Realization of the educational potential of social advertising

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Abstract. The study of advertising discourse in modern Russian science is dedicated to a large number of works, but there are not enough specific studies of the social sector of advertising today. However, at the present time, due to dramatic changes in the political and sociocultural life of Russian society, this type of advertising is of particular importance. This paper is aimed at the issue of the specific status of social advertising texts within the framework of modern advertising discourse. An advertising announcement is seen as a polycode text intended for the public in general. The authors pay particular attention to the unity of form and content as a mechanism to influence the awareness and emotions of consumers of advertising. The material for analysis is the texts of street (urban) advertising. The functional-stylistic, cognitive, descriptive, semantic-grammatical, quantitative methods, as well as methods of discourse and comparative analysis are used. By analyzing a large number of texts, the high-impact potential of socially directed advertising texts is concluded. Identifying the semantic dominants of the texts of social advertising allows the authors to conclude about its disciplinary and teaching (educational) functions and consider these texts as one of the tools of human education. It is suggested that specially designed advertising texts can raise people in the spirit of traditional national values, to form the actual value meanings in the minds of those who perceive them. The paper gives examples of polycoded advertising texts functioning today in the living urban area.

Keywords: social advertising, advertising discourse, polycode means, urban area, advertising theme, semantic dominant, impact, mentoring, educative potential of advertising

1 Introduction

The principles of the Russian language functioning in different spheres of communicative activity are studied in Russian science from different points of view, see, for example: [1–4]. Recently, studies of the Russian-language advertising discourse have also intensified [5–8]. V.I. Karasik considers advertising discourse as a separate type of discourse [9].

It is known that advertising is "a text representing companies, goods, services, etc. with the aim of attracting the recipient's attention, to interest him, to convince him of the advantage of the advertised object in comparison with others" [10]. This definition emphasizes the communicative and pragmatic aspect, which is significant for advertising texts as a type of social communication.

In Russia, print as well as audiovisual (TV and radio) advertising has begun to develop rapidly since the 1990s. Today, advertising has become a powerful industry due to the media, and the typical structure of advertising activity has been established, which is most often associated with commerce, the sale of goods and services. Nevertheless, since the ancient times there has been political advertising, and at the turn of the XX–XXI centuries, the concept of social advertising was consolidated. In recent years, this type of advertising occupies a special place in advertising discourse.

Social advertising is a special type of non-commercial information spread through institutions and media, aimed at achieving certain socially significant goals by the state or executive authorities.

Researcher O.V. Aronson fairly considers that social advertising is not an advertisement for a particular product, but for some attitude toward the world. It may (or may not) manifest itself only in the long-term period. And the result is unknown beforehand [11].

The main source of social advertising is public life, which is abundant with negative facts, conflict situations, confrontation of social groups, and therefore in urgent need of creative stimuli and processes. This stimulus for creative processes is socially-oriented advertising [12–14].

All over the world, social advertising is an important part of the worldview and moral health of society. However, in modern Russia, this type of advertising communication for a long time was not active, almost never used. Only in recent years the "social sector" in Russian advertising discourse has begun to emerge intensively.

The main task of social advertising – to draw people's attention to a socially significant problem, such as social inequality, low living standards, the health of the nation, intergenerational relations, etc. Today, the most popular
2 Description of the scientific problem

2.1 Reasons for the problem

Recently, the demand for socially oriented advertising texts has increased significantly due to some negative processes developing in society. Globalization that has overtaken the world is increasingly suppressing the national identity of a particular people, specific cultural traditions and stereotypes, dissolving them in the common space of the global (“transnational”) world.

Certainly, the global unification of countries and peoples is an inevitable and logical phenomenon for the current level of development of civilization. However, this "logical" phenomenon has negative sides: the importance of the individual with his special, cultural and historical attitude to life, people, the surrounding reality is suppressed; a person becomes an irrelevant screw in the work of the world-scale mechanism and therefore ceases to feel himself a person, losing faith in himself and in his ability to influence something, to achieve something. But most importantly, it is becoming increasingly evident that many traditional values that have been formed for centuries in the minds of people as representatives of a particular national collective are becoming irrelevant.

This condition applies not only to small nations traditionally absorbed by larger cultures, but also to such an ancient and numerous nation as the Russian one.

