



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

Master's Thesis – 10th semester
Culture, Communication and Globalization

IS SEXISM THE SELLING POINT? – young Romanian consumers'
perspective on Sexualized Advertisements



Supervisor: Daria Morozova

Name: Irina-Claudia Marin

Student number: 20191752

Number of characters (incl.spaces): 71.530

Mai 2021

Abstract

The flag of anti-feminism is still being waved across Eastern Europe to this very day. The gender equality narrative is often shut down, by the citizens or their representatives and the process is hardly progressing. The discourse is no different in Romania either. Patriarchal sentiments are prevailing -male superiority is dominating, traditional gender roles are expected to be fulfilled, derogatory attitudes towards women, objectification and even abuse are being considered normal and socially acceptable.

One of the channels that helps the spread of this discourse is advertising, especially when using sexualized content as a strategy to attract potential customers. The focus of this thesis proposes to get a better understanding of how these types of advertisements are being perceived by young Romanians. The main elements examined are emotional reactions, attitudes and behavior in connection with the sexualized advertisement while also regarding the society that the respondents live in.

For this, semi-structured interviews have been conducted, getting insights from young Romanians, men and women in the age span between 23 to 27. The respondents expressed their views and opinions on the matter after being exposed to a sample of advertisements and commercials created by Romanian agencies/brands. Female respondents reacted stronger and had very negative attitudes towards high sexualized advertisements and were did not consider purchasing the promoted product/service. On the other side, men displayed less stronger reactions, even if negative and were more open to trying out the advertised product or service.

The findings of this study could be used by marketers and advertisers when trying to plan out a strategy when targeting young Romanian consumers in order to attract a diversity of potential consumers.

Keywords: Feminism, Eastern Europe, Romania, Sexualization in Advertisement, Sexism, Young Consumers, Romanians, Emotional Reactions, Attitudes, Behavior, Sexual Advertisements and Commercials

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
Research Purpose	1
Problem Formulation	2
<i>Literature Review.....</i>	<i>3</i>
Sexualization in Advertisement	3
Feminism in Eastern Europe: Communist, post-communist and present	6
Women in Romania – social norms, gender roles and gender equality	10
Gender Theory	12
<i>Philosophy of Science</i>	<i>15</i>
Research paradigm	15
Ontological considerations	15
Epistemological considerations	16
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>17</i>
Research Purpose	17
Research approach.....	17
Research Strategy	18
Data Collection.....	18
Sampling method.....	19
Execution of the semi-structured Interviews.....	20
<i>Data Analysis</i>	<i>26</i>
Women	26
Emotional Reaction and Attitudes	26
Behavior	28
Men	29
Emotional reaction and Attitudes	29
Behavior	30
<i>Findings and Conclusion</i>	<i>31</i>
Limitations	33
Suggestions for Future Research	34
<i>References.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Appendix.....</i>	<i>40</i>

Introduction

The idea for the thesis was born after long minutes of scrolling on Facebook out of boredom that shifted into curiosity after seeing an “unusual” sponsored post. A BMW Dealership in Romania promoted an ad showing an elegant, edgy woman, casually leaning on the hood of a grey BMW X model followed by the text “even if you are not her first, pleasure is still guaranteed”. In the comments, the reactions varied from “she is beautiful and the car as well” to “another advertisement objectifying women, comparing them with luxury goods while also perpetuating the stigma that women should be pure and unacceptable to have multiple partners”.

Unfortunately, feminism has a long way to go, especially in Eastern Europe (Scharpf, 2020) and this type of advertisement was just a reminder of the perceptions and mentality Eastern Europeans have about women and their “position” in society. Considered a stance against communism, anti-feminism is clearing the path for great issues with significant effects on society, but especially on women.

Romania follows the same pattern, lacking knowledge about the importance of gender equality. Traditional gender roles are expected to be fulfilled, derogatory attitudes towards women, objectification and even abuse is being normalized, views that are already deeply rooted in today’s Romanian society. (Manea, 2013).

Patriarchal sentiments are prevailing -male superiority is dominating, traditional gender roles are expected to be fulfilled, derogatory attitudes towards women, objectification and even abuse is being considered “normal” and socially acceptable.

Extensive and significant research has been done on the way men and women react to different levels of sexualized advertisements and commercials, but there are none specifically targeting Romanian consumers’ perspective of sexualized advertising of different products and services, while also regarding the societal norms and culture the respondents live in.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to better grasp the perceptions of young Romanians regarding women in sexist advertisements that have aired on TV, have been on billboards or online in the past years.

Taking into consideration the patriarchal norms and gender issues present in Romanian society, the advertisements used for this study are exclusively created by Romanian agencies assuming that this is what the agencies, respectively the brands, view as effective on potential Romanian consumers. All of the advertisements express sexual connotations, objectification and humiliation of women, while some exhibit male dominance at the same time.

Problem Formulation

In order to gain more information on this particular angle, the following problem formulation and sub-question were developed:

**What are the emotional reactions, attitudes and behavior of young Romanian potential consumers when exposed to sexualized Romanian advertisements?
Are there potential differences between men and women in this context?**

For a better understanding along the way, a quick mention of how the three factors are being defined in the current study:

Emotional reaction – the response of the body in the form of strong feelings influenced by other individuals, groups, things or entities. (Schnoor, 2005)

Attitude – an individual's mental tendency that expresses the way they think or feel for someone or something, the way they perceive things – inner thoughts and feelings. Is almost exclusively based on their life experiences and observations. (Surbhi, 2017)

Behavior – the way an individual conducts itself – moves, actions, functions towards other people or groups in a specific situation. Behavior is an expression of the individual's attitude and is conducted by social norms. (Surbhi, 2017)

While attitude refers to one's pre-dispositional perspective of an action or an evaluative continuum of that behavior, emotion refers to one's current condition or circumstances (Allen, Machleit, & Kleine, 1992)

Literature Review

This chapter consists of a deeper exploration of the previous studies that have been done within the area of sexualization in advertisement, as well as insights from research regarding feminism in Eastern Europe and especially in Romania. Furthermore, relevant information about Gender Theory is presented to get a better understanding of gender, gender roles, intersectionality and stereotypes.

Sexualization in Advertisement

Besides fear, humor, music, rationality, emotion and scarcity, sexual appeal is one of the seven appeals successfully used in advertising, some more effective than others depending on the circumstances (Clow & Baack, 2007). The aim of brands is to use appeals to incite the need of potential consumers for the product. Reichert (2003) describes sexual appeal as a “persuasive message” combined with sexual information (suggesting sexual interest, behavior or motivation) to send an overall message about the brand.

Physical features, movement, context, proxemics, voyeurism/fantasy are considered to be sexually appealing elements, but each factor also covers other aspects that have to be taken into consideration when analyzing the sexual level of an ad. Physical features are indicated by persons depicted in the ad, how attractive they are according to societal views and the amount or type of clothes they are wearing. Movement consists of the attitude the model expresses, the way it acts, but the voice, what is being said and how, is also included here. Proxemics are being introduced in advertisements in form of music, lighting, settings, effects, colors, but also by the distance between models and how they interact with each other. The later aspect can also be observed in the voyeurism/fantasy aspect, as well as the connection the models have with the viewers (Reichert & Ramirez, 2000). There can be identified different levels of sexual appeal in advertisement. Studies have shown that models wearing t-shirts display a low level of sexual appeal, while models in underwear exhibit a higher level (Black, Organ, & Mortion, 2010).

When discussing sexualization in advertising, sexual content can come in different types of communication methods, such as images, sounds text and videos (Reichert, 2007) and via different channels, traditional media – TV, billboards, magazines, radio or Internet – social media platforms.

Sexual objectification, according to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), is a type of body reductionism in which a person is dismembered into a collection of sexual body parts or functions, treated as a silent ornament, and assessed merely on the basis of his or her appearance. Furthermore, sexual objectification is being significantly applied on women by men, due to the heterosexual and patriarchal essence of Western societies (Nussbaum, 1995). Mass-media is being recognized in the objectification theory as the principal context where women's sexual objectification is taking place (Gramazio, Cadinu, Guizzo, & Camaghi, 2020).

Data obtained by analyzing content has surely exposed that women are more likely than men to be sexualized in advertisements. (Vaerhellen, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2016) Although, researchers discovered that the male body appears in the media as well, overly sexualized and hyper muscularized (Daffemer, Campagna, & Rodgers, 2019).

Unfortunately, sexualization in advertisements come with negative consequences for both men and women. Findings state that women, besides the fact that are being objectified, also tend to have negative feelings towards the way they are viewed, and their physical and psychological well-being suffer (Loughnan & Pacili, 2014). Meanwhile, men's body dissatisfaction raises as the projected male ideal has a muscular body type (Lorenzen, Grieve, & Thomas, 2004).

Interestingly, a new question arose, is it worth using sexualization in advertisement considering the disturbing consequences and is it ethical and commercially useful?

