

Fictional Characters in Modern Russian TV Advertising as a Means of Implementing Communicative Functions¹

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the fictional characters used in the advertising text, which are an effective means of implementing communicative function. As a fictional character is considered an element of the advertising text - an image that embodies an action, experience or statement and is in a variety of relationships with the object of advertising. The article presents the typology of fictional characters: based on their nature and formal characteristics, as well as based on the role that the characters play in plot construction of the advertising text. Fictional advertising characters, being a link between the brand and the consumer, can perform various communicative functions. The most important of them is the function of attracting attention (attractive). Advertising characters allow capturing the addressee's attention and highlight an advertisement among competitive texts. The informative function is realized by notifying the advertising information by a fictional character. The function of emotional "contagion" is implemented through the transfer of emotions that a character is experiencing to the target audience. The revealed features allow speaking of advertising characters as effective elements of advertising text and advertising communication.

Keywords: Advertising; Advertising Text; Fictional Character; Brand Character; Communicative Function.

1. Introduction

In modern conditions of struggle for the consumer, it is no longer enough for an advertiser to simply notify the audience of advantages and unique characteristics of their product. Advertising should perform a number of functions: to attract the attention of target audience, standing out from other advertising messages,

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to cause a positive reaction, to leave an emotional mark in the minds of consumers, see: Dyer (1995), Cook (1992), Goddard (1998).

The unit of advertising communication is an advertising text - a polycode text, which contains information about the object of advertising (about an individual or legal entity; about goods, services, ideas, etc.); forms and maintains interest in it; contributes to its promotion in the market. The advertising text, in accordance with the actual requirements for it, has signs that allow the addressee recognizing it as advertising (Krivonosov, 2001, pp. 13-14; Feshchenko, 2006, p. 162; Vargas-Hernández, 2016). The manufacturer implements the functions inherent in advertising with the help of advertising text. The list of these functions is not the same in the works of different authors; it depends on the approach chosen by the researcher to the phenomenon of advertising: Linguistic, marketing, communicative, psychological, etc. (Morozov, 2009; Stepanova, 2013; Pyadysheva, 2016) Nevertheless, it can be said that the allocation of communicative function is a common place for the majority of scientific works on advertising and, in particular, on advertising text. Recognizing the advertising text as a unit of advertising communication, one should speak of the communicative function as a basic one. This function is complex, it highlights several aspects or private functions providing the process of advertising communication: the function of attracting attention, the function of informing, the function of emotional involvement of the consumer, etc.

A special role in ensuring effective communication belongs to the visual signs of the advertising message (Yakuba, 2013, p. 138). Often, a means of achieving these goals becomes an advertising character who is able to perform all of the above functions (Davtyan, 2006, pp. 49-61; Yazdekhasti et al., 2015). In addition, the character's introduction into the advertising text is effective, since it contributes to the expansion of the circle of potential consumers, formation of a positive attitude towards the brand, building an associative connection between the personal qualities of the character and the trademark (Batra, 2004, p. 409; Murzinova et al., 2018).

In modern advertising (especially television), the tendency to use images of fictional creatures endowed with anthropomorphic features as advertising characters is very stable. They make advertising expressive and unusual, have unlimited potential for presenting the advertised product or service and are an effective means of implementing basic communication functions (Jabbari et al., 2019; Nakhaee & Nasrabadi, 2019).

2. Materials and Methods

Research materials: texts of TV advertising, which include advertising characters - fictional creatures with anthropomorphic features. The analysis was

carried out using the methods of discursive and semiotic analysis; the following methods were also used: observations and descriptions, associative relationships, interpretive and contextual analysis, classification, generalization and typology.

3. Results and Discussion

The images of fictional characters used in modern advertising are heterogeneous both from their nature, appearance, morphological features, and from participation in the plot of the commercial. Consider both of these sides.

Analysis of the nature of fictional characters of commercial advertising allows selecting several main groups of characters.

3.1. Painted Person

This group includes images of a person not having real prototypes. Morphologically, they are completely identical to a person; they have a head, sense organs, two arms and two legs. It is endowed with the ability to think, speak, can give advice to other characters played by real people.

Examples of realistic animated characters are, for example, children and their father from Sportik water advertising. Clothes, backpacks behind the backs of children give a clear idea that these are schoolchildren to whom a caring father gives a bottle of water with them.

Realistic reproduced characters are similar to the real consumer, and therefore are able to enter the trust area. It is known that the effectiveness of advertising increases in the case when the advertising character has a set of social signs similar to the target audience. Identifying himself/herself with the character, the consumer feels the desire to possess the same product or just as easily solve his/her problem.

