

LANGUE ET COMMUNICATION / LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

A Few Insights into Political vs. Commercial Advertorials in Romania

Antonia Cristiana ENACHE¹

Marina Luminița MILITARU²

Raluca Nicoleta ȘERBAN³

Abstract

The present study looks into the hybrid genre of the advertorial, a recently emerging type of text situated at the border between journalism and advertising. The genre is highly flexible in terms of language, style and persuasive strategies, providing various tools for content creators to craft their message, seduce their readership and make them act according to their wishes. The corpus selected includes two commercial and one political advertorial, and our research focuses on the language they use (from technical and specific to refined and elegant), on the way the discourse is structured and organised and, last but not least, on the persuasive strategies therein, on the criteria invoked to bestow legitimacy upon the brand, bond with the audience and build up an emotional connection with them. In this relatively new, hugely versatile type of text, nothing is off-limits; hence, our analysis attempts to shed light on the multifaceted ways in which content creators craft their message so as to attain their marketing objectives.

Keywords: *advertorial; commercial communication; political communication; tone and language; persuasive strategies*

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Introductory remarks

In recent years, the boundaries between journalism, advertising, and political and media communication have become significantly more blurred, with borders melting down and different genres overlapping in

¹ Antonia Cristiana Enache, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania,
antonia.enache@rei.ase.ro

² Marina Luminița Militaru, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania,
marina.militaru.rei.ase.ro

³ Raluca Nicoleta Șerban, Bucharest University of Economic Studies,
raluca.serban@rei.ase.ro

ways that generate new, unexpected challenges for the recipients thereof. The reasons behind this shift are manifold, ranging from the prerequisites of life in modern days (more specifically, the multiscreen world we are all confined to), to the increasing demands of *infotainment* – blending together *information* and *entertainment* (Lilleker, Darren G., 2006: 99) and to the fierce competition content providers face in their relentless quest for reach, readers, voters and market share, respectively.

One of the most significant outcomes of this shift is the emergence of *the advertorial*, a hybrid genre taking the form of “an advertisement written in the style of an editorial or news story” (Jones et al, 2021: 155), a type of text that blends element pertaining to *journalism* (more specifically, to editorials) alongside elements pertaining to *advertising*. Thus, in terms of style and language, this type of text resembles an editorial, although it serves promotional interests and, for ethical reasons, it should be marked as such. While advertorials were initially associated mainly with commercial advertising, they have also made their way into the political realm.

Against this rich and nuanced background, the present research puts forward a qualitative analysis based on a comparison between two commercial advertorials on the one hand (one promoting a no-name dental clinic⁴, published in the well-known Romanian newspaper *Libertatea*, a publication with tabloid origins which gained credibility in recent years for its marked shift towards serious investigative journalism, and one promoting the world-renowned flatpack furniture producer IKEA⁵, published in the health and lifestyle magazine *Avantaje*), and a political one, published on the Romanian news platform *Hotnews*, that endorses digitalisation initiatives by the Romanian National Liberal Party (PNL)⁶ on the other. In our study, we will analyse the structure, discourse, language and persuasive strategies in the three documents, aiming to show the similarities and differences between them and how these align with their communicative purpose. Thus, we are looking to highlight the shifting nature of media discourse and the subtle, nuanced ways in which

⁴ <https://www.libertatea.ro/publicitate-advertorial/de-ce-sa-alegi-serviciile-dentare-premium-de-la-clinica-stomatologica-de-top-dental-premier-din-bucuresti-5268254>, accessed on April 11, 2025.

⁵ <https://www.avantaje.ro/articol/ikea-lanseaza-o-noua-editie-a-colectiei-iconice-stockholm>, accessed on April 12, 2025.

⁶ <https://hotnews.ro/p-pnl-bucuresti-sustine-revolutia-digitala-aducem-statul-mai-aproape-de-cetateni-cu-un-singur-click-1846632>, accessed on April 11, 2025.

commercial and political content creators aim to attract a larger readership, converting them from mere trawlers into obedient “consumers” of political and commercial products, respectively, consumers who are then likely to act pursuant to the content creator’s wishes.

1. Advertorials – in-between journalism and marketing

Advertorials represent *commercial messages* that take the form of an *article*; often, the text is marked by a small-print disclaimer that signals we are looking at sponsored content. They have experienced significant rise and popularity in recent years, having reached remarkable success at targeting customers and prompting a positive response from them. One of the main reasons for this unprecedented triumph appears to be that, due to their hybrid nature, most people are not even aware they are reading commercial content (Wojdyski, Bartosz and Evans, Nathaniel, 2016). Indeed, since advertorials blend elements pertaining to *advertising* and elements related to *journalism* (editorials are known for conveying the editorialist’s genuine thoughts and opinions on a given subject and, while they are opinion-based rather than fact-based and therefore do not claim objectivity, nor are they sponsored content); hence, to this day, a vast majority of readers are still somewhat at a loss when exposed to a hybrid genre that challenges traditional assumptions, since, “in reality (...), advertorials are more confusing and misleading than people expect” (Zhou, Sijing, 2012: 324).

