RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship between Advertising, Archetypal Imaginaries and Myths

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Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate that mythical structures, capable of organizing the imaginary and directing it toward acquiring products as symbolic objects, play a significant role in advertising design. By extension, they leave an imprint on the broader cultural and mental landscape of the contemporary world. The relationship between archetypes and myths is outlined as a complex interplay of actualization, manifestation, and organization through which the two intertwine. As a secular form of contemporary remythologization, advertising borrows numerous iconic schemes and a symbolic polysemy from the archetypal reservoir to transfer them into the realm of brands and products.

1. The Relationship between Advertising and Archetypal Imaginaries

The fact that advertising resorts to mythical structures capable of organizing the imaginary and directing it toward acquiring products as symbolic objects entails the enabling of considerable archetypal material, insofar as archetypes mediate the manifestation of myths through universal representations and images.

"*We shall agree (...) to define the imaginaries as sets of productions, mental or materialized in works, based on visual – painting, drawing, photography – or linguistic images – metaphor, symbol, story – forming coherent and dynamic sets, referring to a symbolic function in the sense of combining literal and figurative meanings.*" (Wunenburger, 2022: 23)

Archetypes, as prototypes of symbolic ensembles deeply ingrained within the subconscious, are archaic images of the collective unconscious, imaginary patterns, or performant, ordered and ordering, models, as suggested by the etymological structure of the term *archetype* (in Greek, *arche* designates the idea of principle, origin, beginning, while *typos* signifies form, figure, or model). More specifically, archetypes are formal potentials for representation organized around an invariable core of meaning.

The relationship between archetypes and myths is outlined as a complex interplay of actualization, manifestation, and organization through which the two intertwine: thus, if myth is fundamentally narrative, archetype is figurative. The dynamics of archetypes and symbols enable the articulation of the myth's message. Myths are meant to explain certain schemes underlying archetypal ideas (e.g., the myth of the hero, with its well-known narrative structure of a special mission, is embodied through various heroic archetypal figures such as the orphaned boy, the lost son, the young prince, etc.). Myths forge logical models for evaluation and integration into the natural world through symbolic thinking; they are symbolic theatres activating archetypal scenarios.

From the repertoire of archetypal structures compiled by Jung, the most well-known types include: the *animus–anima* dyad (the masculine dimension of the woman's unconscious respectively the feminine dimension of the man's unconscious), the *mother* (an archaic image of femininity), the child or the *infans archetype* (symbolizing regeneration – the divine or miracle child capable of initiation and transformation), the *shadow* (the darker side of one's personality), and the *wise old man archetype* (an image of the unconscious self).

As a secular form of contemporary remythologization, advertising borrows numerous iconic schemes and a symbolic polysemy from the archetypal reservoir to transfer them into the realm of brands and products. It

exploits both the practical and symbolic dimensions of the product. The functional criterion is essential in advertising archetypology, adapting original myths and archetypes to consumer needs so that the symbolic aspect of a product's image refers to original patterns, while its pragmatic aspect addresses present-day requirements. Archetypal language functions as a code preserving the promise and image the product offers. Through this, the consumer establishes a consistent relationship with the product, with archetypes becoming a means to access the psyche on a subconscious level

Integrated into the great mythical structures frequently recycled in advertising (the myth of the hero, the erotic myth, the myth of the eternal return), various archetypal figures participate in the advertising spectacle, engaging in a competition to showcase products, captivate consumers, and immerse them in a symbolic mirage.

1.1. Archetypes specific to the hero myth

Determined by courage and boldness, as well as success in overcoming obstacles, the dominant image of the classic hero is transferred in the advertising space to a diverse environment of action, adapting to contexts such as a sports competition, workplace, or any practical area of life where a problem requiring urgent resolution arises. Updated, the hero is associated with semantics of the contemporary world such as speed, energy, discipline, decision-making power, and the ability to choose among products of the same category, etc. (e.g., detergent advertisements often employ the mythical schema of heroism). Among these archetypal representations frequently used in advertising, the following are worth mentioning:

1.1.1. The archetype of the conqueror of lands or wilderness, associated with the archetype of the explorer or the adventurer, is mostly used in car advertisements. This archetypal schema corresponds to consumer values and ideals such as boldness, energy, and speed. The intended meanings achieved through the use of this archetype in advertising include: the product helps the consumer feel free and be nonconformist; the product inspires vigour, resilience, and solidity, being suitable for use in dangerous situations; it helps consumers build a strong identity, differentiating themselves from others through the time-space-speed dynamic reflected in their personality.