The natural desire of the individual to preserve his place in society and his culture in the global world causes a reaction of counteraction, accompanied by aggression not only to the representatives of other nationalities, but also to the representatives of his own nationality, because the leveling of ethnic values inevitably leads to the destruction of centuries-old bonds between their bearers. For example, in recent years there have been numerous reports in the media of growing intolerance and even hatred among Russians toward one another.

Obviously, it is unfair to blame globalization alone for what is happening to Russian consciousness and identity today. Along with globalization as an external cause, we believe that there are internal reasons for this situation. Two of these, in our opinion, are basic: 1) ideological (or historical), and 2) socio-educational.

By ideological reason, we mean the absence of a state idea, acting as a unifying spiritual bond that unites the nation. In the early 1990s, during perestroika, when the communist ideology collapsed and carried into oblivion the communist ideals on which the Russian population had been raised for over 70 years, a so-called ideological vacuum was created. The people of old and mature age, accustomed to live for a "bright future" and firmly imbued high moral values of Russian culture (literature, journalism, education, science, music, art, etc.), were in no hurry to part with these values, but rather, sought to preserve them from the influence of Western stereotypes that had poured into Russia. The younger generation found itself in an ideological void, or rather in moral chaos: in addition to (and often instead of!) traditional Russian national and cultural stereotypes, a variety of media texts actively penetrated the mass consciousness with attitudes, values, and ideals that were not typical of the Russian worldview.

As a result, a large part of Russian society already at the boundaries of centuries was in one way or another "prepared" to lose close ties with national traditions, to the spiritual acceptance of the ideals of consumption and mass culture as products of world globalization.

Thus, the ideological cause of the disunity of Russian society and the growth of aggression in it is connected, in fact, with the peculiarities of its historical development.

The second reason – socio-educational – is the absence in Russia for more than twenty years of state policy of educating civil society. Meanwhile, without a planned and consistently implemented by the state strategy of citizenship education it is impossible to create a harmonious society, it is impossible to properly build relationships between individuals and the government, between different people and different nationalities in one country. It is no mere coincidence that such great Russian educators as D.I. Fonvizin, A.Y. Polenov, N.I. Novikov, A.N. Radishchev believed that only state training can "multiply true sons of the Fatherland," carriers of true morality, "seeking diligence, frugality, modesty, love of science and crafts, expanding their knowledge, self-improvement and great things for the glory of the Fatherland". [15].

2.2 Task setting for problem-solving

Since the early 1990s, the Russian government has not possessed a unified doctrine for educating the nation. After the crash of the communist ideals, the society was offered nothing in return; no one seemed to be interested in the moral and psychological state of society, which at that time was more and more losing touch with its national origins, centuries-old traditions, and the norms of the Russian way of life. And only in recent years the government seems to have realized the need to address socio-educational tasks, in particular the persistent search at the level of state
propaganda for the foundations of the idea of national unity, or so-called spiritual bonds, as which the society has been consistently offered soccer, the Sochi 2014 Olympics, sports, the fight for a healthy lifestyle, the ideals of Orthodoxy, the search for the national anthem, patriotism education, and other aspects of social life. Which of the proposed ideas will end up as a publicly recognized idea (or several ideas at once) of uniting and educating the nation is still a question, but one thing is clear: without a well-thought-out and consistent state policy of spiritual and moral education of all society and every individual, it is impossible to create a strong, united and invincible country.

For the Russian society this is especially relevant in connection with the events in Ukraine, which influenced the increase in the media space of texts of a political nature, aimed at the formation in the minds of Russians of values that correspond to the official (state) position; significantly increased today and the number of texts aimed at educating a sense of patriotism, civil duty to the Fatherland.

One of the directions of the state policy of educating society has recently become social advertising, the share of which is increasing in the total volume of advertising discourse: the number of socially directed texts (billboards) in urban areas is growing, such texts are increasingly included in the TV and radio advertising content. In this regard, an urgent task for the linguist is to determine the most effective linguistic tools to influence the public consciousness to achieve the desired educational effect.

3 Research Questions

1. What is the core set of themes in contemporary outdoor social advertising?
2. What is the set of polycoded units that take part in expressing the content of social advertising?

4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the analysis is to determine the main range of relevant topics for modern advertising and to identify the peculiarity of their linguistic solution.