Going back to 1871, the first to use sex to sell products was Pearl Tabacco by placing a "naked maiden" on their cigarette package. At the time, this was quite provocative, and sales gone through the roof. In 1885, Duke & Sons joined the movement and began adding trading cards of "sexually provocative starlets" in their cigarette packs. The technique worked and, by 1890, W. Duke & Sons was the leading American cigarette brand (Porter, 1971). Later, in the early 1900's, the Woodbury's Facial Soap, a woman's beauty bar, was in danger to be discontinued as the sales were dropping. What overturned the end of the product was the show of ads that portrayed couples in romantic scenes, promising love and intimacy for those who used it (History, 1926).

Previous studies on the efficacy of sexualized advertising have stated an inconsistent pattern of results. In ads where women are sexualized, it seems that sexualized ads boost positive attitudes towards them compared to neutral ads (Reichert, Heckler, & Jackson, 2001), whereas other researchers identified negative effects (Mittal &

Lassar, 2000) especially on female viewers (Dahl, Sengupta, & Vohs, 2009). In addition, inconclusive results have been drawn after studying purchase intentions as well (Putrevu, 2008).

Focusing on sexualized male models in ads and the effects on potential customers, research had similar inconsistent findings. A study made a comparison between ads in which male models have been shown sexualized at different levels – fully clothed, suggestive, nude and neutral ads (with only the product presented). Results have stated that women tend to have a more favorable attitude than men when ads reveal sexual depicted male models (Simpson, Horton, & Brown, 1996). On a different note, a comparison between ads which portrays sexualized female and male models and neutral ones, has shown that women do not have different attitudes across conditions, while men display higher positive attitudes towards female than male sexualized ads (Jones, Gelb, & A.J.S., 1998).

According to previous studies, sexualized ads are considered to be more powerful in triggering emotional responses, than non-sexualized ads (Reichert, Heckler, & Jackson, 2001). By looking at the findings, it can be observed that female nudity in advertisement determine positive arousal in men, but negative one in women (LaTour, 1990). Interestingly, it was discovered that both men and women expressed positive affective reactions and attitudes when the pictured sexualized model in the ads was of the opposite gender (Reichert, LaTour, & Kim, 2007).

Considering the results, it seems that men and women have different emotional reactions to sexualized advertising – men showing more positive feelings and more arousal when the model in the ad is female, while women have negative reactions toward the same advertising. On the other hand, a higher positive feeling in women can be seen in male sexualized advertising (Gramazio, Cadinu, Guizzo, & Camaghi, 2020).

With this information in mind, research has been done in order to prove a connection between emotional appraisal and purchase intention, more specifically emotions and persuasion processes (Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Findings highlight that emotions can anticipate attitudes towards the ads, positive emotions translating into potential favorable attitudes and negative emotions less favorable towards the ads (Aylesworth, Goodstein, & Kalra, 1999).

A more recent study suggests that the women subjects had negative emotions towards both female and male sexualized ads which resulted in being hesitant to purchase the respective products. Contrarily, for men, there was no increase in product

attractiveness or purchase intentions which portrayed sexualized female in comparison to neutral ads, but they had negative feelings towards ads used sexualization on male models (Gramazio, Cadinu, Guizzo, & Camaghi, 2020).

Therefore, the concept of “sex sells” is a two ways street - in an overcrowded media marketplace where is difficult to make a product or service get noticed and sold, the sexualization strategy might gain attention and support, but it can also backfire resulting in hostility towards the product and implicitly the brand.

Feminism in Eastern Europe: Communist, post-communist and present

The flag of anti-feminism is still being waved across Eastern Europe to this very day. Not too long ago, we witnessed an attack on women’s reproductive rights in Poland. In Hungary, the discourse of the far-right prime minister is frequently dismissive and insulting towards women, reducing them to their primary role, child-bearers and homemakers (Walker, 2018). Bulgaria is one of the eight EU member states that still have to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (the Istanbul Convention) and in February 2018 parliament members stated that the convention’s goals and Bulgaria’s Constitution are not compatible, as it calls for gender equality which also encourages homosexuality and challenges the “traditional values of Bulgarian society” (Margolis, 2018). In Romania, where the Romanian Orthodox Church is still one of the most powerful and influential institutions, where parishioners look for guidance and wisdom, All Holiness Teodosie stated that women began the sin and if they wouldn’t have, giving birth wouldn’t be painful (Iancu, 2021).

In 1989, Eastern Europe experiences the taste of the fall of communism and moves on to the next step, becoming post-socialist and renegading “all things communist”. This backlash could be observed on the Communist party’s version of feminism which created a wave of anti-feminism (Wolchik, 1991).

Taking a few steps back, the practice of feminism in the communist bloc was a version inspired by the work of Engels and a couple of other outstanding socialist theorist at the time, but by the end of the 1980’s had little likeness to that particular theoretical work. The main motive of gender inequality was considered to be the capitalist relations of production. Therefore, the sole purpose was to achieve equality in the public sphere of productive employment, considering that equality in other spheres would surely follow as well. The concept of women’s liberation gravitated only around the idea of legal equality and equal labor force presence. At the same

time, communist states had no issue in deciding on women's bodies and lives, while also enforcing gendered roles on its citizens. A strong contradiction between the views of socialist feminists (Western feminists) and Eastern Europe feminists erupted. While socialist feminists considered that the notion of women's legal equality and high rates of labor force participation positioned women as being superior in socialist nations compared to capitalist ones, Eastern European feminists bring to light the overwhelming roles that socialist women have to fulfil (Occhipinti, 1996).

Starting with the end of the 1950's until the fall of Communist rule, the perfect and complete "socialist woman" was supposed to be a good and competent worker, a caring mother and wife and "enthusiastic comrade". Not only that they had to fulfil their maternal, worker and family role, but the burden of women's unpaid domestic work was overlooked and whether they chose to be a housewife or go to work, women felt pressured into explaining their choice (Corrin, 1992). The employment options were limited for girls and they were encouraged to go for low-paying jobs in areas considered "feminine", such as medicine and health care, banking, education (Venerova & Okruhlicova, 1992) while, in the meantime, jobs in the heavy industry were considered "masculine", but prioritized by state policies being offered better wages and, subsequently, women were paid less even if they had higher levels of achievement in education.

Protective legislation deepened the already existing gender inequality issues and constrained women's choices by accentuating the role of women as birth-givers and mothers while preserving their dual role as workers (Eisenstein, 1993). To combat the falling birth rates, pro-natalist policies were provided to increase the birth rate, but not actually benefit women (Heitlinger, 1993). Paid maternity leave, family allowances, while beneficial, also have a problematic side, as the woman and new mother was expected to return as soon as possible into the workforce and were in disadvantage competition with men in the workplace due to the abundant domestic workload in addition to their role in the economy (Scott, 1974). Between the pressure of the idealized motherhood, devoted wife, professional worker and active citizen, women throughout Eastern Europe found it difficult, if not impossible, to successfully carry out these roles (Kiczko & Farkasova, 1993).

After the fall of Communism in 1989 the idea of "women's emancipation" has been considered "communist propaganda" and rejected by both men and women. Hence, the wave of anti-feminist movement was born. A shift towards the women's "traditional" role in society could be observed in media and political discourse, the transition being an expression of another pattern of a reimagined patriarchy. Women

were centered around their duties for their family and house, canceling the involvement they had in the paid employment and household in at least the past century (Occhipinti, 1996).

Class, ethnicity, age, social position, family structure were a few of the factors that influenced the way Eastern European women responded to the traditionalist sentiment. While the transition to an open economy, the changes in the political and social order may have created opportunities for some women, other obtained only burdens. (Occhipinti, 1996) According to Pine (1994) a part of how ideas about gender are identified and women's public roles are locally decided, stands in how women view their own role in society and in the work force. The idealized figure of a woman as full-time homemaker, whilst popular, did not reflect into real life experiences. On one side there are the ones that didn't want to give up their personal life choices for the domestic sphere and then there are the ones that would not be able to economically survive without a paying job. (Occhipinti, 1996). As long as employment options were limited for women, childcare was unaffordable the idea of being a stay-at-home mom and/or wife would be unrealistic (Einhorn, 1991).

The powerful anti-feminist attitudes were not prevailing in Eastern Europe only because of the anti-communist backlash, but because of the general idea that women were the reason of the feeling of social disorder, for destroying the family and not living up to their glorified role as mothers (Goven, 1993).

Ironically, the anti-feminist surge increased the "double burden" faced by women. In the process of holding a job and raising a family with no support for the state and no opportunities, facing criticism for struggling to fulfil both roles, many eastern European women began fighting to be released from the low-paying, low-status jobs that the labor force had to offer them (Occhipinti, 1996).

Working was considered preferable instead of unemployment or part-time jobs that were uncommon yet in the former socialist members, but another issue would surface, discrimination against women when hiring. Women were not the ideal candidate for an employer as they allegedly could not travel, would take more time off, could not work overtime, young/childless women would be considered "imminent mothers" (Fong & Paul, 1992) and, as some of the costs of maternity leave had to be covered by businesses and not the state, women became a more expensive employee compared to their male co-worker.

Without question, the full participation of women in the work sphere has been considered a key component in gender equality by both socialist and feminist theory,

but many women expressed the fact that working a low status, dead-end, low-paying job was not as satisfying and rewarding as the high valued family responsibilities (Occhipinti, 1996).