1.1.2. The archetype of the warrior defending certain values, akin to a modern-day crusader, is exemplified in relevant advertisements such as those for Holsten beer, depicting a knight in armour ensuring quality, accompanied by the message: "*Holsten's taste is guaranteed by the German purity law of 1516. This purity must be respected.*" His figure is associated with the image of the vigilante, the guardian of values.

1.1.3. In advertising, **the missionary** depicts someone who carries forward a duty or task, unable to abandon a tradition. The commercial for *Murfatlar* wine is constructed around this image of the missionary, with a grandson continuing the family tradition.

1.1.4. **The archetype of the magician** who, illustrating the narrative scheme of fairy tales helps to fulfil some wishes. In advertising, magic operates everywhere through the promptness of effects and the efficiency of resolving a situation; sometimes, the magician can be the consumer of a product with miraculous powers, which is also recommended to others (e.g., the *Tide* campaign with the slogan: "*My mom is a magician*").

1.2. Archetypes specific to the erotic myth – predominantly focus on two types of relationships: masculine–feminine and seducer–seduced. The product mediates or triggers the process of temptation, embodying either masculinity or femininity. Three typical scenarios recur within this archetypal narrative:
-       the product acts as an aid in initiating a love relationship (*Kandia, chocolate with love*).
-       the product is treated like one of the partners (*Kreskova – my Russian companion!*).
-       the product is the outcome of the act of seduction, embodying the mythical fulfilment of love (*Izvorul minunilor – a legendary water variety*).

1.3. Archetypes specific to the myth of the eternal return – refer to the primordial moment of creation, to the beginnings, and to the sources of existence, spanning a wide array of advertising scenarios that can be classified into two typologies:

1.3.1. Material Creation Archetypes – advertising employs elementary archetypal images (fire, water, earth, air) combined within a poetic advertising framework of primordial elements.

1.3.2. Immaterial Creation Archetypes – advertising resorts to archetypal representations such as: the *angel archetype* (*Rai [=Heaven] by Murfatlar*); the *creator archetype* (emphasizing on the way in which the product was designed); the *artist archetype* (a Red Bull commercial evoking one of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings); the *innovator archetype* (highlighting the idea of originality); the *craftsman archetype* (*Sibiu liver pate – the weavers*); the *professional archetype*, among others.

2. Stereotypes in Advertising and Myth

Stereotypes, or *stereotypies*, are simplified, uniformly fixed images of reality that facilitate its understanding due to their schematic, generalizing nature. The etymology of the term is connected to the activity of typographers, referring to casting lead into metal moulds (from Greek: *stereos* – "solid" and *typos* – "sign, mark"). Symbolic/mythical thinking operates through a system of collective schematic representations, while stereotyping constitutes a fundamental dimension of advertising, whose messages are concise, terse, constructed by resorting to such means of cognitive economy. Among the numerous definitions of the concept, the idea of a mental schema, with a simplified, easily recognizable, and applicable structure in various real-life scenarios, is particularly operational in advertising (subjected to a disorienting hybridization of discursive registers and codes).