Advertorials are successful not solely because readers do not immediately identify them as paid advertising, but also due to their versatility and to the fact that they allow for endless creativity in terms of language and content. Therefore, while potential buyers have gradually become fed up with advertising and have grown increasingly sceptical of a form of communication that has often disappointed and turned out to be exaggerated, even misleading, the engaging narrative format of the advertorial takes them by storm; when skilfully crafted, an advertorial can morph into a form of art, seducing the readers to the point where they are not even aware of the intrinsic marketing dimension thereof. “Marketers purchase advertorials to educate and entertain readers, as well as promote a product or service. The advertorial is used to connect with readers through story, unlike a traditional print ad or website banner ad that uses limited space to hard pitch a call to action.” (Fisher, Christian, 2023). The purpose of the brand is better served, and attained with increased efficiency, when

combining persuasive and informational elements (Tisapramotkul, Ornuma, 2023: 73). Thus, the boundlessly creative writing style not only provides information about products or services, but also bestows credibility upon the text and, perhaps most importantly, connects with the audience at an emotional level, forming a bond more difficult to break.

As far as the linguistic and structural characteristics of advertorials are concerned, they employ the tone, language and structure of traditionally written editorials, purposefully blurring the lines between information, persuasion and entertainment. The style used is often formal; the more creative the writing becomes, the more it moves away from the overt promotional language and starts replacing the former with subtler persuasive strategies, which can range from mentioning objective facts (like studies or research, statistic or expert quotes) to the use of storytelling and third-person narration. All of these enhance the credibility of the text, make it sound credible and help readers turn a blind eye to the content creator's persuasive intentions.

While the language mimics editorial-writing rules, the content, by contrast, takes over the golden rules of advertising, the most important of which appears to be the classic *problem-solution paradigm*. Once the readers have been made aware of the existence of a problem, their interest is aroused so they will read further, in pursuit of a solution (Zhou, 2012: 333). Reference to the awaited solution is bound to emerge, by more or less subtly mentioning the promoted product or service; skilfully crafted advertorials will make the marketing process so smooth that readers will almost forget this is paid content; in almost all situations, the promotional message will be seamlessly integrated into the editorial-style narrative.

A well-written advertorial will start from understanding the target audience (Enache, Antonia, 2023:212); deeply grasping their pain points will result in an appealing, successful message. Secondly, providing valuable content is what differentiates advertorials from classic advertising. Valuable information and tips must be provided, along with a solution addressing the readers' problem. "Media companies publish advertorials and intend to make them appear to be reporting or sharing useful information with readers. In contrast, the advertiser's ultimate purpose is to deliver the sales message and to persuade readers. Therefore, a compromise must be reached between the media company and the advertiser" (Zhou, 2012: 328). Focusing on the real problem usually goes hand in hand with forming an emotional bond with the audience – while arguments appealing to reason may fail, the

emotional reaction, once triggered, is most likely to shape the reader's mindset the way the content creator desired. Last but not least, to sound credible, advertorials must match the style of the publication they will appear in.

To conclude this part of our research, it is important to point out that the momentum advertorials have gained in recent years comes hand in hand with a number of ethical concerns. Out of those, the most important stems from the aspect discussed above: since readers may fail to identify them correctly as paid content and may mistake them for genuine expressions of opinion (editorials), a legitimate ethical issue ensues regarding the potential (and deliberate) misleading of audiences. Along the same lines, the very credibility of modern media may be at stake, since mixing advertising and editorial content may end up eroding the public's trust in journalistic integrity.

In the following subchapter of our research, we will look into the three editorials mentioned, two commercial and one political, shedding light on their discourse structure, on the tone, style and language used, as well as on the persuasive strategies put forward by their authors, in their attempt to seduce the readership and turn them from disengaged trawlers into future buyers or voters, respectively.

2. Case Study – A Comparative Analysis

2.1 *Discourse structure*

An analysis, albeit succinct, of the advertorial promoting Dental Premier shows that, from the very beginning, the clinic is portrayed as an up-market location, targeting a wealthy, health-conscious clientele in pursuit of the best quality of services. Digital progress across the board is invoked ("*in an era of digital innovation*⁷"), so as to establish from the get-go that the customer base the clinic wishes to attract consists of the upper market segments. Other factors bestowing legitimacy upon the clinic are the technology used (in line with international standards), the team's expertise and the quality of the medical act.