Three decades after the fall of communism, a PewResearch report (2019) on gender equality in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) highlights the considerable discrepancies of the attitude about the importance of gender equality in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and how, overall, there are firmly different opinions between Eastern and Western Europe, Western Europeans displaying more progressive views.

Looking at the social and legal rights of women, the number of people stating that they saw improvements since the regime changed has increased significantly since 1991. Still, a substantial minority in Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary believe that there are no changes and women have the same rights as they had under communism. When it comes to marriage, most respondents from Sweden, France and Spain consider that egalitarian marriage, where both husband and wife work and take care of the home and children. Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine and Slovakia an important percentage thinks that a more traditional marriage, where the husband provides for the family and the wife takes care of home and children is more satisfying.

In the economic sphere, while most respondents do not think men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce, Slovakia is the only country where the majority agreed with the statement, but numerous individuals in Greece, Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Italy and the Czech Republic also agreed. An interesting aspect of the report is that in the Central and European countries that have been surveyed, women, more likely than men, say that is very important that women have the same rights as men in their country (the gender difference is higher in Slovakia, Italy, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Russia) (Wike, et al., 2019).

Although great efforts are being made to balance gender relations around Europe, especially through the gender strategy, in CEE the discourse of gender equality seems to need a different action as it falls behind other European countries (Scharpf, 2020). Might be traditions, difference in socialization, lack of implementation and reinforcement of the right legislation, no institutional representation, but many other motives can make CEE derail from the path to reach gender equality.

In the past year, the global Covid-19 Pandemic took a toll on the advances that have been made in the process of gender equality. Not only in Eastern Europe, but around the world, women are again burdened with juggling childcare, their education, work

and domestic chores. These inequalities have been prevailing in Central and Eastern Europe before, but there is the risk of becoming the “normality” in the post-pandemic time (Scharpf, 2020).

Women in Romania – social norms, gender roles and gender equality

Despite the recent years of dynamic changes in perspective when it comes to gender equality defined by a modernization in societal views, Romania is still stagnating in its efforts to achieve gender equality. According to the Gender Equality Index (2020), Romania ranks 26th in the European Union with 54.4 out of 100 points, 13.5 below the EU’s average score.

While some improvements have been seen in the past 10 years, such as the higher number of individuals, both men and women, participating in the work force, the number of women that have decision-making positions, such as ministers and members of the Parliament has increased, an overall better access to health services for both men and women, there are still some very worrying aspects that have been highlighted. The gender gap in full-time employment is wide, especially between women and men who are single and women and men in couples with children.

The problem of the gender gap can be seen in unpaid care work, where women spend more time caring for children, grandchildren, older people or people with disabilities, which is also the widest gap in the EU (Gender Equality Index, 2020). Therefore, women have the tendency to work part-time more than men and there are almost no men when it comes to care responsibilities that require to be economically inactive or work-part time, whilst 1.9% of working-age women are in this situation (EIGE, 2017). Unfortunately, the current pandemic left 50% of Romanian women with no position in the workforce, while only 16% of men got laid off from their jobs (Filia, 2021).

In terms of money, despite the fact that monthly wages have improved for both men and women, women still earn 5% less per month than men, and the difference worsens in couples with children. It also expands with age, with males earning nearly three times more than women at 65 and older (EIGE, 2017).

When it comes to education and knowledge, there has been a rise in the number of women graduating from university education. Even while men and women complete tertiary education at similar rates, women graduate at a higher rate in the age range 25-49. There is also a gender divide in study disciplines, with women dominating

disciplines such as arts, education, health and welfare, humanities, and arts, while males dominate vocational, science, technology, and engineering (EIGE, 2017).

Traditional patriarchal thinking still prevails in Romania when it comes to domestic tasks, childcare, and time. As a result, women are responsible for domestic tasks and childcare, while the man is the “pillar” of the house, brings money, and provides for the family. Because conventional roles are so strict, childcare is still considered as largely mainly a woman's responsibility. At the same time, regardless of their employment status, women do an overwhelming majority of home duties (Manea, 2013). As if this wasn't already a gender equality issue, the Covid-19 pandemic only pushed women further into being swallowed by household chores, family service and work tasks that need to be accomplished from home.

Women's violence is a deeply rooted issue in Romania, where prejudices and discriminatory conduct are still acceptable and tolerated. A Eurostat report from (2016) affirms that 55% of Romanians think that rape can be justified – when there are alcohol and drugs involved, when women wore “revealing” or “sexy” clothes and when the person goes willingly home with someone.

Intimate partner violence is quite common in Romania, according to data collected by the network on preventing and combating violence against women. In 2020, there were over 26,800 occurrences of physical and/or other forms of violence inside families, women and girls representing 80% of the victims and men being in proportion of 91% the perpetrators. There were 226 rapes and 111 instances of sexual aggression documented, with 87 percent of rapes and sexual aggressions occurring in the victim's home. Due to unfortunate circumstances, 72 killings took place, 59% of victims being girls or women that have been killed in significant numbers by their partner or close family member. Compared to 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic brought a 14% surge in rapes and 4% more sexual aggressions in 2020 (IGPR, 2020). Also, during the current pandemic, the number of calls reporting domestic violence doubled in Romania (ANES, 2020).

Stalking is a less common occurrence, but it is still a severe problem in Romania, where 8% of women say they have been stalked at some point in their lives. (FRA, 2014) Workplace harassment is nevertheless prevalent; 44 percent of Romanian employees, 86 percent of whom were women, said they had been subjected to sexual harassment at work (Bestjobs, 2019).

The Gender Barometer in Romania (2019) shows that gender equality policies are not considered to be necessary, as the respondents do not have knowledge about the

potential problems (for example, the need of balance between family life and work) or they view them as being already solved and not a priority. It also seems that Romanians present a swing in attitudes between conservative, compliant and modern when it comes to gender issues. Not only that, but the report shows that there is not enough knowledge on the subject, which creates a category of significant respondents that are confused, manifest contradictory attitudes when it comes to the theme of gender and gender equality (Grünberg, 2019).

To conclude, Romanian women have had minor taste of the benefits of enforced legal and political gender equality initiatives, but it is not enough. Improvement is slow and is overshadowed by the fact that women are still the victims of sexism, objectification, and being reduced to their traditional patriarchal position while still being the potential subject of their partner's violence.

Gender Theory

Known throughout centuries and seen across all societies, humans developed a process of establishing how to describe and socially organize sexual differences and what is being categorized as normality and deviance (Gerish, 2005). While sex refers to anatomically visible characteristics of a human body (female, male, or intersex), gender sums up societal expectations, roles, and behavior (feminine and masculine) (Hare-Maustin & Marecek, 1988). In numerous occurrences, the conjunction between “nature” and “culture” has been used to determine that, such as in nature, culture is both superior and masculine. This action has led to social organizations and norms to develop patriarchal systems that would put males above females almost everywhere globally (Gerish, 2005).

Gender theory explores how masculine, feminine, and queer identities are interpreted and constituted in any particular environment, community, society, or field, such as literature, history, sociology, cultural studies etc. Under constructivism, gender is viewed as being a social construct determined by social interactions (Butler, 1990), while essentialism established that sex is the equivalent of gender. Gender theory's main goal is to disrupt sexist structures and stereotypes while also recognizing the uniqueness and individuality of being human, independent of any gendered self-representations (Focault, 1978).

By looking at gender theory and feminist theory, while different, both theories aim to understand the process of gender socialization in connection to disproportionate power distribution in the world by conceptualizing gender role socialization (Kimmel

& Aronson, 2010). Moreover, gender theory has two interrelated goals. Firstly, to challenge the hierarchical system that places feminine-gendered traits, such as sensitivity, cooperativeness, commitment as lesser and weaker than masculine-gender attributes, like aggressiveness, competitiveness, leadership. Secondly, to remove or at least decrease the social restraint so that people may express themselves as masculine and/or feminine as they want to and to encourage a long-awaited wave of diversity, complexity and plurality (Jule, 2014).

From a constructivist point of view, gender is something thought as individuals enter a society and end up developing sets of characteristics and behaviors determined by the views of those around us. Gradually, by being gender socialized, the person gain masculine and/or feminine traits in different circumstances, but, as social scientists state, an individual behaves using a combination between masculine or feminine characteristics that can be seen, depending on the context, purposes and relationships, as both or either masculine or feminine (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Another intriguing fact is that most gender theorists regard gender as something that one does, rather than something that one is. Accordingly, gender is undoubtedly more than the way a person executes or resists the role they are supposed to complete in their community (Jule, 2014). In Butler's viewpoint, "performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise power". (p.225)

Contrarily, there are perspectives that do not distinguish, but actually emphasize the connection between biological sex and gender, pointing out that gender stereotypes are social expressions of biological and essential "truths" – for example, women being considered more nurturing than men, men being considered more aggressive than women (Paglia, 1991).

Contradictory, there are some philosophical issues between the constructionist and essentialist angles when it comes to gender – constructionism is based on essentialist concepts ("gender is always constructed" is viewed as an essentialist affirmation), whereas essentialist perspective is entirely constructed). On the other side, biological determinists are striving to show additional sex-related traits with the primary purpose of simplifying each individual's complexity (Jule, 2014).

