jotul* company, with their over 100-year-old traditions, work in a much colder climate than ours and provide high quality, they will surely be useful here (which is also possible thanks to the 25-year guarantee). Timeless Norwegian craftsmanship is a guarantee of care for the highest quality of each unit.

While stereotypisation depends on the use of available knowledge and simplified, existing social beliefs on a given topic, mythisation allows for superimposing direct meanings with new ones as well as assigning values and attributes thereto, which are sought after and highly praised. An advertised seasoning may be associated with happiness and family health, while chocolate is associated with love and erotic experiences. In the literal sense, spice is a component of dishes used to improve their taste and smell, and chocolate is a sugar confectionery made mostly of cocoa paste, fat, and sweeteners.

The structure of mythical thought (Barthes, 1973), in which the layer of expression and existing literal meanings are superimposed with additional meanings, is present in advertisements based on the COE. In such messaging, mythisation encompasses not only a brand but also the COO itself. It allows for the strengthening of the ties between both and multiplying the strength of the influence of mythical thinking by way of transferring superimposed meanings from one element to another. In the example of *Costa* coffee analysed before, Italian taste/sense of style is the element that connects a masterpiece of antique architecture with the coffee brew. The category of Italian style, or timeless, refined Italian culture, encompasses both objects, which are located at the same ontic level. Connotations connected with the Colosseum as a unique historical attraction allowing us to experience (taste) the culture of the distant past are transferred into the coffee, which also combines tradition with the present.

The structure of mythical thinking was also used by the creators of a series of visual advertisements for *Rodney Strong* wine. One of the advertisements from this cycle depicts a bottle of wine in the background of a highland landscape with vineyards. The entire image is in black and white, sepia, and gold. In the foreground, taking up 1/3 of the image, is a bottle of *Rodney Strong* wine on a wooden counter, intertwined with a grapevine with golden leaves. The brown wooden boards and the highland landscape with vineries in different shades of black, grey, and white, with elements of sepia, evoke the past, tradition, simplicity, and nature. These colours are also present on the bottle and the label, which are kept in the style of classic elegance and simplicity. The design of the bottle combines a simple form with something subtle and refined. The superimposed meanings are tradition, artistry, and aristocratic form. Their carriers are the aforementioned colours but also shapes, fonts invoking elegance, the unassuming presence of gold colour, and the name of the region itself. The gold band on the neck of the bottle, the gold borders of the labels, and the gold leaves of the grapevine wrapped around the bottle are elements that tie the product together with the gold logo of the brand, completing the label and being repeated in the lower right-hand corner of the image. Gold is a symbol of perfection, majesty, regality, the elixir of life, richness, and abundance. It was commonly associated with the sun and godliness. The colour, also present on the bottle and the grapevine, ties this symbolism with the product (brand) as well

as with the region-of-origin (which is strengthened by the presence of the region name). It invokes the highest quality, elevated birth, and artistry. Furthermore, the symbolism is strengthened by the delicate presence of the colour red – in the signs on the label and on the grapevine wrapped around the bottle. The claret hue of the colour refers to wine itself, but red is also a symbol of royal power, life, passion, love, and health (in the past, red clothes were seen as adequate protection against pox and measles). The symbolism of life and passion corresponds perfectly with the name of the brand, which commemorates the founder of the company, *Rodney Strong Vineyards* – a pioneer of wine and a former dancer, Rodney Strong. The cultural background of the recipient (e.g., a European) allows them to intuitively trigger these meanings and transfer them to the product and its region-of-origin.

The significance of place-of-origin is attested to by the advertising slogan: *Place Matters. Sonoma County*. It initiates the connection made by the recipient between the attributes of the brand and those of the region-of-origin – famous for its wineries, production of wines, and sampling on wine tours. In effect, both the brand and its COO undergo mythisation. The mythical element (meanings superimposed on that which is literal) common to the brand and the COO strengthens the semantic relationship between elements of the messaging, which in turn strengthens the persuasive aspect of the advertisement.