The rescuers-firefighters from Gaviscon drug advertising are less realistic. They demonstrate the drug effect on the human body, building the link “heartburn = fire”, “Gaviscon = firefighters”. To make the image of firefighters more firmly associated with the medicine, they are represented by white men, their uniforms and equipment are of the same color as themselves. The lack of a detailed study of the appearance of the drawn people allows focusing on the viewer's attention directly on the advertisement object.

3.2. Person in the Role of a Fictional Character

In commercial advertising, the role of a fictional character can often be played by a real person.

For example, in the series of commercial advertising for throat aids from Hexoral trademark, famous Russian singer Philip Kirkorov plays the role of the Snow King, who seeks to infect everyone around. The ice suit, the crown, the magic ice staff create an obvious associative connection with the fairy tale "The Snow Queen" and allow identifying the role of the main character.

The main character advertising Hylak forte suffers from digestive problems, which are "personified" in the advertising message. The role of dysbacteriosis is played by a skinny man, a man of medium build has abdominal distension. The role of each character is marked on the shirt.

Often the actor can depict the advertised object. For example, in advertising for Coldact Flu Plus drug, the main character, while at the workplace, begins to feel cold symptoms. He is helped with a character in a T-shirt with *Coldact* inscription, who stretches a capsule to the diseased, which eliminates all the symptoms.

3.3. Animals with the Intelligence Features

Quite often, the main characters of commercial advertising are represented by drawn animals. They are endowed with anthropomorphic features, the ability to speak with people or with each other.

For example, in an advertisement for semi-finished products of Troekurovo brand, the fox family practices yoga and eats burgers with pleasure. The heroes have external morphological signs of foxes, but they are able to talk, they are erect, they use their front paws like hands and wear clothes.

The heroes of advertising of dairy products of Chudo-detki trademark are a merry company of animals. The zebra, Tim duckbill, Emma ostrich, Gaz kangaroo and Buch rhino play together on the playground. Animals are dressed in children's clothes, which helps to identify the gender and age of the characters.

The images of this type also include the wise goose, engaged in the production of seeds (Semechki ot Martina), the stork musician in the advertising ointment Bepanthen, the penguin family from the advertising of Kinder Pingui cake, etc.

3.4. Characters Who Personify Other Real-Life Objects and Phenomena of Organic and Inorganic Origin

To this type we include personalized objects and phenomena that have inanimate analogues. For example, Happy Meal from McDonalds. This perky joke, specially designed to advertise children's dinners, is a red box with eyes, arms and legs.

Microbes are endowed with anthropomorphic traits in advertising of Domestos cleaner. In commercial advertising, this is an army of creepy creatures

seeking to grab a toilet and a bathroom. Some have two heads, one, two or three eyes; some move on their feet, others crawl like worms.

In the advertisement of nail polish from nail fungus Oflomil, a pair of plush slippers in the form of two hedgehogs acts as personalized items. Hedgehogs communicate, one wonders why everyone thinks that hedgehogs love mushrooms, and advises to run away when meeting with a fungus.

3.5. Creatures That Have No Analogues in the Real World

This group includes completely fictional characters that do not have materially expressed prototypes. These are unique images designed specifically for the advertising campaign.

For example, the video advertising for Imunele is accompanied by text on behalf of the Lyoshka (a boy) immunity. His immunity is presented in the form of a funny white fluffy creature with blue hair that accompanies the boy in all games.

Another example is the “ghosts of complications” in Broncho-munal drug advertising. Otitis, Genyantritis and Bronchitis, painted in the form of typical ghost cartoons, fly through the air, frightening a girl suffering from a cold: Otitis compresses the girl's ears, Genyantritis - the nose, and Bronchitis - the neck.

Fictional characters may participate differently in a commercial advertising, the character's connections with the advertised product are also diverse. Depending on the role played by the analyzed characters in plot construction, there are several most frequently encountered types.

"Assistant". A hero belonging to this group demonstrates a tool that helps people faced with a problem to effectively solve it.

It should be noted that fictional characters in the role of "assistant" are frequent in advertising cleaning products. Striking examples of "assistants" are Mr. Proper - a hero of commercial advertising of Mr. Proper detergent - and Mr. Muscle, who represents Mr. Muscle detergent in the superhero costume.

The fictional character Biolan acts as an "assistant" in the advertising of means for dishwashing, cleaning and washing Biolan. This magical creature appears in the kitchen, littered with dirty dishes, and in a matter of seconds helps the hostess to clean and wash everything.

Often the plot of advertising of pharmaceutical products is built around the hero-"assistant". In advertising of a vitamin complex for children Supradyn Kids, a superhero-"assistant" helps a little girl to become strong and healthy. Funny little people help the sick family to remove nasal congestion in the advertisement of Snup spray. In an advertisement for Strepsils, a blue creature with clear anthropomorphic signs saves the main character from severe pain in the throat.