Furthermore, the constructionist viewpoint ignores similarly created relations such as race and class (Coates, 2003) which leads to the concept of intersectionality. Derived from the black feminist theory of power using black women's experiences of racism, sexism and economic disadvantage due to enslavement, intersectionality observes

how oppressive factors, racism, patriarchy, capitalism, interact to create an institutionalized hierarchy that also propagates disadvantage to different groups. The theory explains how oppressive institutions reinforce one another, and how power must be regarded as co-created rather than individually produced. The theory became wildly popular in the 1990s especially within, but also being sociology, researchers using the experiences of people who have been disadvantaged across several oppressive systems in their analysis (Robinson, 2018).

Nevertheless, the intricacy and unlikeness of an individual cannot be reduced to simplistic predictions of their behavior, nor be prevented. Consciously or unconsciously, gender is a form of how individuals distinguish and are being distinguished (Jule, 2014). Regardless of the gendered societal views and role expectations, every human being expresses their gender differently, in line or complete opposite of the existing stereotypes, but nevertheless, in a complex, unique and diverse manner.

Philosophy of Science

In this section the research paradigm, as well as the ontological and epistemological stances chosen for this study will be explained.

Research paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain the meaning of a paradigm in the context of a philosophical approach in social sciences as “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of a method, but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways”. Hence, the research paradigm is necessary for the construction of the researcher’s perspective of reality while also backing up the chosen research methods.

The primary views suggested by the authors are positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and social-constructivism and are established by three elemental aspects:

Ontology: “what is the form and nature of reality and what can we know about it

Epistemology “what is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the reality investigated?

Methodology: “How can the inquirer go about finding out he or she believes can be known?”

The current study revolves around social norms, gender roles and societal perspectives of gender that are being transcribed into marketing strategies and creating sexualized advertisement in order to attract potential customers of a patriarchal society. The suggested aim was to understand the perspective on the matter of group of young Romanian men and women and see how they feel and react after being exposed to sexualized Romanian add – which clearly depends on their background, beliefs, experiences, knowledge of the subjects, position and role in society.

Therefore, the most appropriate philosophical approach for this study would be social constructivism, where the individual creates its own reality and gains knowledge and meaning through the interactions it has with a group (McKinley, 2015).

Ontological considerations

As stated above, ontology refers to the nature of social entities. The main question is whether social entities are objective entities that hold a reality that is external to social

actors or they are social constructions created by actions and perceptions of social actors. The principal positions in this matter are often referred to as objectivism, respectively constructionism (Bryman, 2012).

The ontological position in this study can be considered to be constructionism (constructivism) that views a social phenomenon as being established through interactions between social actors and always suffering revisions (Bryman, 2012).

This research considers that the reproduced reality is a result of social interactions, considering that the respondent's reality and perspective have been ongoingly built through socialization from the moment they were born until the present moment.

Epistemological considerations

The epistemological angle refers to what is or should be considered acceptable knowledge. The pivotal issue in this situation is if the "social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures and ethos as the natural sciences" (p.27) A natural science epistemology is considered to be positivism and its opposite is interpretivism (Bryman, 2012).

Interpretivism emphasizes the differences between individuals' objects of the natural sciences, while focusing on subjective meanings of social phenomenon. Also, social researchers are trying to see the world through people's eyes and to gain access to people's "common-sense thinking", understand their actions and the social world they live in (Bryman, 2012), which can also be considered the standpoint of this research, as the main goal is to collect from the responders as many details as possible concerning their views on sexualized advertisements and commercials that have been broadcasted in Romania in the past years, to understand their reality through those details and the meaning behind their reactions and motivating actions.

Methodology

Already existing data and findings have been presented in the previous chapters; therefore, the methodology section will explain the method that will be used to collect empirical data, the sampling method used and what further steps will be taken to analyze the collected information.

Research Purpose

The research purpose of this study has an exploratory aim – allowing for a more profound understanding of the chosen topic (Klug & Vigar-Ellis, 2012), but also has a descriptive nature since it describes the phenomena (Yin, 2003) of sexualized advertisements and commercials and its effects on young Romanians. To further explain, the study has proposed to gain a more in deep understanding of how young Romanian potential consumers view and react toward sexist advertisements and commercials, their motives and underlying reasons. The way they express their attitudes was assessed by exposing them to a sample of advertisements and commercials, understand if they view them in a favorable or unfavorable manner (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989), moreover if they found the content offensive/ not offensive, disliked it/ liked it, convincing/ not convincing (Black, Organ, & Morton, 2010) to see if they would consider purchasing the product or service. Furthermore, another aim is a comparison between the attitudes and purchase intentions of men and women when they are exposed to advertisements and commercials that depict a woman as the sexualized character or model (Gramazio, Cadinu, Guizzo, & Camaghi, 2020).

Research approach

The approach of this study was deductive as there were research and theories available to have a base for the topic and that have been used to contradict or agree with the existing findings of different studies. (Bryman & Bell, 2018)

Moreover, a qualitative research approach was used so that the study fulfils its research purpose. Qualitative research is more about words, where the researcher is trying to see through the eyes of its respondents, rather than quantification when data is collected and analyzed. It also provides substantial details in responses and is more flexible in its structure. (Bryman, 2012).

Research Strategy

Considering that the researcher had little to no control over the context in which questions such as “how” and “why” are being asked (Yin, 1994), the thesis got to be framed as a case study.

Rather than generalizing the phenomena, the study focused on a deeper understanding of attitudes, reactions and behavior of potential Romanian consumers, aged between 23-27 towards advertisements and commercials that sexualized and objectified women.

Data Collection

For this study there were used two types of data, primary and secondary. Primary data consists of data that has been collected in order to answer the purpose of a specific topic while secondary data is gathered for other causes (Brown, Suter, & Chruchill, 2014).

In order to create a solid information base for the selected topic, secondary data was used and mostly expressed in the *Literature review* chapter – offering the readers an understanding of what the thesis revolves around, centered on multiple studies’ findings. On the other hand, primary data was collected by conducting online interviews via Zoom with Romanian young adults, both men and women, to understand their perception of sexist advertisements and commercials that have been present in Romania in the past years.

One of the tools that can be used when the study is centered around understanding how people feel or react is interviews. Qualitative interviews are suitable for this particular research as it allows for broad and significant data that would offer the respondents’ perspective (Bryman & Bell, 2014) while using simple questions that causes complex responses.

The type of interview used was the semi-structured interview, as it is a flexible method that can offer the liberty of collecting even small details (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and provides an environment where the interviewer can focus on the relevant aspects of the topic, can come up with follow-up questions and guide the interview to keep it on track, while the subjects can freely express their feelings, opinions and thoughts on different points. Accordingly, an interview guide was developed as it was important, so the interviewer and respondents discussed the most

relevant points of the study that were needed to answer the research question and fulfil the research purpose, but additional questions were asked and, in some cases, the already underlined questions were rephrased just to make sure that a full perspective was gained.

Sampling method

The initial sampling method used for this research was purposive sampling – the main criteria was outlined which the participants had to meet in order to be included in the sample. Further on, it took the form of a snowball sample by getting in touch with recommended individuals through the already existing respondents that would fulfil the requirements.

The criteria required for the participants to fulfil was the following:

- Male and female individuals;
- Aged between 23-27;
- Born and raised in Romania;
- With a stable income (salary, scholarship, freelancing etc.).

Firstly, all the respondents had to be born and raised in Romania, as it was important to have the same cultural and social background, to be familiar with the social norms and gender roles that prevail in Romania. The age span used, 23-27, was determined due to the following aspects – close of age meant a similar way of being socialized, most likely made by parents that were born, raised and lived during communism. Also, studies have shown that young adults are being targeted as the main consumers of sexualized advertisements (Reichert, 2003).

Secondly, individuals that identify as men and female were selected, as one of the intentions of the study was to determine if there is a difference in attitudes and reactions between the two genders when exposed to sexualized advertisements.

Lastly, stable income was another important factor to take into consideration, the respondents had to be able to afford or even consider purchasing the advertised products or services. Stable income was defined as any type of salary obtained at a full-time job, part-time job, freelance activity or scholarships.

Execution of the semi-structured Interviews

There were conducted 10 one-on-one interviews (5 males and 5 females), 25-30 minutes long each, via Zoom, due to the different location of the respondents and the interviewer. The interviews were conducted in Romanian, as it is the first language of the respondents and interviewer which eliminates any potential language barrier. The interview guide translated into English can be found in *Appendix: Interview Guide* with the questions that have been formulated beforehand in order to follow the main points of the study and the advertisement and commercial samples.

It first started with some demographic and basic personal information such as name, age, gender, education, monthly income, occupation and if they have their own family/ children. The most important aspects that wanted to be explored through the respondent's perspective were the initial reaction to the ad/commercial, what feelings were associated with it, if they felt the need to change something, if they would consider purchasing the specific product or service and lastly if they feel that they are usually surrounded by similar advertisements in Romania.