The persistence of stereotypes as standardized mental representations can be attributed to specific features, such as:

- *self-affirming* nature – this refers to the ability of certain images to reinforce themselves within social groups, anticipating the attitudes of group members;
- *informative* nature – stereotypes are designed to trigger social learning processes; promoting certain cultural stereotypes and social representation clichés facilitates schematic learning;
- *cognitive economy* phenomenon – stereotypes activate social thinking and social memory efficiently; socio-cultural stereotypes, generated collectively by the social context, are transmitted from one generation to another through various channels (socialization, behavioural models, education);
- *linguistic reinforcement* – stereotypes are linguistically supported, which aids in perpetuating these mental schematizations (abstract terms are definitive for stereotypical behaviours) (Moraru, 2009: 122)

A field that manages and disseminates numerous social representations, standardizing certain images and promoting them through commercials, *advertising* is the space most open to the phenomenon of *stereotyping*. Essentially, the advertising spectacle is built on the stereotypes played between the producer and the consumer, as commercials package products with stereotypical representations in order to sell them to customers, ensuring audience adherence to particular behavioural images and lifestyles. Stereotypes offer a convenient means of accessing advertising messages, creating a sense of familiarity and mental comfort for the consumer. Advertising simplifies the consumer's world and ties it to the product, making brand acquisition a necessity and fostering customer loyalty.

However, along with the purchase of objects, a set of values, beliefs, representations, and stereotyped images are also assimilated. A thematic classification of advertising stereotypes reveals the following categories:

2.1. Gender stereotypes – are built through binary oppositions, masculine traits vs. feminine traits, while commercials target products toward one gender or both, accompanied by values such as: for men: strength, security, individualism; for women: delicacy, beauty, fragility.

In regards to female beauty stereotypes, one can also identify a rich repertoire:
- the *seductive woman stereotype*;
- the *natural woman stereotype*;
- the *eternal youth stereotype*;
- the *classical beauty stereotype*;
- the *hedonistic woman stereotype*, etc.

Similarly, male beauty stereotypes are generally constructed in relation to representations of strength, energy, authority, and power. Commercials emphasize gestures, posture, and gaze expression. Thus, distinctions arise:
- the *seductive* or *conquering man stereotype* (the Don Juan-type);
- the *elegant classical beauty stereotype*;
- the *Herculean man stereotype*, etc.

2.2. Social stereotypes – are associated to roles in society, most often professional roles, such as:
- **the specialist** – portrayed as guaranteeing quality and testifying as a professional to the advantages of using a particular service or product;
- **the economist or bank officer** – conveying trust, supporting innovation, and helping fulfil aspirations;
- **the construction site worker** – depicted in a populist light, always present in the community, active, noisy, and with a sense of humour (the *Unirea* liquor brand);
- **the mother and housewife** *figure*– a symbol of family happiness, promoting values such as responsibility, care, and attention (Tide commercial, *SUPERMOMS, My Mom is Super*);
- **the active woman** – working in an office, captured in a professional setting, etc.

2.3. Age stereotypes – sharing the values transmitted through advertising scenarios also involves age segmentation, associating psychological traits with products targeted at specific age groups (adolescence, old age).

2.4. Cultural stereotypes – imply that values and stereotypes are adapted to local peculiarities to resonate with the audience. They appeal to an identity-based culture, underpinning the consumer's self-image. These stereotypes consider the influence of cultural factors on consumer behaviour, guiding product selection and shaping mental representations. Cultural stereotypes include:
- **historical stereotypes;**
- **ideological stereotypes;**
- **stereotypes of personalities;**
- **folklore stereotypes;**
- **traditional stereotypes;**
- **stereotypes related to one's origin**, etc.

Conclusion

Advertising is not only a tool for promoting products, but also a complex mechanism for influencing the collective imagination, through the use of archetypes and myths. Advertising functions as a modern form of remit, adapting ancient mythical structures to the contemporary context and consumer needs.

Archetypes are used to create strong emotional bonds between the product and the consumer, and stereotypes simplify and streamline the advertising message. By resorting to the myth of the hero, the erotic myth or the myth of returning to origins, advertising creates familiar and attractive scenarios, facilitating identification and attachment to brands. Finally, it is highlighted that advertising does not only sell products, but also shapes perceptions, lifestyles and cultural values.

Thus, advertising does not only promote objects, but also contributes to shaping cultural values, lifestyles and the collective perception of the world, strengthening the connection between consumers and the symbolic universe of brands.

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