We need to bear in mind that, unlike the advertorial promoting IKEA, the world-renowned flatpack furniture producer, this text faces two

⁷ "*Într-o eră a inovației digitale.*"

additional challenges: firstly, it has to bring under public scrutiny a clinic that is relatively unknown; thus, its task includes raising *brand awareness*. Secondly, unlike in the case of IKEA, whose products are inexpensive and competing on price and convenience, the clinic's services are pricey, the provider having opted to compete on quality (one cannot be both inexpensive and high-quality at the same time). Given that even well-off people are reluctant to part with their hard-earned cash, the mission of a company selling expensive products or services appears as significantly more challenging than that of a company providing affordable products.

On the plus side, the clinic responds to a basic need, that of accessing dental health services, which works to their benefit. In its attempt to raise brand awareness, the advertorial proposes a detailed solution revolving around *high quality* and *state-of the art technology*; to provide legitimacy to their claim, they go on to describe an AI-driven way of personalising the insertion of implants. This appeal responds to the recent advent of *customer-centric marketing*, where the customer is placed at the heart of the seller's activities. Customer-centric marketing indicates the shift from mass marketing to a more personalized form thereof, from a short-term, profit-oriented approach to a deeper vision pursuing customer loyalty and slower, longer-term, enduring growth. Although it may not be as profitable in the short-run, this new way of doing business results in clear long-term benefits, as "companies that adopt a customer-centric approach tend to outperform their competitors in terms of revenue generation and market share" (Meester, Aimee, 2023). While it may seem counterintuitive to focus on making customers the number-one priority rather than focusing on sales, products or campaigns (Meester, Aimee, 2023), it has already become obvious that putting the client's needs first will lead to lasting brand loyalty, customer satisfaction and trust (Meester, Aimee, 2023). Hence, in today's fiercely competitive arena, "businesses have to adopt a (...) customer centric marketing approach and carry out all marketing activities within this framework in order to keep their existing customers and get new ones" (Aslan, 2021: 58).

The advertorial describes in detail the procedure whereby a customised service will be provided to patients, this description conveying increased legitimacy to the seller. The terms utilized mean nothing to the layperson; however, they convey the overall impression that the services are impeccable and are bound to stand out due to the advanced technology and personalised assessment offered. The article also puts forth an empathetic

approach (by capitalizing on the patients' fear of dentists), ending on a direct call-to-action, common in advertorials.

The Ikea advertorial presents a more complex, more elaborate structure. The introductory part establishes *the context* – the history of the Stockholm collection. The fact that it goes back forty years is self-explanatory, its longevity in itself acting as a testimonial for the collection's merit. The way it is described (*"sofas, elegant wooden pieces, hand-woven wool rugs, chandeliers and vases made of hand-blown glass – all reflect the brand's distinctive design philosophy"*⁸) points to its high quality and upmarket features, all aiming to counterbalance the store's core reputation, that of targeting a midmarket customer base due to its low-cost products. This description points to the contrary: we are looking at handmade, luxurious products designed for elite customers.

The following paragraphs elaborate on this initial description, also pointing out that the exquisite quality comes at an affordable price. The democratization of luxury, "understood as the perceived reduction in distinctiveness, exclusivity, and self-differentiation of luxury goods due to wider availability and access, has changed the luxury industry landscape substantially" (Shukla et al, 2022:44), contributed to the rapid rise of the global middle classes, especially in developing economies. The democratization of luxury has spawned a whole new business model, assigning "value", or luxury, to mass-produced products (Culver, Annika, 2024). Thus, it has led to the creation of a category of people that strive to acquire luxury goods that were previously the preserve of the elite (Shukla et al, 2022:44). The way in which luxury has come to be perceived has changed markets substantially, propelling on the one hand luxury brands to expand their reach, sometimes unwisely, so as to exploit growing global demand (a phenomenon called *taking the brand downmarket*, which can backfire if the initial, high-end customer base is antagonized) and, on the other hand, propelling midmarket companies to enter into partnerships with luxury brands, so as to loan an elitist touch to their products (as was the case, for instance, with the 2015 fashion collaboration between H&M and Balmain, that sold out in a matter of hours). Overall, these associations have spawned a whole new generation of blurred market lines, leading to categories of

⁸ „Canapele, piese elegante din lemn, covoare din lână țesute manual, candelabre și vase din sticlă suflată manual, toate reflectă filosofia de design caracteristică brandului.”

products that are more difficult to pinpoint, and to brands unable to clearly define and address a specific target market.

With its attempt to promote collections that are as luxurious and expensive-looking as they are affordable, Ikea attempts to align with these global trends and to build a more complex customer base, without letting go of its initial goal, that of making furniture accessible to everyone.