The following advertisements and commercials were used as sample to be exposed to the interview participants:

In Romanian, ad/advertisements is used interchangeably with commercials even though they are, in some ways, different – commercials air on TV or Radio, while advertisements are considered to be in print (Rick, 2018) but to not confuse the respondents, they have all been named advertisements to be easily referred to.

1st Advertisement – Alka (2018)



Image 1 – source:facebook.com/centrul.filia

Description: On half of the billboard is shown a woman with her eyes closed, smiling while sticking her tongue out as she is about to lick her fingers covered with (what seems to be) chocolate. On the other half is written “Cătălina”, supposedly her name and „Craiova” which is allegedly the city she is from. Underneath is written: (translated from Romanian) „She likes it with her eyes closed”. At the end, the brand logo can be found.

2nd Advertisement – Fast-Food chain OroToro (2015)

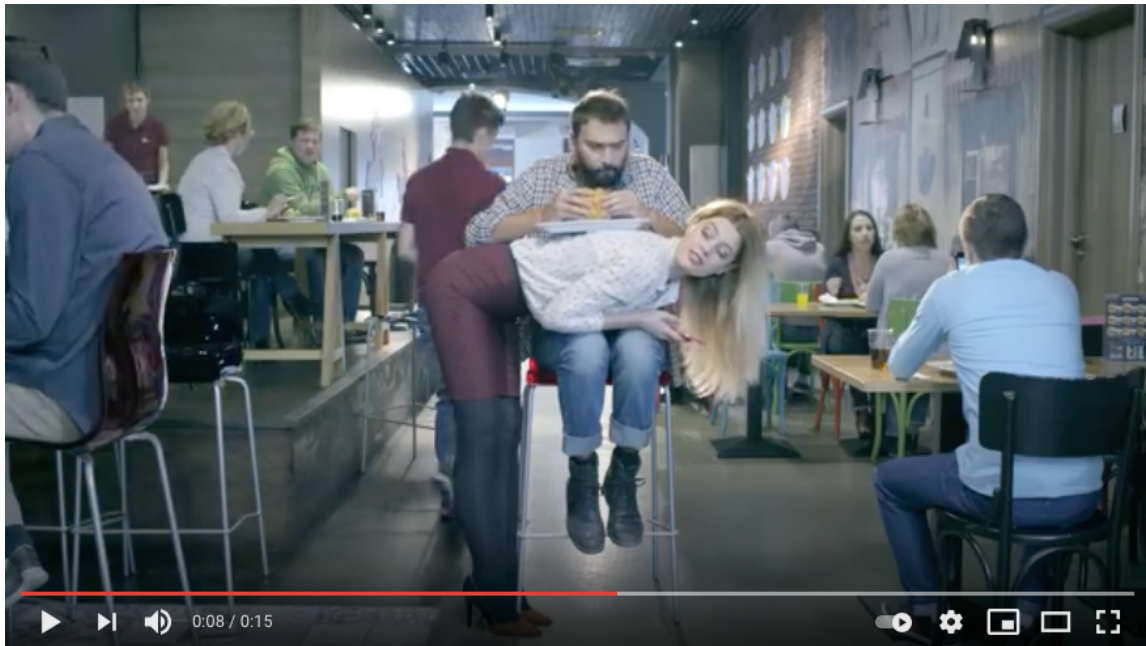


Image 2 – source:youtube.com/channel/OroToro

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-b9Zjs88nTY>

Description: The commercial starts by showing a man in close-up with a burger in his hand saying the following line:

(Translated from Romanian) “Table? My woman supports me whenever I am hungry”. Takes a bite from the burger and the image expands showing the rest of the frame. A woman wearing tight pants, high heels boots is bending over the man’s knees, who’s sitting on a tall bar chair and using her as a table while she is checking her mobile phone. The action takes place in a restaurant and, in the background, people are sitting and dining at the other tables. The woman lifts up her head a little from her phone and tells him (Translated from Romanian) “Enjoy your meal!” at which he replies (translated from Romanian) “Thank you!” and continues to eat. Then she returns to checking her phone. The frame blurs and the Fast-Food Restaurant’s logo “Oro Toro” and underneath is written (translated from Romanian) “Food for the wild ones”.

3rd Advertisement – PacoMedia Printing Center (2013)



Image 3 – source:anapebune.ro

Description: The billboard reveals a woman in a sensual position which seems to be naked and has part of the galaxy painted on her skin. On the other half is written (Translated from Romanian) “Print on whatever you want” and underneath (in the red square) “Creativity without limits”. The rest of the text contains a list of the materials that can be used to print on, the name of printing center’s website and other details about sizes and textures that can be printed on at their establishment.

4th Advertisement – Murfatlar Winery (2011)

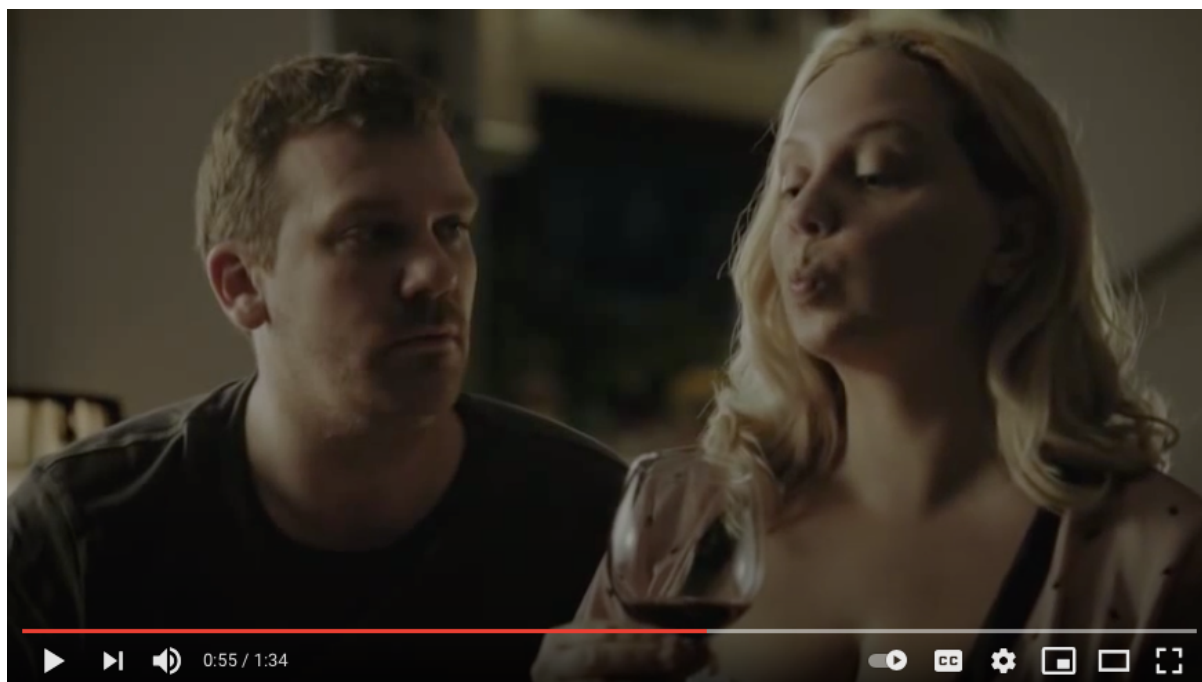


Image 4 – sorce:youtube.com/channel/MurfatlarRomania

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywDQdofg3rw>

Description: The commercial takes place in a living room, a couple is sitting on a couch in their pajamas. He is pouring wine into a glass, looks around and says, "Come on, quickly, before the kids come in!". He hands her the glass and begins to give her instructions, at first with only their faces in the frame: "Play with it!", "Yes, just like that!", "Check it out". They both look at the glass and he says "Beautiful!". She is listening expressionless then continues to follow his instructions - "Take a little bit into your mouth! A little!" she proceeds to do it. He nods pleased and continues "Swirl it around slowly! We swallow! Swallow, alright? Move it around. Take a small breath between your lips to feel everything". She chokes a little, laughs and very docile apologizes for swallowing it all. He gets very irritated and upset "You swallowed? You swallowed?!". Gets up from the couch and leaves visibly mad. At the end, the same wine testing expertise is taking place but at a winery between the first man, trying to guess the wine he just tried and another one, which seems to be a winery worker and connoisseur. The ending scene is with the wine store and in the background, the conclusion: "Since the Murfatlar winery opened up, everybody is a wine connoisseur. Listen to the dude at the winery, he will show you what to buy and how to drink it!".

The advertisements and commercials were collected from different platforms and were mostly promoting products in the area of restaurants/ food & beverage. In the study, it was assumed that the respondents purchase and consume the same or similar products and services. The advertisements were created by Romanian agencies and exclusively sexualized female models/characters, not a very unusual aspect for a patriarchal society such as Romania considering that a vast majority do not

understand the issues of sexism and its damaging effects, as well as the importance of feminism and gender equality (Grünberg, 2019).