The *Place Matters* slogan, the image of the Sonoma County vineyards, the bottle of wine, and the golden grapevine are elements that also repeat in the subsequent visual advertisements of the campaign. Another repeating element is the same colour tones – the combination of achromatic colours and sepia – invoking elegance, artistry, and tradition – with gold, which connotes richness, perfection, and majesty. The use of the structure of mythical thinking allows for the superimposition over the brand and its region-of-origin of such values as artistry, tradition, sublimity, and community. New elements of subsequent visual advertisements also participate in the superimposition of these meanings, thanks to which the brand image becomes enriched. In the case of one such ad, these are: an image of a dancer, referring to the profession of the company founder and invoking the vaudeville tradition from the mid-20th century; the *History Matters* slogan above; and the sign in the central part of the image: “*Celebrating our Founder’s Passion for the Arts and Winemaking: Exclusive Wine Partner of Wells Fargo Center for the Arts*”. In the case of another, these are: an image of the clapping hands of the audience as the background for the sign *Community Matters*; below the image, the sign *Rodney Strong Celebrates 50 Years of Winemaking*.

The way of depicting the audience – the cropped hands of the elegantly dressed audience invoke ovations after a theatre play or dance recital – this last association may appear in the case of recipients who have seen the campaign’s other visual advertisements, or cognisant of the fact that a dancer founded the company. At the same time, the clapping hands are directed at the Sonoma County landscape with its vineyards, which are located on the left-hand side of the image, along with bottles of wine in the centre. The brand (wine bottle) is the object that connects the COO (place) and the community, thanks to which both of these factors gain significance. At the same time, the advertisement accents that which is tied to the

singular, specific act of tasting wine – the attention of the recipient is drawn to the foregrounded bottle of wine and the sharpened image of a male hand (on the background of the blurred clapping audience).

All the elements of the campaign underline the continuity of the company, which, since its inception, has consequently combined love for art and beauty with love for producing wine, the perfection, artistry, and flawless taste of which may only be nurtured thanks to Sonoma County wineries.

Another crucial factor supporting the mythisation used in *Rodney Strong* advertisements is the semiotic aestheticisation of the messaging, which introduces a hierarchy of the image elements and results in that which is real and daily becoming beautiful and unique. Furthermore, this aestheticisation plays well with references to the art of dance and, broadly speaking, performative art. The beauty of the nature of Sonoma County and the beauty of art and tradition combine in the advertised brand.

Beauty, considered to be one of the most basic human needs, is a value in and of itself. Its strength rests, i.e., in the fact that it is hard to rationally explain and define once and for all, as well as in the fact that these definitions may be numerous. At present, beauty is considered to pertain to those things that are perceived as beautiful or that may be perceived as such. As a source of the feeling of pleasure, beauty plays a persuasive role in advertising. It is the most simple way of connecting daily life with an ideal. Even Plato in his “Symposium” referred to beauty as the ideal made visible, while in modern times Gadamer (1987) considered the ontological function of beauty to be the bridging of the gap between the ideal and reality. By locating the object of advertising close to the representations, which are vehicles of beauty, the objects themselves are perceived as guaranteeing the harmony of the world. The use of beauty in advertising in the form of people, nature, and objects is tied to the glorification of both the brand itself and everyone who comes into contact with it. This is possible thanks to the unique feature of aesthetic values to undertake transgressive actions – to enter into the content accompanying them and make it more noble. Beauty, usually associated with high art, elevates the advertising messaging and raises it to the rank of art. It explains the existence of both the advertisement itself and the advertised product as such (brand).