The Ikea advertorial is backed by quotes, which serve to convey legitimacy to the asserted facts, to bond with the audience and convey a scientific aura to the text. In this respect, the blend between a science-like approach and a poetic-like description appealing to the reader's sensitivity is striking, making the text more readable and more memorable. We are told that, *"although the name STOCKHOLM evokes the image of a bustling city, the design team drew inspiration from both urban areas and the serene nature and islands surrounding Sweden's capital. The combination of colours and textures – rich earth tones, natural fabrics, and wood – was inspired by the beauty of Nordic nature⁹."* The tone is aesthetic, sophisticated and refined, in stark contrast to the quotes previously rendered, thus aiming to shock through diversity and contrast.

The text also draws legitimacy from the informative corpus conveyed – there are 96 products in the collection, crafted by passionate designers using exquisite raw materials. The central pieces (two sofas) are described in detail, with emphasis both on their beauty and on the comfort provided. The ending invites the readers to discover the collection in Bucharest and Timișoara starting with April 10; what we can see is that there is no aggressive call-to-action, only an invitation to access the Ikea website. Overall, we have read a discreetly promotional text, putting forth a lifestyle proposition that taps both into a concrete need (that of having our house furnished) and into the abstract desire for comfort, luxury and feeling special at a price we can still afford. On that last point, we should also add that, while both commercial advertorials analysed go to great lengths to seduce readers by invoking the luxury of their services / products, price is only mentioned in the case of Ikea, possibly to not alienate their initial target market, to whom affordability is of the essence.

⁹ „Deși numele STOCKHOLM evocă imaginea unui oraș agitat, echipa de design s-a inspirat atât din zonele urbane, cât și din natura liniștită și insulele care înconjoară capitala Suediei. Combinația dintre culori și texturi – tonurile intense de pământ, textile naturale și lemn – a fost inspirată de frumusețea naturii nordice.”

If we now turn to the political advertorial, we can see that, from the very beginning, it establishes its goal, similarly to a commercial text - by pinpointing a problem their target audience are facing. In this case, however, the problem is not explicitly stated, but implied: excessive bureaucracy, high public costs, and an inefficient administration. Against this unsettling background, the text goes on to affirm the mission PNL has embarked upon, so as to help modernize the state. Thus, digitalizing the administration emerges as the only answer to a systemic problem and takes the form of some initiatives PNL has put forward, such as: accessing documents online, rapidly setting up new companies, a simpler relationship between citizens and the state, and reducing public costs.

Unlike the Ikea advertorial, the tone is more formal, more succinct and businesslike. There is no explicit call-to-action, but we do have a hopeful ending, bringing along the promise of a better, simpler life. All the three advertorials analysed follow a structure that is standard in advertising: *problem-solution-call to action*, although the extent to which the phases explicitly surface vary from one text to another. We have an explicit CTA in the dental clinic advertorial (*"Choose excellence and innovation, choose Dental Premier in Bucharest!"*¹⁰), we have implicit CTAs in the other two – an invitation to access the Ikea website, versus the implied call to vote in the PNL text. As far as the differences between them are concerned, while the two commercial texts focus on consumption and on individual needs, the political text puts forward a community-oriented approach, implicitly advocating for collective involvement and civic participation; thus, its message also carries a powerful *moral* dimension.

2.2 Tone, language and style

The dental clinic advertorial uses a persuasive, empathetic tone, albeit succinct, without much fluff. The vocabulary is simple, accessible, conversational and casual, resorting to terms emphasizing comfort, luxury and state-of the art facilities, as well as a painless experience with no compromise. In its turn, the tone strikes us as persuasive and enthusiastic, with a clear promotional intent. Generally speaking, using this tone aims to inspire trust, to convey a sense of exclusivity and superiority and instil the

¹⁰ „Alege excelența și inovația – alege clinica stomatologică de top Dental Premier din București!”

idea that the advertised service is unrivalled on the market. Phrases like "*premium*", "*top*", "*revolutionary*"¹¹ etc. help reinforce an aura of prestige and high quality, which are known to appeal to fickle, demanding, elite customers.

The language of this advertorial is predominantly formal, replete with technical terms and, as was said in the previous sub-section, with a strong emphasis on customer-centric marketing. The specialized terminology, which seems to have been purposely crafted so as to become inaccessible to laypeople (Navident, digital impression, CBCT, Smile Design 3D), serves to bestow an aura of authority and credibility upon the clinic, luring customers in as in a hypnotic state. Superlatives are frequently used ("*most advanced*", "*millimetric precision*", "*state-of-the-art technology*"¹²), which further enhances the impression of innovation and excellence. For the target market of this clinic, the price is not an issue; therefore, unlike in the Ikea advertorial, there is no need to point to affordability since, unlike Ikea customers, Dental Premier's customers are more upmarket, free from financial concerns.