The conversations had during the interviews were audio recorded (with the participants' consent) and also notes were taken, later allowing for a transcript to be created. This enabled for a more thorough analysis, which included going back and re-reading the responses, highlighting similarities, and uncovering new relevant data.

Data Analysis

This chapter will present the empirical data that has been collected from the participants, as well as its analysis, organized into separate subsections for each element that has been the focus for this study.

After the data has been collected, the next obvious step is analyzing it. Trost (2013) states that, when evaluating data that has been acquired through qualitative interviews, creativity is crucial. Because there are no clearly defined methods for assessing data, researchers must rely on their imagination and ingenuity to interpret the data. However, the basic steps are data reduction - where data gets comprised, organized and easy to understand, data display – so it is easy to view and draw conclusions. Lastly, conclusion and verification underlines patterns, as well as differences in the obtained data. (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

In the process of coding, Bryaman and Bell (2014) state that it should be done simultaneously with the data collection and should be assessed multiple times, first without taking notes and then while writing things down. For this research, the data has been gathered through Zoom one-on-one interviews while also taking notes at the same time, but later transcribed with the help of the recorded audio from each interview. The transcript has been browsed numerous times, notes were taken on the side and possible codes were highlighted.

Firstly, looking at the general information about the respondents, it looks like all of them graduated with at least a bachelor's degree and a vast majority is studying to get their master's degree as well, while some already obtained it. Also, it can be observed that all of them currently living in an urban area and are not married or have any children. The range of occupations is from student, gymnastics trainer, customer service worker, journalist to developer, mechanic, engineer and navigator. The average monthly income of the respondents ranges from 850 to 6.000 RON.

Women

In this part, there will be noted the reactions, attitudes and behavior of women, as well as other elements that were identified in their responses after being exposed to the selected advertisements and commercials.

Emotional Reaction and Attitudes

When asked to describe the first reaction and how the advertisement made them feel, most of the women had very strong and negative emotional reactions towards some of the ads and commercials and mild towards the other ones. The ads and commercials that displayed a more exaggerated form of sexualization (1st, 2nd and 3rd ad) were not very well received, provoking the female respondents to feel mostly “uncomfortable”, “repulsed” or “cringe” at the sight of them. These feelings were associated with the ads that also objectified women and depicted them as submissive and weak, while the men in the ad were shown as strong and dominant.

On the other hand, some of the ads generated confusion, first of all because the female interviewees didn’t understand what the promoted product was and, in some cases, felt like there was no connection between the image, text, using sex as a strategy and the product itself (especially in the 1st and 3rd ad).

From the advertisements and commercials that the women were exposed to, some generated laughter, in an isolated case because the interviewee thought it was “tasteful” and funny, but in some cases, it was “funny, but bad funny” which was explained as the content being poorly created, or the concept was considered bad to begin with (referring to the 3rd ad).

In the female responders’ perception, majority of the advertisements and commercials were described as “sexist”, “perverse”, “misogynistic”, “repulsive” and “not enjoyable at all”. If they viewed the ad as badly realized, they thought it was “uninspired” and “not very creative”, but at the same time it was seen by some as “funny” and “enjoyable” being seen as subtle and decent (3rd ad).

Interestingly, when asked if they would change something, some of the women gave alternatives where male models/ characters would have been subjected in the ad the same way the women were, which in their perspective, created a more “equal” environment between the genders and would have made them less offensive. Also, in some of the examples, they suggested that it would be better if just one sexual element would be kept, making it more appropriate, either the text (which was mentioned to be more vulgar and inappropriate) or the image (in which the model looked nice, put together and the ad was overall visually nice) without exaggerating, making it subtle. Both the sampled commercials (2nd and 4th ad) seemed to be unsavable, from the women’s point of view – being considered totally “tasteless”, “disappointing” and “degrading”.

Behavior

At the question “would you purchase the product/service?” there were some strong noes, especially for the advertisements and commercials considered utterly “disgusting”, “sexist”, “misogynistic” and “degrading” towards women (2nd, respectively 4th one). The majority stated that they “don’t want to promote this attitude” and don’t want to support the brand in any way imaginable. Also, the brands that promoted their products illustrating the man as the “alpha male”, strong, dominant and the woman as the submissive, unknowledgeable character (2nd and 4th), the female respondents felt that they were not the target for this product promotion, so they won’t consider going or buying from brands that “do not want” them.

If they initially would have considered to buy from them because they liked the product, they recalculated their decision after seeing the ad promoted by the brand. In some of the respondents’ words “I feel the ad stuck with me, in a bad way” and they would remember them every time they would see the brand logo (referring to the 1st ad).

If the ad was seen as lighter or just considered “poorly created” and “bad” (3rd ad), the general answer was “maybe” or if they “really need to”. In an isolated case, where the ad was considered funny, the answer was a strong “yes” because the “ad was funny, it stuck with me”.

When asked to choose the least favorite one and the one they liked – the majority picked the ones that “objectified”, “demeaned” and “sexualized women” in one place (4th and 2nd one) respectively the one considered “funny”, “lighter” or “the lesser of two evils” (3rd ad). In some cases, none of the sampled ads and commercials was seen as likeable.

In the perspective of all the women interviewed, these types of advertisements and commercials are not new, nor isolated. Not only that there are “bad ads, in general”, but most of them also “support and normalize gender stereotypes”, such as “cleaning products being targeted towards women as they are supposed to clean and take care of the house”, “kids medicine”, also created for women, potential mothers, “because they care for the kids”. Meanwhile, men are pictured as the “hard-working provider”, “being a specialist in tasting wine and meat”, “coming home from work while the wife welcomes him and sets up the table where she used a specific brand of condiments that the husband likes”.

Men

In this part, there will be a dive into the reactions, attitudes and behavior of men, as well as other elements that were identified in their responses after being exposed to the selected advertisements and commercials.

Emotional reaction and Attitudes

Discussing the respondents' initial reactions and feelings towards each advertisement, there were a variety of answers. Starting with "lighter" feelings such as "nostalgia", "nice", "amusing" to sentiments of languish, uncomfortableness and even disgust and repulsiveness. Harsher reactions were seen in the majority of the male respondents after viewing the commercials which objectified women, using them at tables (2nd ad) and the one that describes wine tasting between a couple (4th) with a very sexualized dialog describing them, at best, "funny for all the wrong reasons".

More neutral feelings, such as languish and boredom were attributed to the advertisements that didn't really put emphasis on the product or "put a woman there just to attract the male gaze" (referring to 3rd ad) which actually seems to apply because, in isolated cases, the interviewed men said that some of the ads "caught their eye".

On a more positive note, the 1st ad promoting Alka products was described as "nostalgic" making the responder remember the time his mother used to bake and allowed him to lick the bowl or "nice" (the 3rd ad) being seen as artistic by the interviewee.

A predominant view of the male respondents is that the commercials and ads have no connection to the product itself, by oversexualizing women and not putting enough or almost no emphasis on the promoted product, also stating that, in some cases, it makes them "want something indecent, not food". It was also expressed that, if the advertised products were "sex toys" or "video chat agencies" their perspective would not be this harsh and the marketing strategy would have been understandable.

The condition of the women presented in these materials is brought up quite a significant number of times being associated with the position of women in "medieval times" or "not from 21st century". An important number of the male respondents underlined the issues of women objectification and degradation in some of the advertisements (especially in the 2nd and 4th commercials), considering them inappropriate and offensive.

When asked what they would change, the majority stated that something that would put more emphasis on the product would have been better and more convincing, actually clearing out “what the ad is about”. It was mentioned in some cases that there was no need for a female model (1st ad, 3rd ad), images of the product would have been more effective. Overall, the main points were to eliminate the dialog and texts with sexual connotations, as well as the moments that degraded women (such as being used as a table in 2nd commercial) and replacing them with visual content that put the light on the product.

Behavior

When talking about buying the presented products/services, the responses differed. A some of the respondents said a strong “yes” in some cases, being curious to try the product (1st ad - “that cream looks delicious”) while, if the product or service seemed to have some potential or it was a last resort, the answer was “maybe”. Some of the respondents that had previous experience with the presented brand stated that they would purchase because “the product is okaish” or would not purchase because “is not a good quality” or “there are better and cheaper alternatives”. In some cases, it was mentioned that not the advertisement is encouraging them to buy the product, but the past experience with the brand.

On another hand, there are the male respondents that felt too disturbed and uncomfortable (especially by 2nd and 4th commercials) to consider purchasing anything from the brand. Some pointed out that the 3rd advertisement was so “boring”, “uninspired” and with no focus on the product (1st and 2nd) that, they wouldn’t buy it just because they are “not sure what the product is” or “what the name of the brand was”.

While putting everything into perspective, the majority of men picked the either the commercial that had the explicit sexual conversation (4th) or the one that illustrated “women as furniture” (2nd) as the worst ones. The vast majority named the first ad, being considered “funny”, “simple”, “more acceptable” as the most likeable one. In an isolated case, none were considered acceptable to be the most liked or the worst.

When asked if they feel that there are similar advertisements and commercials in Romania, most of the male respondents said that they don’t really think so as they haven’t been exposed to any. In two occasions, the subjects stated that they think that promotional materials with sexual connotations, stereotypes and not really showing of the product are quite present in Romania.

