

## VISUAL POLLUTION: A NEW AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF MARKETING?

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*Everyone's belief is that marketing plays a fundamental role in all economic or uneconomic areas of business. However, what becomes very clear is that, in addition to the many positive aspects that it generates, marketing produces unwanted effects as well.*

*The paper tries to prove the relationship between marketing and axiology (its value and its perception on the people), on the one hand, and one of its most obvious effects - visual pollution, which already starts to be in the attention of those who can counter it, on the other hand. Value, as a concept, is a result of a long and laborious research, both economic and uneconomic (philosophical, psychological, etc.). The visual pollution and the ecological architecture are recent approaches and it cannot be said that there is a very rich experience or a proper literature in this domain. But the interest is growing undoubtedly.*

*The authors consider that the demarche of the paper, to sit marketing, value and pollution alongside, is at the beginning of the road and certainly will arouse the interest of further research.*

*The paper is the result of an office research of secondary sources of information. They are limited and also limiting, the domains being studied separately. The result of the paper is the noting on the fact that marketing can be extremely harmful. We agree with the idea that marketing supports businesses and the economy of an area, but it is better to be aware that the pollution it produces is increasingly significant so the rules by which marketing plays must be rewritten.*

*If the authorities, the business itself and those involved in education will focus and will exactly understand their role in a sustainable development of the society, than the aim will be achieved. We believe that the authors' concerns, which are dedicated to the idea that by means of marketing one should not destroy but build, will be of public interest as well.*

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*JEL classification: M31, Q56*

### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, the conviction of everyone, professional or not, is that marketing undoubtedly plays a fundamental role in all economic or uneconomic areas of business.

According to the marketing study in terms of axiology, we can highlight the values followed by this activity, compared with those generally accepted. We define value as a specific axiological relationship between a natural or created object and the human subject, by means of which he expresses his appreciation for its qualities that are meant to satisfy some specific needs. Value

appears as well as the relationship between subject and object, in which by means of polarity or polarization and of hierarchy, we express our differentiated appreciation for certain things or their qualities, for certain persons or human acts, for certain works created by virtue of their ability to satisfy some specific needs, aspirations or interests.

## **2. Concepts used**

A classification of values is as follows: economic values, legal values, political values, ethical values, historical values, aesthetic values, religious values. The first four values are determined by the constituent and regulating functions of the social life. The other three are determined by the frame in which the social reality exists and evolves.

For our study we only discuss three of these values, which are directly related to marketing, and have impact on this activity, namely: economic, ethical and aesthetic values which, depending on the way they are perceived, lead to visual pollution.

The economic value is generally understood as the awareness of the usefulness of the goods comparing to others, which satisfies a certain need. The needs are physical and mental, so we distinguish between two kinds of values: spiritual values and material values. The economic values are material. The value theory is more likely a theory of cost, since it addresses a crucial moment of the value, that meaning the cost, a labor required to produce the goods and the limited usefulness.

The economic values are constituent for the social reality; they represent only a part of the social values that span multiple levels with different functions in the social life.

The ethical values relate to our desires which can be numerous, so we always require the same question: Which is the best goal? For some people it is happiness for others wealth, virtue, etc.

The psychological theory states that an ethical value has a mental basis, it is a product of the self will, of the will to upgrade one's personality.

The analysis of the moral conscience takes into account the opposition between sensitivity and the responsibility imposed by the categorical imperative, because the ethical value is an imperative that we all must obey.

The ethical value has life as an ultimate principle and the ethical laws are natural laws, whose inobservance brings evil. So, shall we sacrifice the ethical values to the detriment of the economic ones?

The aesthetic values relate to the aesthetic pleasure by the existence of an object that has a value and a subject for which that value exists. Beauty is the central aesthetic value, to which all the other ones report. By their specifics, the aesthetic values are significantly related to sensitiveness. The aesthetic values can be intuited, felt, experienced, represented and imagined. And then we might ask ourselves: where is the beauty in all the examples that will be further presented?

## **3. Research on the marketing negative effects on the environment**

Mankind has a spectacular rate of development and marketing has the main position in greatly contributing to this development. This one actually "pushes" forward the world economy and the contemporary society, but it is also responsible for many negative effects which are difficult or even impossible to be repaired, attracting more and more criticism this way.

The oversized consumption of resources (e.g., the paper used in much larger quantities than normal, the lights burning all night), the shopping addiction, the excessive consumption of unhealthy foods leading to obesity, cancer, etc. are negative aspects that began to be reported a few years ago. Their influence reflects on individuals, as consumers, their age being in a rapid decline.