5 Research Methods

The material chosen for the research was studied using the functional and stylistic method, through which the linguistic specificity of the advertising utterance was interpreted in close connection with the extra-linguistic context – goals, objectives, conditions, intentions, genre features of advertising texts; besides, the methods of structural and semantic, interpretative, as well as the method of direct observation were also relevant in our study.

6 Analysis of Linguistic Material

6.1 Thematic Characteristics of Social Advertising Texts

Here are a few examples of street advertising, capturing in passing the themes of the advertising texts (see Figures 1–6. It should be emphasized that the sampling of advertising texts was carried out in different Russian cities, such as Yekaterinburg, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Perm):

Fig. 1. A call to quit bad habits
(Inscription: Drink it, smoke it. Natural selection has already started. Kostroma Funeral Home. Kostroma, 22a Fedoseyeva St., 355–122, twenty-four hours a day)

Fig. 2. A call to quit smoking
(inscription: Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation. – Get off the hook! A Russian smoker depends on 6,570 cigarettes a year. 8800200200 Smoking Denial Center)

Fig. 3. A call to protect children from the Internet, to take care of them
(Inscription: Went to the Internet and did not return. Sasha 12 years old, online, looking for a friend. Edick, 40 years old, looking for a friend. Let's protect children from online criminals. Safe Internet Center)

Fig. 4. A call to be tolerant of other nationalities
As these examples already show, the themes of the advertising messages presented in the living space of cities are related to the everyday life of people, to their habits, common opinions, judgments, or assessments of well-known events, and all texts are aimed at correcting these "popular assessments" up to their complete change in a positive direction. These kinds of texts are aimed at fostering in the mass consciousness the right attitude to others, to themselves, to their children, to their own actions, to their lives and the lives of those nearby.

It should be emphasized that the problem of raising citizens is the leading issue for street social advertising, since the vast majority of the texts reviewed are devoted to raising citizens. For example, the following qualities are educated in representatives of Russian society:

1) Caring for the children (Spend more time with the children!; Tell the children about ...; Teach the children about ...; Evening eleven! And where is your child now?; Do you know what your son is thinking about, what he is feeling?; Night to sleep! Minors are not allowed to be in entertainment establishments or on the street at night unaccompanied by parents! etc.);

2) parents' responsibility for their children's Internet correspondence (Went to the Internet and didn't come back!; Let's protect our children from harmful information!; Parents! Protect your children from unnecessary information!; Protect our children from dangerous content! etc.);

3) love for your city or neighborhood (I love my neighborhood!; I love Moscow streets after the rain!; Being Moscow a clean city! Perm is changing. And change yourself! We live in a cultural capital! etc.);

4) care for the cleanliness of the streets, city, and nature (They [items of household garbage] will outlive your grandchildren!; Clean is not where you clean, but where you don't litter! etc.);

5) to be free from bad habits, to strive for a healthy lifestyle (It's time not to smoke!; You kill yourself by inhaling, you kill others by exhaling; Don't look for a friend in a bottle – look for a friend in a person! etc.);

6) law obedience, including obeying traffic rules (Turn on the turn signal – save his [other traffic participant's] life!; Chance of saving. Belt up!; Drunk driving... Nothing without you! [meaning, without the one who died in the car accident]; Asking your age? The seller is legally entitled! etc.);

7) the ambition to be a cultured, well-mannered person (It's easy to be a gentleman! It's enough to give way; Perm is changing. And change yourself! We live in a cultural capital!; Let's keep the beauty of the city for our children!; Moscow is a city of literate people! etc.);

8) striving to be a moral person (Honesty. What is it? Explain to your children!; Love. What is it? Explain to your children!; Help the elderly! You won't always be young either, etc.);

9) Preventive health care (Which checkup is more important? Get free medical check-ups!; Take care of your youthful health! etc.);

10) careful, responsible handling of fire (Fire is not for jokes! Don't joke with fire!; Better to joke in a club than in the woods! etc.);

11) Tolerance for people of other nationalities (Clogging up the country? Bagration was a great Russian battle captain. Georgian! etc.);

12) Economical use of energy and water (Save energy! Use it carefully!; Rivers flow by the drop! etc.).