Findings and Conclusion

This chapter will consist of discussion regarding the findings by also looking back at previous research that has been done on similar subjects. There will also be included delimitations and also suggestions for further studies.

**What are the emotional reactions, attitudes and behavior of young Romanian potential consumers when exposed to sexualized Romanian advertisements?
Are there potential differences between men and women in this context?**

The current study proposed to gain a perspective on how Romanian youngsters perceive the use of female models and characters in sexualized advertisements that also, through this strategy, normalize sexism, objectification and degradation of women and emphasize male superiority. These are recurrent issues in Romanian society and studies have shown that a significant number of Romanians do not have a lot of knowledge, if any, regarding gender issues and do not grasp the gravity of the effects. (Grünberg, 2019).

To begin with the most simplistic answer to the research question – it depends on who is being asked and what they're being shown. Firstly, while looking at the empirical findings, it was observed that some of the sampled advertisements and commercials evoked stronger and more negative emotions while others milder negative, neutral or even positive reactions. Reichert (2002) points out that the level of nudity can influence the consumers' attitude toward advertisements.

In the conducted interviews, it was predominant for both male and female respondents to exhibit “disgust” or “discomfort” for materials that had both text and images with strong sexual connotations that also objectified and/ or degraded women. If the ads were, from the respondents' perspective, less explicit and a little more temperate they were perceived as acceptable or even good and funny. On the other side, if the ad was viewed by the subjects as not really interesting, with no potential of catching attention, the sentiments were mostly neutral.

An interesting aspect is that the respondents were receptive to sexualized ads if they were realized with “taste” and subtle, by just keeping one of the elements with some indecent tendencies (either text or visual) one of the female respondents clearly stating that she “has nothing against sex in ads”, but without going overboard.

Confusion was present in some of the participants' responses, both male and female interviewees mentioning that they are not sure what some of the advertisements are about, the use of the sexual concept is poorly executed, with no connection with the product or brand itself and mentioned that a simpler advertisement with more focus on the product that, from their point of view, would be more convincing and effective. Reichert (2003) explains that the use of sexual appeal should be used in order to send an overall message about the brand. It can be supposed that when specific task is not achieved by the brand, the effect is not the expected one and the advertisement is not that efficient.

Most men generally expressed their disapproval more due to the fact that the product was not properly promoted, while most women were more negatively triggered by the way the women characters and models were portrayed in the advertisements. Furthermore, majority of male responders expressed their willingness to try the products regardless of how they found the advertisement, especially if they had previous positive experiences with the brand. In some cases, the intention to purchase is not determined by the ad but conditioned by a possible need for the product or service.

All the women interviewed, and a small number of men stated that they do not intent to purchase the products shown in the ads that caused them strong negative reactions because they don't want to support and associate themselves in any way with the respective brand. A recent study suggests that women tend to be hesitant about purchasing a specific product if they had negative emotions towards the sexualized ad (Gramazio, Cadinu, Guizzo, & Camaghi, 2020).

Furthermore, a significant number of the female responders mentioned that they don't even feel like being the target of the advertisements, some of them being obviously for men. This can show that while some brands try to attract a specific group by using sexualized content, they might offend another one along the way. Previous studies have explained that men are showing more positive feelings when the model in the ad is female, while women have negative reactions toward the same advertising. (Gramazio, Cadinu, Guizzo, & Camaghi, 2020).

Although, most female respondents expressed the will to potentially purchase the product or service if there is considered to be less sexualization in the advertisement.

An interesting aspect was that some of the female subjects suggested that one way to make some of the advertisements less offensive was by introducing male models or characters that would play a similar position to the women. Previous research results

have stated that women tend to have a more favorable attitude than men when ads reveal sexual depicted male models (Simpson, Horton , & Brown, 1996).

A small number of the male respondents mentioned that they felt aroused by some of the advertisements. The effect of arousal on attitudes toward commercials, according to Singh and Churchill (1987), is based on Schachter and Singer's theory of emotion, which states that an emotion caused by arousal is dependent on an individual's perception of the arousing situation.

In comparison, all the female respondents seem to be more attentive of similar advertisements and commercials that have been and are still shown in Romania, that promote gender roles and stereotypes, as well as overly sexualized female models. On the other hand, the majority of men stated that they are not aware of similar advertisements, just a small number having a similar point of view with the female respondents.

The findings of this study could be used by marketers and advertisers when trying to plan out a strategy and concept for a product or service promotion, when targeting young Romanian consumers in order to attract diverse potential consumers.

Limitations

Firstly, the research is using a limited number of advertisements and commercials to expose the respondents to because of the lack of available content, but that could have offered different nuances in the consumers' reactions, as well as maybe a different viewpoint if there were also sexualized male models/ characters.

Secondly, the study has a binary focus, trying to understand the effects on men and women, so there is no point of view from queer people. Due to the small scale of the sample and the age group, the findings can't be extrapolated to all Romanian men and women.

A risk when using one collection method is the uncertainty of the results, as bias information might be provided. The respondents might not have been entirely honest with their answers, which creates a high chance for denaturation of reality and influencing the results.

Suggestions for Future Research

Taking into consideration some interesting aspects identified through the responders' answers a few ideas regarding future researchers are being suggested. One of them is focusing on a study exposing a similar target, with male and female participants to advertisements that also include sexualized models and characters. This way, data can be collected on the attitudes and behavior of men and women exposed to male and female sexualized models and see if there are any similarities or differences between how the two groups react.

An issue would be to find advertisements to be used as sample, created by Romanian agencies that would depict male in such a way considering that "men as table" is not something a patriarchal society would want to see. Supposedly international advertisements can be used, by they are not necessarily considered to be tailored for Romanian consumers. Even studies have shown that women are more likely than men to be sexualized in advertisements. (Vaerhellen, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2016)

Some other suggestions would be to dive a little deeper in some of the factors that could influence the way the respondents perceive the advertisements shown, such as education, occupation or income. For this a new sample can be created that can be formed exclusively by two groups - one with participants that finished the required 10 grades or graduated high school and entered the workforce and one where the subjects got a university degree, within the same age range, considering the fact that, according to the European Commission (2018) Romania's pre-university education system is facing multiple challenges.

References

- Allen, C., Machleit, K., & Kleine, S. (1992). A Comparison of Attitudes and Emotions as Predictors of Behavior at Diverse Levels of Behavioral Experience. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(4), 493-504.
- Aylesworth, A., Goodstein, R., & Kalra, A. (1999). Effect of archetypal embeds on feelings: An indirect route to affecting attitudes? *Journal of Advertising*, 28, 73-81.
- Bestjobs. (2019, February 20). *Romania Insider*. From [romania-insider.com](https://www.romania-insider.com/study-workplace-sexual-harassment): <https://www.romania-insider.com/study-workplace-sexual-harassment>
- Black, I., Organ, G., & Morton, P. (2010). The Effect of Personality on Response to Sexual Appeals. *European Journal of Marketing* 44(9-10), 1453-1477.
- Black, I., Organ, G., & Morton, P. (2010). The Effect of Personality on Response to Sexual Appeals. *European Journal of Marketing*, 44(9-10), 1453-1477.
- Brown, T., Suter, T., & Churchill, G. (2014). *Basic Marketing Research: Customer Insights and Managerial Action (8th ed.)*. Stamford: Cengage learning.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2018). *Business research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods 4th*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Churchill, G., & Singh, S. (1987). Arousal and Advertising Effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 16(1), 4-40.
- Clow, K., & Baack, D. (2007). *Integrated advertising promotion and marketing communications (3rd ed.)*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Coates, J. (2003). *Men talk*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Corrin, C. (1992). *Superwomen and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*. Toronto: Second Story P.
- Daffemer, M., Campagna, J., & Rodgers, R. (2019). Making gains: Hypermuscularity and objectification of male and female Olympic athletes in sports illustrated across 60 years. *Body Image* 29, 156-160.
- Dahl, D., Sengupta, J., & Vohs, K. (2009). Sex in advertising: Gender differences and the role of relationship commitment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36, 215-231.

- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical education*, 40(4), 314-321.
- Dillard, J., & Pfau, M. (2002). *The persuasion handbook: Developments in theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- EIGE. (2017). *Gender Equality Index 2017: Romania*. European Institute of Gender Equality.
- Einhorn, B. (1991). Where Have all the Women Gone? Women and the Women's Movement in East Central Europe. *Feminist Review*, 39, 16-36.
- Eisenstein, Z. (1993). 'Eastern European Male Democracies: A Problem of Unequal Equality. In N. Funk, & M. Mueller, *Gender Politics and Post Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union* (pp. 303-312). New York: Routledge.
- Equality, E. I. (2020). *Gender Equality Index*. EIGE.
- European, C. (2018). *Education and Training Monitor*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission, D.-G. f. (2016). *Eurobarometer: Gender-based violence*.
- Filia, C. (2021). *Experiențele femeilor în timpul pandemiei*. Agenția Națională pentru Egalitatea de Șanse între Femei și Bărbați.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fong, M., & Paul, G. (1992). Eastern Europe. In V. M. Moghdam, *Privatization and Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: The Gender Division* (pp. 44-49). Helsinki: WIDER.
- FRA. (2014). *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.
- Fredrickson, B., & Roberts, T. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21, pp. 173-206.
- Gerish, D. (2005). Gender Theory. In H. Nicholson, *Palgrave Advances in the Crusades* (pp. 130-147). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goven, J. (1993). Gender Politics in Hungary: Autonomy and Antifeminism. In N. Funk, & M. Mueller, *Gender Politics and Post Communism* (pp. 224-240). New York: Routledge.
- Gramazio, S., Cadinu, M., Guizzo, F., & Camaghi, A. (2020). Does Sex Really Sell? Paradoxical Effects of Sexualization in Advertising on Product Attractiveness and Purchase Intentions. *Sex Roles*.
- Grünberg, L. (2019). *Barometru de gen: România 2018*. București: Editura Hecate.