Advertising is an example of the presence of aesthetics outside of the space of art (Welsch, 1997). It confirms the significance of the aesthetic experience of daily life (Saito, 2007). It makes use of the fact that aesthetic experience may be initiated by, e.g., the look of a product and its surroundings, taste and smell, touch, opening of a present, reception of elements of our surrounding social reality, and natural phenomena (fauna and flora, sunset, and rainbow). In the analysed advertisements from the *Rodney Strong* brand, the aesthetic experience is initiated by activating mental images of the refined taste of wine by way of tying it with the unique character of the Sonoma region, the gold of the grapevine, and the artistry of performative art. Touch is also activated; the refined look of the bottle is presented from a very close distance, as if it were in reach of the recipient’s hand; one of the advertisements presents a close-up image of hands, which are also associated with the sense of touch. Another factor participating in the creation of the aesthetic experience of the product is the use of the technique of artistic photography.

The aesthetic experience of daily life, engaging all senses (not just hearing and sight, as in the case of the reception of high art), is an important source of the experience of pleasure. If – as Berleant (1992, p. 135) correctly claims – each aesthetic experience is a creative act (and not just the passive contemplation of an aesthetic object), then in the case of the aesthetic experience of daily life, this act and the ensuing aesthetic pleasure are primarily anchored in sensual and emotional reception. Intellectual reception is of secondary importance here, which strengthens the persuasive potential of the aesthetic experience. Tying beauty to utilitarian objects makes them consumable objects and acts of daily life. Beauty becomes placed in a space of promise – promise of being made available to anyone who purchases the advertised product.

For this reason, besides referring to beautiful representation, of significance in advertising is aestheticisation, which at present is introduced with the use of digital technologies. Modelling colours, light and shadow, shapes, and operating with different levels of blurring/sharpening are just some of the examples of shaping the semiotic layer in such a way as to turn it into an impulse for the recipient to create specific meanings, associations, and emotions.

Aestheticisation supports and strengthens the mythisation strategy in advertisements based on the COE. It is a way of capturing the interest of the recipient, triggering in them a desire to experience aesthetic pleasure from coming into contact with the advertised product as a source of beauty in and of itself, as well as the beauty of the COO and that which is associated therewith. In this way, aestheticisation is directed technologically and has a persuasive nature. It strengthens values and attributes, which, in the process of mythisation are superimposed over a brand and the COO. The efficiency of aestheticisation is high, considering that it does not require explanation and is rooted in the consent and acceptance of the recipient, which multiplies its ability to persuade. Advertising refers to universal standards of beauty; it is not interested in what is considered beautiful subjectively but in that which is commonly perceived to be aesthetically valuable. This leads to the standardisation of beauty and the preservation and creation of commonly accepted norms, which at the same time are promised to satisfy individual tastes.

The Narrativisation Strategy

Another crucial strategy for engaging the recipient in the messaging, which is also used in visual advertising based on the COE, is stimulating the recipient to create a narrative. While audiovisual and verbal advertising create stories that comprise a sequence of events tied together in a cause-and-effect manner, visual advertisement draws upon narrativisation; it makes use of images that lead the recipient to create or complete stories (Fludernik, 2005, p. 19–25). Both narration and narrativisation are cognitive constructs (Ryan, 2004, p. 9), which refer to the human disposition of thinking about events retrospectively and prospectively (Carr, 1986, p. 84). Narration is a disposition of human thought, a way of getting to know and ordering the world, of giving sense to events, and of protecting them from being forgotten. It enables us to place facts and fictions on the same ontic level and, in effect, allows

for their unrestricted combination; the permeation of elements belonging to different modes of existence. This last property of narration – namely, being above truth-fiction relationships – is one of the reasons why advertising so often adopts it as a strategy. The goal of advertising is to ensure that the recipient sees its contents as being consistent with reality – to grant them the status of truth. One factor conducive to such identification is undoubtedly the object of the advertisement itself, present in the world of the recipient as a consumer. Another is the graphical or verbal reference to the COO, present in the geographical-political reality of the recipient. The third factor is the use of the recipient's structure of thinking – i.e., narration – which is conducive to lending credence to the advertised content.