The style of this text is in line with the general style of advertorials: while appearing to be mainly informative, it does carry a strong promotional dimension, highlighting the clinic's main strengths (the top-notch technology and the personalised experience, which make it stand out from competitors). Following a logical flow (from general challenges in the industry to its specific technologies and advantages), the text sounds appealing to an audience that is well-off, tech-savvy and quality-conscious. Thus, this advertorial's creator masters the skill of starting from a basic need (that of dental care) and converting it into a pursuit of luxurious, unrivalled, first-class self-care. The sentences are complex and polished, targeting an educated, urban demographic who will settle for nothing short of the best.

If we turn to the Ikea advertorial, which is also commercial, we notice considerable differences in language, tone and style from the one promoting the dental clinic. Thus, the overall tone is elegant, celebratory, refined and fancy, inspired from lifestyle journalism, with an emphasis on the importance of local traditions, on the longstanding existence of a chain of stores that was not only a pioneer in its field, but which has been a worldwide success for a great many years. *Heritage* and *craftsmanship* are the two legitimizing pillars around which are built both the text itself, and its

¹¹ "*Premium*", "*de top*", "*revoluționară*" etc.

¹² "*Cel mai avansat*", "*precizie milimetrică*", "*tehnologie de ultimă generație*".

persuasive message. The elegant tone serves a twofold function: on the one hand, it seduces the reader, luring them into a universe governed by beauty, luxury and all forms of aesthetic pleasure. On the other hand, the same tone helps divert attention away from the marketing dimension of the text – implicit advertising tends to come across as less intrusive than overt advertising, which increases its chances of success. Thus, the text emphasises the importance of tradition, exclusivity, and high quality at affordable prices, while at the same time praising the artisanal value of a mass-market collection.

A wide array of descriptive vocabulary (warm and expressive) is used to convey the beauty of the materials, textures and design choices (“*authentic Scandinavian craftsmanship*”, “*unstructured shapes*”, “*forest-inspired fabrics*”, “*handmade*”, “*sustainable design*”, “*no compromise*”¹³); what we also find relevant, is that the message of high-end artistry is intertwined with a message of ethical production, which helps increase the advertorial’s appeal to young, environmentally conscious consumers who would not dream of shopping with a company in violation of CSR rules, no matter how attractive the products and how low the price may be. Moreover, as explained in the previous section of our research, the inclusion of direct quotes from relevant people, people in the know, adds personality to the text, conveys an impression of “bonding” with the readers through direct dialogue, and makes the message more impactful than if it had resorted to reported speech.

As far as the style is concerned, the Ikea text gets as close as can be to the standard rules of advertorial writing, with an additional touch of poetry, nonetheless. We are looking at a narrative, editorial-like style, an extremely elaborate way of writing which takes product promotion to the next level: *emotionally bonding* with the audience. This is done via *storytelling*, combined with a rendering of thematic layers: the history of the store, a description of the materials, the philosophy of its design and an emphasis on some key products meant to enhance the value of the collection, all help create a sense of high-end uniqueness and deep understanding of the buyer’s needs. There are visual, sensorial details in the text, skilfully backed by the imagery with which they appear intertwined. Thus, it would be safe to say that the targeted readership of this text includes design-conscious consumers alongside readers of lifestyle media and educated professionals in urban

¹³ “*măiestrie scandinavă autentică*”, “*forme nestructurate*,” “*țesături inspirate de păduri*” “*realizate manual*,” “*design sustenabil*,” and “*fără compromisuri*”.

areas, since the long, detailed, well-crafted sentences contribute to a slow, compelling reading and also signal the fact that the products are top-tier.

By contrast, the tone of the political advertorial has no poetic features to it, it is all down-to-earth and businesslike. We are looking at an assertive and optimistic appeal (optimism is a must in political communication), aiming to inspire confidence and mobilize potential voters to act. The party attempts to come across as a progressive, action-oriented political faction; to do so, they have to connect with citizens, especially younger, internet-savvy ones, who have become fed up with excessive bureaucracy; it is their growing frustration that the text taps into, it is this negative emotion that they aim to capitalize on. By repeatedly using the appeal "*we, liberals*¹⁴", a sense of inclusivity is conveyed which also helps bond with the audience. Creating a connection and making potential electors feel part of a living, vibrant, pro-active community is a force never to be underestimated in political communication, since the psychological sense of community is an important mechanism that drives people's social behaviour in today's technological environment (Wang, Kevin Y. 2010: 74).