- Guba, Egon, G., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2, 163-194.
- Hare-Maustin, R. T., & Marecek, J. (1988). The meaning of Difference: Gender Theory, Postmodernism and Psychology. *American Psychological Association*.
- Heitlinger, A. (1993). The Impact of the Transition from Communism on the Status of Women in the Czech and Slovak Republics. In N. Funk, & M. Mueller, *Gender Politics and Post Communism* (pp. 286-300). New York: Routledge.
- History, A. (1926, April). Woodbury's Facial Soap. Andrew Jergens Company.
- Iancu, M. (2021, May 6). *ÎPS Teodosie: "Femeia a început păcatul. Dacă nu păcătuia, nu ar fi născut în dureri."*. From Adevarul:
https://m.adevarul.ro/locale/constant/Ips-teodosie-femeia-inceput-pacatul-nu-pacatuia-nu-nascut-dureri-1_609422955163ec4271c3fde0/index.html?fbclid=IwAR1DSYnsqKw1LVqyKi00plEqxbqai1tVM9-vVSYXLeQ45B8P2quY01zvcrE
- IGPR. (2020). *Statistici Violenta în Familie 2020*. IGPR.
- Jones, M., Gelb, B., & A.J.S. (1998). Beefcake and cheesecake: Insights for advertisers. *Journal of Advertising*, 27, 33-51.
- Jule, A. (2014). Gender Theory. *Gender Studies Institute, Trinity Western University, Canada*, 2466.
- Kiczko, Z., & Farkasova, E. (1993). The Emancipation of Women: A concept that Failed. In N. Funk, & M. Mueller, *Gender Politics and Post Communism* (pp. 84-94). New York: Routledge.
- Kimmel, M., & Aronson, A. (2010). *The gendered society reader (4th ed.)*. New York: Oxford Univeristy Press.
- Klug, P., & Vigar-Ellis, D. (2012). Gender Differences In Student Attitudes Towards Sexual Appeals In Print Advertising. *SAJEMS*, 15(4), 367-380.
- LaTour, M. (1990). Female nudity in print advertising: An analysis of gender differences in arousal and ad response. *Psychology & Marketing*, 7, 65-81.
- Lorenzen, L., Grieve, F., & Thomas, A. (2004). Exposure to male models decreases men's body satisfaction. *Sex Roles* 51, 743-748.
- Loughnan, S., & Pacili, M. (2014). Seeing (and treating) others as sexual objects: Toward a more complete mapping of sexual objectification. *TPM: Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology* 21, 309-325.
- MacKenzie, S., & Lutz, R. (1989). An Empirical Examination of the Structural Antecedents of Attitude Toward the Ad in an Advertising Pretesting Context. *Journal of Marketing*, 53(2), 48-65.
- Manea, C.-N. (2013). Gender Stereotypes. A comparative Analysis: Preschool Children from Romania and France. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, volume 78, 16-20.

- Margolis, H. (2018, October 10). *Speak out to Protect Bulgaria's Women*. From Euronews: <https://www.euronews.com/2018/10/10/speak-out-to-protect-bulgaria-s-women-view>
- McKinley, J. (2015). Critical Argument and Writer Identity: Social Constructivism as a Theoretical Framework for EFL Academic Writing. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 12(3), 184-207.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mittal, B., & Lassar, W. (2000). Sexual liberalism as a determinant of consumer response to sex in advertising. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 15, 111-127.
- Nussbaum, M. (1995). Objectification. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 24, 249-291.
- Occhipinti, L. (1996). Two Steps Back?: Anti-Feminism in Eastern Europe. *Anthropology Today*, Dec., 1996, Vol. 12, No. 6, 13-18.
- Paglia, C. (1991). *Sexual personae: Art and decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Pine, F. (1994). 'Privatisation in Post-socialist Poland: Peasant Women, Work, and the Restructing of the Public Spher. *Cambridge Anthropology* (17) 3, 19-42.
- Porter, P. (1971). Advertising in the Early Cigarette Industry: W. Duke, Sons & Company of Durham. *The North Carolina Histroical Review* 48 (1), 31-34.
- Putrevu, S. (2008). Consumer responses toward sexual and nonsexual appeals: The influence of involvement, need for cognition (NFC), and gender. *Journal of Advertising* 37, 57-69.
- Reichert, T., & Ramirez, A. (2000). Defining Sexually Oriented Appeals in Advertising: A Grounded Theory Investigation. *Advances in Consumer Research* 30(1), 267-273.
- Reichert, T., Heckler, S., & Jackson, S. (2001). The effects of sexual social marketing appeals on cognitive processing and persuasion. *Journal of Advertising* 30, 13-27.
- Reichert, T., LaTour, M., & Kim, J. (2007). Assessing the influence of gender and sexual self-schema on affective responses to sexual content in advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 29, 63-77.
- Reichert, T. (2003). The online source for sex in advertising research, history and commentary. <http://www.sexinadvertising.com>.
- Reichert, T. (2003). The Prevalence of Sexual Imagery in Ads Targeted to Young Adults. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 403-412.
- Reichert, T. (2007). The Ageless Allure: Sex, Media, and Marketing. *Journal of Promotion Management* 13(1-2), 3-11.

- Rick, S. (2018). *Chron*. From smallbusiness.chron.com:
<https://smallbusiness.chron.com/difference-between-ad-commercial-26203.html>
- Robinson, Z. (2018). Intersectionality and Gender Theory. In B. R. (eds), *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender, Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research* (pp. 69-78). Springer International Publishing.
- Scharpf, N. (2020, August 5). *GMF*. From gmfus.org:
<https://www.gmfus.org/blog/2020/08/05/different-kind-story-gender-relations-central-eastern-europe>
- Schnoor, M. (2005, March 5). *Emotional Response*. From Mike Schnoor:
<https://mikeschnoor.com/2005/03/05/emotional-response/>
- Scott, H. (1974). *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Simpson, P., Horton, S., & Brown, G. (1996). Male nudity in advertisements: A modified replication and extension of gender and product effects. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*, 24, 257-262.
- Surbhi, S. (2017, October 28). *Difference between attitude and Behavior*. From KeyDifferences: <https://keydifferences.com/difference-between-attitude-and-behavior.html>
- Vaerhellen, Y., Dens, N., & De Pelsmacker, P. (2016). A longitudinal content analysis of gender role portrayal in Belgian television advertising. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 22, 170-188.
- Venerova, L., & Okruhlicova, A. (1992). 'Czechoslovakia.' In *The Impact of Economic and Political Reforms on the Status of Women in Eastern Europe. United Nations Regional Seminar*, (pp. 40-45). New York: United Nations.
- Walker, S. (2018, december 21). *"We won't keep quiet again": the women taking on Viktor Orbán*. From The Guardian:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/21/hungary-female-politicians-viktor-orban>
- Wike, R., Poushter, J., Silver, L., Devlin, K., Fetterolf, J., Castillo, A., & Huang, C. (2019). *EUropean Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism*. Pew Research Center.
- Wolchik, S. (1991). *Czechoslovakia in Transition: Politics, Economics and Society*. New York: Pinter Publishers.
- Yin, R. (1994). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods (3rd ed, Vol. 5)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix: Interview Guide

Introduction

I am investigating how young consumers' view and react to advertisements and commercials that have gendered connotations. For this interview, you will be shown a few advertisements and commercials that have been either on air on TV, on billboards or as an online ad in Romania, followed by some questions about your initial thoughts and feeling. After that, you can re-watch all of them again if you need to, or we can directly wrap it up with a last couple of questions. There are no right or wrong answers, so do not feel pressured to give me answers that you think are socially acceptable as I am genuinely interested in your views and opinions.

Information about the respondent:

name

age

gender (m/f)

education

monthly income

occupation

family/children

Questions:

Questions after every ad/commercial shown:

- What are the first thoughts after seeing the ad? How did it make you feel? (maybe some follow-up questions based on their answer).
- Would you change anything? If yes, what and why?
- Would you consider purchasing the featured product or service? Why?

After all the ads have been shown, maybe show all of them again and then ask

- What is your least favorite ad/commercial from the ones you've seen? Why?
- What is the one you liked the most? Why?
- Do you think there are usually a lot of similar advertisements or commercials in Romania?