Thanks to narration, the events presented along with the object of the advertisement become ordered and sequenced in a cause-and-effect manner. Narration is a tool with a view to granting sense to the object of the advertisement and providing it with attributes of a thing which is necessary for the satisfaction of the recipient. It is a way of elevating a brand, providing it with particular weight by way of situating it in the centre of a story. The advertising narration separates the object from other objects, which are depicted as common. It is provided with the attributes of a thing that has unique properties, of a magical subject – one that knows the desires of the recipient and is capable of satisfying them.

Including the advertised object in some story makes it easier for the recipient to remember it, as well as provides it with a historic nature that elevates it to the rank of an important hero of a story. Telling stories has the power of attracting interest and stroking curiosity. It engages the recipient, particularly when it requires him or her – as in the case of narrativisation – to engage in narrative thought, complete a story, or create it outright. In this process of creation, a very significant role is played by all of the semiotic elements of the representation – not just the advertised brand itself and the COO, but also the portrayed scenery, the choice of colours, the use of light and shadow, as well as the composition of the elements of an image – and it is these elements that are transformed into a story in the process of reception. They decide on the meanings and emotions created by the recipient and how they will be tied to the advertised brand. Below is an example.

The disposition of the recipient to think in the categories of a story, and in particular, in the categories of narrativisation, is at the foundation of the French advertisement of *Jotul* fireplace inserts. The image has been divided into two parts. On the left, on a green field, there is a *Jotul* fireplace insert with a visible burning fire and pieces of firewood organised underneath. Above, there is the slogan *Rendez-vous au coin du feu!* The right-hand side of the advertisement contains a generic scene from everyday life: a photograph depicting a man and a boy sitting on a clearing in the forest by the fire and having a friendly, smiley conversation about something. The image initiates in the recipient a tale of a common male trip of a father and his son to the forest in early autumn, of shared adventure, of a conversation with a view to strengthening the father-son bond, of fatherly care – the father is holding a stick in his hand, similar to those visible in the fire, which leads the recipient to point to the father as the person responsible for the fire intended to warm up the boy, as well as responsible for preparing a warm drink. The lit fire, the father with

a stick in his hand, the boy holding a metal cup in his hand – these set-pieces allow the recipient to easily complete the image with events that had taken place prior to the scene – that is, the collection and placement of firewood, lighting the fire, heating up the drink. The photograph itself comes to life and becomes an event, tied in a cause-and-effect manner with other events. The recipient adds further events: a long conversation in a warm, family atmosphere, which is maintained by the warmth of the fire (colours of fire, brown wood) and the enticing forest in early autumn on a rocky terrain (colours green and grey). Narrativisation allows the recipient to turn the photograph of the event into a story. The advertisement stresses the aspect of interpersonal communication, of meeting one another, of warmth – not only in the literal sense in front of the fireplace but also the warmth and satisfaction provided by meeting those closest to us. The slogan invites us to meet up by the home fireplace, a place where usually friends and family members meet, just like the father and son spend time together, conversing by the fire. The adopted analogy – the time spent by the fire in the forest and the time spent by the *Jotul* fireplace at home – is a way of strengthening familial bonds, or bonds of friendship. Associations generated by the photograph on the right – a story of a time well spent, of strengthening familial bonds or bonds of friendship – are transferred to the image on the left-hand side of the advertisement. The triggering of metaphorical thinking is possible thanks to that which connects both images and points to the use of semiotic analogy. These elements are present on both sides: fire – its analogous colours and shape; the grey *Jotul* fireplace frame and the grey of stones around the fire in the woods; the browns of the logs underneath the fireplace and the woods of the sticks in the forest; the marine green of the background image with the fireplace and the marine green of the son's coat (building a connection, ensuring warmth and safety are tied to the child, not the grown-up). Connecting both parts of the advertisement to one another in the process of reception and creation of a joint meaning, a common series of associations, is possible thanks to the use of semiotic analogy, expressing or suggesting analogous meanings in different sign systems or with the help of different elements of the image. And so the slogan on the left-hand side speaks of a meeting by the fireplace, and on the right, we can see a photograph of such a meeting – the meeting of a father with his son by the fire; the fireplace insert frame (on the left) has the same colour as the pieces of rock surrounding the fire (suggestion: the frame is as hard and as permanent as a rock and similar to pieces of rock, it holds the fire inside, which provides safety); the colour of the background (on the left) is the same as the boy's coat (on the right) – the fire of the *Jotul* fireplace will warm your room and your close ones, like the fire warmed up the boy. Another common element is the white sign in the centre of the black circle: *autumn offers*. These offers, on the one hand, pertain to the *Jotul* fireplace insert and meetings in the warm comfort of one's own home, and on the other, to a shared autumn adventure in nature.