The language used, simple and clear, with no unnecessary words, skilfully combines technical references (e.g., *ROeID*, *Ghișeul.ro*) with the people's everyday concerns, such as time wasted at public offices, excessive red tape and bureaucratic inefficiency. There is significant use of the 1st person plural to refer to the liberal party members ("*the concrete steps we have taken*", "*we cut useless costs*", "*we simplify the Romanians' life*", "*we will support*" etc.¹⁵), which emphasises once again the idea of a tightly-knit community that does not shy away from taking responsibility and actually getting things done. Along the same lines, the past achievements and initiatives are invoked to legitimise future ones. *Accountability* is a crucial feature that gives politicians credibility, reinforcing their message and building up a dependable public persona that voters will trust. The contrast is also significant between *the problem* (excessive red tape and inefficiency) and *the solution*, conveyed by value-laden terms like "*efficiency*", "*simplification*", "*cost reduction*" and "*stress elimination*"¹⁶; thus, *digitalization* is presented as a practical good that will improve citizens' life and, last but not least, the

¹⁴ "*Noi, liberalii.*"

¹⁵ "*Pașii concreți pe care i-am făcut*", "*reducem costurile inutile*", "*simplificăm viața românilor*", "*vom susține*" etc.

¹⁶ "*eficiență*", "*simplificare*", "*reducerea costurilor*", and "*eliminarea stresului*".

ultimate solution to the problem identified – in this respect, the advertorial closely follows the standard rules of commercial communication.

The use of bullet-points increases the businesslike appeal of the text (reports use them, for clarity and improved readability); bullet-points are characteristic of all documents that waste no time on unnecessary language and thus, the impression of efficiency is enhanced, which is in line with the message of the text. Clarity goes hand in hand with outlining clear, specific deliverables; future-oriented promises draw their legitimacy from past achievements, which is a classic persuasive strategy in political communication. The simple, direct phrasing (“no more waste”, “have to be accessible”¹⁷) also contributes towards a message of energy, action, efficiency and improvement, in stark contrast to the complacency and wastefulness that have characterised the public system so far and that people are fed up with. It is equally interesting to notice that, by capitalizing on the citizens’ growing frustration with public inefficiency, the text targets more than just traditional PNL voters, extending its appeal so as to include people who may have other political preferences, or people who may be sceptical or disengaged. The political advertorial appears to be skilfully crafted, the content creator generating a successful alignment of the message conveyed with the language used to that effect.

2.3 Persuasive strategies

When a piece of information succeeds in changing an individual’s attitude and behaviour, this is always the result of a series of operations, analyses and associations formed unconsciously, starting from the content of a message (Kapferer, Jean - Noël, 2002: 14); thus, *persuasion* always results in *change* (Kapferer, Jean - Noël, 2002:15). Persuasion is, therefore, a challenging undertaking, since human beings intrinsically tend to maintain the status quo, are reluctant to change either their convictions or their planned actions and tend to reject anything contradicting their pre-existing beliefs and intentions. With this in mind, when designing a message, a content creator must establish exactly what audience they are targeting, what change they attempt to trigger, and how messages must be crafted so as to lead to that change.

¹⁷ “Gata cu risipa”, “trebuie sa fie accesibile”.

The Premier Dental Clinic Advertorial gradually builds a persuasive message based on the appeal to *authority, innovation and expertise*, as well as to *prestige and exclusivity* (by emphasizing patient benefit and by using an aspirational tone). The skilful blending of *reason and emotion* also contributes to the overall persuasive impact of the text.

The appeals to *authority, innovation and expertise* tap into the emotional resources generated by building up trust in the *seller's credibility* (Larson, Charles U., 2003: 259). Indeed, the clinic is presented as a technological leader in its field, a facility using the most advanced dental technologies available worldwide¹⁸. Its mastery of the domain, alongside its innovative capabilities and its credibility also stem from the specific high-tech tools mentioned (Navident, CBCT, 3D scanning, Smile Design); while the names themselves may mean nothing to the layperson, they stand as proof of competence, further enhancing the clinic's legitimacy. Scientific weight is also bestowed by terms like "*millimetric precision*", "*AI*" and "*virtual planning*"¹⁹, since patients are generally impressed by cutting-edge tools and tend to believe that the use thereof will necessarily result in better, safer health outcomes. Thus, by showcasing features describing measurable precision and expertise, the advertorial aims to build up trust and come off as a medical facility unrivalled in its field.

Persuasion also springs from an appeal to the *prestige* and *exclusivity* of the clinic. Phrases aiming to portray the clinic as the best high-end option are repeatedly used (such as "*premium dental services*", "*top-of-the-line dental clinic*", "*premium dental experiences*"²⁰), which mainly suggests that choosing Dental Premier is as much about status and quality of life as it is about health; due to this elitist appeal and to the fact that many patients are often willing to pay more if they believe they are getting superior care, advertising for a basic medical need is converted into advertising for a luxury customer experience; the target market shifts, and the discourse shifts as well, from one emphasizing health to one emphasizing exclusivity and status.