At the same time, it is essential that during 2022 the billboards devoted to the theme of traditional national cultural and historical values, such as family, patriotism, pride for the Motherland, etc., began to appear on the streets of the cities (See Figures 7–10):

Fig. 5. A call for law-abiding, anti-corruption (inscription: You take the small stuff, you get the big stuff. Robbery is punishable by imprisonment for up to 4 years (Art. 161 of the RF Criminal Code))

Fig. 6. A call to keep nature clean (inscription: They will outlive their grandchildren. Iron Can. Plastic bottle. Lithium battery. Forest is no place for garbage)

Fig. 7. A call to preserve the value of the traditional family (inscription: Constitution 2020. Let's keep family values)

Fig. 8. A call to revive morale and endurance (inscription: sleeping on damp ground for 5 years ... you can try it! Our grandfathers did)
It can be evident that the range of topics of educative value in the texts of socially oriented advertising is quite wide: from the relationship between parents and children to the economical attitude towards energy resources. However, it is important that all of these issues fit into one general conceptual field – "a person must be cultured, educated, and love his Motherland". This is, in a sense, the dominant point of focus, the basic idea of modern social advertising as a phenomenon of mass communication. In specific advertisements, this idea is presented through a single, specific aspect of a person's daily life – Internet communication, attitudes toward the environment and people, attitudes toward one's health, behavior in society and on the roads, attitudes toward the law, etc. Due to these generally meaningful aspects of human life expressed in advertising, it becomes social – aimed at society, "responsible" for the formation in the mass consciousness of spiritual and moral ideals associated with such notions as culture, law and legality, obedience, respect for the Other, kindness, justice, patriotism. Because of this, it would seem to us, social advertising acquires qualities that, to a certain extent, bring it closer to literature, the purpose of which has always been considered to excite the aspiration for good, justice, truth, beauty, and spirituality in the minds of people.

The appearance and propagation of such advertising texts on the streets of Russian cities can only be welcomed: during the years of the lack of an educational line in the activities of the state, we have lost an entire generation, due to which there is an urgent need to restore the spiritual health of the nation, its traditional cultural values. Surely, advertising cannot solve all the issues of the complex process of education, but it is quite capable of contributing to this process.

6.2 The Means of Influence in the Texts of Social Advertising

As it is an outdoor (visual) advertisement, the polycode means, such as color, font, graphics, intervals, and, of course, verbal components, are relevant [16]. In addition, all these means are subordinated to a single function in the advertising text – to influence the consciousness of the addressee in order to change his picture of the world in a positive way. The latter in social advertising refers to the formation in the public consciousness of such values, which, on the one hand, would lay the foundation for a harmonious life of man in society, and on the other – would correspond to the leading state policy (ideology). This explains why the verbal outline of the advertising texts examined is a brief formulation of either the negative consequences of an act (Went to the Internet and did not return!), or a call for “correct” behavior (Protect your children from unnecessary information!), or a statement of "correct" behavior (I love my neighborhood!; Being Moscow a Clean City!). It is important that most of the verbal messages, first, are designed as a call to action, as a kind of slogan, a chant, or – in advertising terms – slogans: Turn on the turn signal, save life!; Better joke in the club than in the woods!; Save the family values!; Look! Be proud! Remember! etc. Second, the general content of such slogans is different universal values, or the national, ethnic values themselves [17, 18].

Some advertising texts are developed according to a more complex compositional and semantic structure, namely, as a short but succinct question-and-answer complex with a moral semantic dominant [19, 20]. These are little stories, for example: It's easy to be a gentleman! It's enough to give way; Perm is changing. And change yourself! We are in the cultural capital!; Sleeping on the ground for 5 years... You can try it! Our grandfathers did (1941–1945) etc.

All of these linguistic and speech means (an assertion of a negative fact, a call to action, a slogan, a short story-admonition) are effective methods of influencing the perceiving consciousness, facilitated by their (techniques) briefness, appeal, and moral semantic dominant.

7 Conclusions

To conclude our discussion of the role of social advertising in the "culturalization" of the nation, it is important to emphasize:

1) the main mechanism (except for the formal and linguistic features) of its educational function is the themes, or rather the entire range of topical social problems, which, "getting" in advertising, on the one hand, expose the "plagues" of society, on the other, are aimed precisely at eradicating them;

2) supportive, but effective means of influencing the public consciousness should be considered a variety of linguistic and speech means, through which the content of the text is formed as a succinct, but vivid expression of the main idea of the advertising utterance.

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