The image communicates traditional values – interpersonal love, friendship, conversation, agreement, spending time together with those closest to us, and contact with nature. Tradition as a value is also tied to the COO and the *Jotul* company – its long-lasting operations, as it was founded in 1853 (as the sign on the image states). The Norwegian origin of the company is communicated in the slogan

Timeless Norwegian Craft, placed near the Norwegian flag and a nature motif of a forest on rocky ground.

Elements of the image and the way they are depicted take part in triggering narrativisation in an advertisement based on the COE. Of great importance are semiotic aspects – colours, sharpness of the image, and composition – including the relationships between the COO and the brand. Narrativisation enables us to introduce an element of individual interpretation, conditioned by the personality trait of the recipient but also the cultural context of the target country, made by a specific recipient of the messaging, which engages him or her in the messaging and the brand itself. Narrativisation allows for alternative narrations (Szczęsna, 2017, p. 12), which result in the tailoring of the story of the brand to the needs of the individual consumer, all the while maintaining the most important elements of the given advertisement (product features, values), which are common to all interpretations of a given message.

Conclusions

Constructing the world of the advertisement as a response to the desires, aspirations, and tastes of a consumer is at the foundation of persuasive actions in all advertising. Its messaging, by embodying the desires of a recipient and thus portraying their potential fulfilment, transfers them from the sphere of dreams into the sphere of accessible reality. In this way, advertising embodies the thought present in modern philosophy of perception, namely that things appear to us as they are not because they indeed are like that but because they appear to us as such (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The conducted analyses prove that this principle also pertains to advertising based on the COE.

Communicating the COO in advertising is carried out through:

- including a country's symbol (usually in the form of its national flag);
- including its name – usually as an adjective accompanying a noun (Italian fashion, French perfume, German cars, Japanese electronics, Belgian chocolate, and Chinese silk, but also Japanese precision, German quality, and Italian Creativity) – or pointing directly to the COO (“made-in Japan”);
- including symbolic representations that form clear associations with the given city and country (e.g., Colosseum as a symbol of Rome and Italy);
- including representations characteristic of a given region, e.g., characteristic landscapes, which are also kept in a colour palette reflecting the climate of a given country (e.g. blue hues – the cold climate of Scandinavia; red, orange, and yellow hues – the warm Italian climate). In a situation where these landscapes could also invoke other regions, advertisements make a clear connection between the iconic representation and a noun reference to a given country (e.g., timeless Norwegian craft, Swiss made) or depict its symbol (flag).

The influence of advertisements based on the COE is the result of the use in the creation of this effect of structured and textual measures, which draw upon the cognitive processes of the recipient. These are: metaphorical thinking, symbolic

thinking, narrativisation, thinking with stereotypes, and mythisation, which is usually tied to aestheticisation. In the case of advertising, these structures are strategies working in favour of strengthening the efficiency of the COE and engaging the recipient of the messaging in reading the meanings. The stronger the efficiency, the less noticeable the aspiration of the creator of the messaging to guide the decisions of the recipient. The risk of the persuasion becoming noticeable is minimised by locating it in different semiotic systems of the messaging – in colour, shape, light and shadow, or composition.