Last but not least, persuasion is attempted with *the appeal combining reason (science) and emotion*. While the text is highly technical, it does not overlook the importance of conveying an emotional appeal. Thus, invoking comfort, safety and trust in the outcomes speaks more to the patients'

¹⁸ "*cele mai avansate tehnologii dentare disponibile la nivel internațional*".

¹⁹ "*precizie milimetrică*", "*Inteligență Artificială*", "*planificare virtuală*".

²⁰ "*servicii dentare premium*", "*clinica stomatologică de top*", "*experiențe stomatologice premium*".

emotional needs than to their rational ones, since these emphasize, above all else, *customer experience*. It is well-known that customer experience has very little to do with the actual product or service delivered and everything to do with how a buyer feels about a certain brand; it is *an emotional construct*.

"The customer experience is a mix of the physical image of the enterprise and the feelings and sensations evoked by it, consciously and unconsciously at every stage of the customer contact with the enterprise and the brand at all points of the contact (so called touch-points). A set of experiences creates the image in the mind of the customer and at the same time the image of the brand and its values, having influence on the evaluation of the activities of the firm and the brand, a tendency to go into closer relations with the enterprise and purchasing decisions." (Wereda, Wioletta and Grzybowska, Monika, 2016)

Along the same lines, the final statement, promising premium dental experiences, helps spawn the promise of an aspirational lifestyle: the customer is not just healed, they are seen, heard, valued and pampered. Combining rational, scientific arguments and emotional appeals help broaden the target market so as to include not just health-conscious consumers, but also intuitive decision-makers who cherish luxury and comfort. Patient benefit, therefore, comes in a wide variety of forms, ranging from safety and precision to extreme comfort, the ultimate wish of patients in search of high-status healthcare.

Since the Ikea advertorial is more complex, more elaborately crafted, the persuasive strategies are also detailed to perfection. To begin with, we can see a striking appeal to *storytelling and tradition* ("*on its 40th anniversary*", "*the Stockholm collection has evolved through eight editions*").²¹ Thus, by stressing the fact that the present collection is not just a spur-of-the-moment creation, but leans back upon a four-decade legacy, the consumers are encouraged to connect to its history and evolution, which stands proof of its merit. Words and phrases like "*iconic*", "*each piece tells a story*", etc²², build an aura of *significance* around the collection, make products become more than objects, acquire meaning, turn into cultural artefacts rather than mere commodities; thus, an emotional bond with consumers is seamlessly created.

²¹ "cu ocazia celei de-a 40-a aniversări", "colecția STOCKHOLM a evoluat de-a lungul a opt ediții".

²² "emblematică", "fiecare piesă spune o poveste".

Secondly, we can see a powerful *sensory and aesthetic appeal* building up throughout the text. Textures, colours, materials and fabrics are invoked, all engaging the readers' senses as well as their imagination. The descriptions are visual and tactile, creating a multi-sensory experience aiming to make the readers feel pampered in a luxurious setting, to the point where they can actually *feel* the wool, *see* the natural palette, or *touch* the blown glass. The text is imbued with a subtle sensorial framing, conveying an overall, almost palpable impression of care and finesse; thus, language is crafted to express a message of cosiness, intimacy and desire, of a customer experience that goes beyond the functional design and becomes unrivalled in terms of luxury and comfort.

As was explained before, the inclusion of quotes from acclaimed designers helps establish the legitimacy of the brand and makes it even more credible. Invoking expert voices in the field, with their names and titles, makes readers trust the brand as an undisputed authority, even if they never heard of those designers before. In addition, some pieces are presented as unique, not mass-produced; in museum-like descriptions, the artefacts are curated rather than sold. Thus, an alluring message is sent out to an audience that may value artistry even more than comfort.

The subtle use of *scarcity marketing* is also not to be ignored. Besides uniqueness, scarcity stands out as one of the features most likely to appeal to elite consumers. Its main goal is "to incite people to act quickly to avoid missing out on something amazing, by generating a sense of urgency and excitement. (...) This strategy focuses on customers who may not be able to obtain certain products or promotions if supplies run out" (Tully, Pat, 2024). Hence, phrases like "signature vases", "the availability of certain products varies from one market to another"²³, along with the references to hand-made items (blown glass, ceramic vases) equally play on the existence of only limited editions, a feature likely to increase the products' desirability in the eyes of potential buyers. FOMO (fear of missing out), a concept well-known in popular culture and similar, though not identical, to scarcity marketing, described as an "emotion that follows cognition" (Hodkinson, Chris, 2016:12) whereby a consumer is prompted to directly address their internal hesitancy, or resistance, to assent to an action (Hodkinson, Chris, 2016:6), represents a powerful marketing strategy, tapping into the consumer's

²³ "vaze unicat", "disponibilitatea anumitor produse este diferită de la o piață la alta".

collector mindset and making them act on the conviction that the products are special, rare, and may not be there tomorrow.