Such characters are shown in familiar everyday situations, in interaction with real people. At the heart of the plot of such an advertisement is an idyll: the heroes easily cope with difficulties using the advertised product.

"Pest". The character belonging to this type is a dangerous creature that the advertised product helps to cope with. "Pests" have common features: they have a repulsive appearance, their behavior causes negative emotions: irritation, fear, and sometimes disgust. In the advertising story, the role of such characters is to spoil people's lives. Most often, "pests" personify the problems that may arise from a potential consumer and are solved with the help of an advertisement object

The analysis showed the frequency of using such characters like "pest" in advertising drugs. For example, in the spray advertising from allergic rhinitis AkvaMaris Ektoin, negative characters are "allergens" moving through the air and seeking to ruin the life of a person. These are spherical creatures, the appearance of each of which causes an association with various allergens (cat, flower, dust, etc.).

In the same scenario, an Imudon immunostimulant commercial advertising was created to help cope with throat infections, which are presented in the form of viruses, bacteria and fungi - multicolored, unattractive and aggressive.

"Animated problem". The difference of this type from the previous one is that the problem itself is endowed with anthropomorphic features, the solution of which is the advertising object.

To the "animated problem" can be attributed, for example, Pechal'ka in the advertising of dairy products belonging to Chudo-detki brand. This character opposes fun and good mood and is able to make everything around dark and gloomy with one touch.

Parts of the body and organs of a person suffering from the disease may become "alive" in drug advertising. For example, the characters are two human fingers - healthy and diseased - in an advertisement for Exoderil foot fungus drug.

"Cheerful buddy". Such characters are common mainly in the advertising of products for children and are carriers of such values as good, strong friendship.

The analysis showed that brand characters often play the role of "cheerful buddies": Quiky rabbit (advertisement of Nesquik products), Dino dinosaur (advertisement of Rastishka products), Barney bear (advertisement of Barney cookies). These fictional creatures are depicted on the packaging of goods and are present in all commercials

"Happy buddies" share with the target audience positive emotions from using the advertising object, give advice to children, come into play with them. The authors make these characters as attractive as possible, their appearance and behavior help to please children and instill confidence in their parents.

"Revived goods". "Humanized" goods that allow standing out from the competition and be unique are often used in the TV commercials. Such characters represent themselves, are the leading participants and elements of the advertising plot

The most famous example of "live products" is M&M's red and yellow candies, which act as sidekick friends in commercial advertising.

This kind of fictional characters include Bonduelle vegetables, endowed with external anthropomorphic features. They move on two legs, talk to each other, participate in sports competitions, sunbathe, fall in love, etc., contact with real people.

The classifications presented do not claim to cover all the fictional characters used in advertising, they only reveal the most common types. It should be noted that the types distinguished in the above classifications may intersect. For example, an animal endowed with intelligence features can play the role of cheerful buddy or assistant; a drawn person may personify an assistant or an "animated problem", etc.

Being a link between the brand and the consumer, fictional characters can perform various communication functions.

One of them is the *function of attracting attention (attractive)*. The importance of the implementation of this function in advertising text is due to the circumstances of its existence in the advertising discourse and, more broadly, in the communicative process. The competitive environment in which a significant amount of promotional offers is struggling for the addressee's attention forces advertisers to provide the advertising text with an opportunity to attract attention, standing out among other texts. In this regard, a qualitatively implemented attractive function can be considered as the basis for ensuring the implementation of other communicative functions of advertising text and advertising in general. The implementation of this function is provided by the action of a strong stimulus that attracts "involuntary attention" (Lebedev-Lyubimov, 2003: 184-193; Halperin, 1976) and causes an emotional response. This stimulus is an unusual character. For example, in the Barney cookie advertisement, this function is illustrated by the unexpected appearance of cheerful Barney bear cub among ordinary people, who plays with the boy, studies natural phenomena and eats cookies.

The informative function is to transfer the necessary advertising information to a fictional character. The character can use the product, demonstrating its properties, talking about the advantages and basic features. Thus, in an advertisement for Acipol, a clever cow tells how this drug helps get rid of digestive problems.

The *function of emotional "infection"* is implemented through the transfer of emotions that a character is experiencing, the target audience. The fictional

character, as a rule, is intended to “infect” the audience with positive emotions (joy, pleasure), so that the potential consumer has a desire to experience such sensations. The emotional component is an equally important tool in the process of character communication with the audience than rational arguments and reasoning.

4. Conclusion

Appropriate, carefully prepared use of images of fictional characters in the advertising texts, which are characterized by polyfunctionality - the ability to perform various communication functions - is an effective way to increase the effectiveness of advertising communication. The application of this method ensures the brand's credibility due to the operation of the mechanisms of identification and building an emotional line of relationships with consumers.

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