When semiotic persuasion refers to different senses, it is less noticeable than when it is verbal. It enables us to shape the messaging in such a way to make it embody the existing desires of a recipient and design new ones, as well as to create in a recipient a feeling of community with the presented world of values tied to the brand. Such a constructed process of persuasive influence allows the recipient to undertake auto-persuasive actions, which they interpret as the effect of their own acts of volition.

Advertising based on the COE refers to the psychosocial construction of the recipient and the structures of human thought. Persuasive influence shifts from a space of direct persuasion into a space of creating the desires and perceptions of the recipient, which are presented as actually existing and as those whose source and guarantee is their COO. The impulse behind their creation is tied to the context of the COO, which accompanies the object of the advertisement. In other words, Italian coffee can be advertised by drawing upon the image of the Colosseum, a Norwegian fireplace insert – a father-son meeting in the forest by the fire; Swiss clock – the image of a modern, beautiful, and uniquely individualistic girl; wine – the image of vineyards, a reference to dancing and shared celebration of important moments in life. A characteristic feature of advertisements based on the COE is that the visual layer of these ads is created in such a way as to ensure that the values created in the mind of the consumer are universal and combine the COO with the target country (e.g., friendship, modernity, tradition, community, and safety). The creation of this community is also supported by the way of depicting the COO – e.g. references to landscapes that are present in both countries.

Advertising mythises the COO – it connects it to desire for the advertised object, messaging, and values, which are elevated beliefs and perceptions in that country. This allows for the creation, in the recipient, of a feeling of similarity with the COO and thus with the brand itself. References to the COO are typically made by known brands whose long tradition is tied to a given country. New brands are less likely to do so – unless they refer to a sector with products of international renown. In the case of historically solidified beliefs and perceptions, as well as those proliferated in mass media in a given country and tied to a specific sector of the economy – the type of a product – such beliefs may be transferred to other, even new, products and brands from this country and sector. This pertains, e.g., to French wine, perfume, and cheeses; Italian fashion and pasta; German cars; Japanese electronics; Belgian chocolate; Chinese silk and porcelain; and Indian spices. It also pertains to the regions of a given country, which are tied in the social consciousness to specific types of products produced therein (e.g., Tuscan sauces).

In the mind of the recipient, what guarantees product quality are traditional or even stereotypical associations tied to the COO. At the same time, they are often challenged, elevated, and enriched by the way of introducing the factor of modernity and more universal messaging and values, combining the COO with the target country. Such shaped meanings, which also draw upon the strategies of narrativisation and metaphor, are tied to the brand. This in turn results in the COO in an advertisement becoming a collection of features, beliefs (contents, associations) adopted thereby, which are modelled, suggested, or stated outright. They are tied to the brand and depicted as desirable by consumers from the target country. In this way, the brand is perceived in the target country as fulfilling values that are also important for recipients in this country.

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Links to Selected Examples of Analysed ADS

Festina:

https://www.hodinky-365.cz/dokumenty/upload/clanky_auto/festina%20swiss%20made2_860.jpg (Access: 03.03.2023).

Rodney Strong:

https://www.google.com/search?q=rodney+strong+place+matters+sonoma&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiev5XU9ur8AhWSuYsKHQ3-CD8Q_AUoA3oECAEQBQ&biw=1440&bih=707&dpr=1#imgrc=W-k7nDOM6j-4xM (Access: 03.03.2023).

Jotul:

<https://heatsource-of-uppingham.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Jotul-2BF160-2BOffer-2B2019.jpg> (Access: 03.03.2003).

Jotul:

https://www.lesarment.fr/wp-content/uploads/JOTUL_AUTOMNE_2020_FACEBOOK_PUBLICATION_V2-1024x538.jpg (Access: 03.03.2023).