Last but not least, the text appeals to environmentally-conscious consumers for whom sustainability is of the essence. Natural fabrics like linen and leather are mentioned to that effect; also, referring to the materials' durability evokes not only cost efficiency (since no replacement will be needed in the near future), but also sustainable production, which seamlessly blends into the overall narrative, enhancing its impact.

For the final part of this subsection, we will look into the political advertorial in our corpus, where *identity-building* appears to be the primary persuasive strategy. The text places increased emphasis on the identity of the National Liberal Party and uses in-group rhetoric ("*We, Liberals*", "*PNL Bucharest team*"²⁴), thus building on the implicit dichotomy *us* versus *them*, *progress* versus *stagnation*. As stated before, the use of the 1st person plural emphasizes unity and a sense of community, as well as a shared mission; alongside the message of the text, that of taking the administration one step forward through digitalization, the party members come across as initiators and trustworthy implementors of progress. An appeal to partisan loyalty also comes forward, since choosing PNL would translate into choosing innovation over the slower, less modern alternatives.

Persuasion also stems from the repetition of the phrase "*digital revolution*"²⁵, which is used as a political campaign slogan or the mission statement of the party. The phrase is short, succinct, easy to remember and emotionally charged, meeting all the criteria of successful slogans. Repetition functions as a powerful persuasive tool (Larson, Charles U., 2003:33), since the familiar is perceived as truer, albeit in the absence of any evidence. "The use of repetition over the long course of an argument, written or spoken, creates a greater familiarity with the message and leads to gradual agreement (...)" (Lewis, 2024). Besides, the noun "revolution" implies change, dramatic and urgent, a word that is bound to tap into the frustrations of younger generations for whom dealing with excessive red tape has become a nightmare. The message is thus energized, likely to come across as a meme-like phrase and to have significant impact on potential voters looking for societal improvement.

²⁴ "*noi, liberalii*", "*Echipa PNL București*".

²⁵ "*revoluția digitală*".

The *problem-solution paradigm* that the advertorial also plays upon is borrowed from the golden rules of commercial advertising. A range of problems is identified: excessive red tape, inefficiency, waste, lots of trips to public offices; to all of these, a clear and modern solution is swiftly proposed: digital tools and online access. The solutions are presented in concrete and accessible terms: getting things done with only one click, with no trips to public offices; thus, the content creator portrays the party as an entity connected to the concrete problems of the citizens, rather than a faction putting forward abstract, ideological concepts that have nothing to do with everyday realities. A message of hope and trust ensues, a message boosted by the classic persuasive pattern of identifying a problem and proposing a solution.

Aside from the specific appeal to our self-indulgent desire for a better, less complicated life, there is also a *moral appeal* in the political advertorial; in this respect, it also appears different from the two commercial ones analysed before. The benefits, therefore, are twofold: on the one hand, the citizens' lives are made easier. On the other hand, the process is an efficient and fair one, resulting in less waste of the taxpayers' money and in the elimination of careless, dated bureaucracy. The text, therefore, does not just emphasize convenience for the potential voter, but also the protection of public interest; PNL comes to be portrayed as a party that, while understanding everyday realities and struggling to improve people's lives, also builds moral authority by doing the right thing. It may be surprising that a text this simple and succinct could convey messages so nuanced – appealing to *reason* (convenience) and *conscience* at the same time is not easy; and yet, somehow, in a few lines, it is done.

Concluding remarks

In the present research, we have looked into advertorial writing in Romania, bearing in mind the fact that we are looking at a hybrid genre that gained substantial momentum in recent years, a genre whose versatility and resourcefulness allow for content creators to freely express themselves in their never-ending pursuit of readers, buyers and voters, respectively. Our analysis covered three texts, two commercial and one political advertorial, highlighting the ways in which readers are lured and persuaded to act in accordance with the content creators' wishes.

We have attempted to shed light on the multifaceted nature of advertorials, on the way in which they blend together the art of storytelling with persuasive intent, thus putting forward an engaging narrative that subtly conveys a promotional message. We have analysed the structure, discourse, language and persuasive strategies used in the three documents in our corpus, highlighting the similarities and differences between them and the way these align with their higher communicative purpose. We have shown how the boundaries between journalism and advertising melt away, giving birth to new, hybrid, versatile texts that aim to persuade their readership via complex messages based on reason and emotion alike. We strongly believe this new genre is here to stay in the ever-changing realm of business writing, as its appeal is as nuanced as it is complex, refined and manifold.

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