We live in a dense environment, with attempts to influence. Much of the population seeks to make the others conform to their demands. The estimates of this type of research suggest that a person can receive up to 400 persuasive marketing calls during an only single day. Managers

boosting the productivity, a policeman directing the traffic, a vendor selling something are numerous attempts to influence every day.

In fact, the company is a massive group of people seeking for influencing, persuading, requesting, asking, urging, or manipulating each other. We call it society because it convinces us instead of physically restraining us. We cannot even imagine what it would be like if every attempt to influence would be replaced by coercion: the store owner would hit the customer who would not buy the shirt, the boss would hit the employee to make him work harder, the police officer would beat the driver who would drive by 60 km / h in an area of 50 km / h. After a typical day, everyone would be a physical wreck.

Persuasion, on the other hand, allows the work in a company to be performed without problems - while the physical coercion stops it. The successful conviction is when the physical coercion is useless. As a result, the society benefits from persuasion and those who do not know how to persuade benefit the most from society.

Lately, another negative effect is quickly to install: pollution, which is a consequence of the oversized and unjustified consumption. The forms of pollution are: air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, radioactive contamination, and noise (sound) pollution, thermal and visual pollution. It is noticed the possibility to group them into three basic categories: chemical, sound and visual.

We shall next refer, in detail, to the final form, the visual pollution, which seems to be the least dangerous. This statement can not be demonstrated though because the „evidence” that show exactly the opposite are very numerous.

We live in a civilization based on image, this phrase becoming an automatism in expression which seems to not send any message any more. The initiator of the concept of society of the spectacle, derived precisely from this media explosion, G. Debord argues, „Where the real world changes into simple images, they become real beings and effective motivations of a hypnotic behavior. The spectacle, as a tendency to make the world, which is no longer directly perceptible, be visible by means of various specialized mediations, finds the sight as the privileged human sense, as once was the touch; the most abstract and the easiest to mystify sense perfectly corresponds to the generalized abstraction of the contemporary society” (Pascu 2002: 97).

In a simplistic and easy to understand manner, the visual pollution can be defined as the damage to the landscape issue, in a manner which can be perceptible to the human visual sense, and with effects on the psyche of the person. In the matter of fact, everything that is around and does not delight us and that has even a negative impact on us and on our psychic as well can be defined as visual pollution. Although the negative effect is much less harmful than the one of the other forms of pollution, by the full accumulation of the specific factors, the issue becomes a drama. We can state as visual pollution the vandalized buildings left in ruins, the abandoned sites, the large advertising blades placed on the vertical surfaces of the high blocks (damaged by weather and environmental pollution) and on the large stores in cities, the display on the side roads which has lost its validity, but which nobody ever updated, the parking spaces organized for a possible halt or garbage disposal, but which have been destroyed, and even panels that advise to protect the forest, but which have themselves become a pollutant because they are rusted, warped and torn. Examples may continue indefinitely.

And since this phenomenon involves the person's visual sense, we cannot limit to the quality of "images", but also to their quantity, which induces the individual in a state of hypnosis, in which he can no longer discern. Most critics of this category are directed against outdoor advertising, because the print ads in the newspapers are easily ignored by turning the page and the ones in television by changing the channel. As shown, both the “by mail” advertising as well as the billboards and the street display lead a struggle against those who wish to apply legal restrictions against the use of these promotional techniques, which use images par excellence (Russell and Lane 2002: 870).

It must be mentioned that all living organisms (plants, insects, birds, animals, humans) are affected by visual pollution.

In this paper we shall refer primarily to people, but also note that anything that affects other creatures listed above, actually distorts the functioning of the ecosystems and hence of the human. If the bright light prevents insects to move, they can no longer be food for birds, the latter ones receive and transmit their influences in their turn, and the weaknesses chain continues.

Visual pollution on humans is manifested in two forms which have been already recognized:

- *direct*, the effects being psychological and physiological;
- *indirect*, the effects being various, from road accidents caused by distraction, to the economic decline of a community.

The authors, A. Dumitrescu and D. Manolache, define the visual pollution by the presence, in the visual field, of some human-made implants, which are in disharmony with the landscape and which promote excessive, depressed or subversive messages, ([www.imst.pub.ro/TCM/Dumi/Visual\\_Pollution.pdf](http://www.imst.pub.ro/TCM/Dumi/Visual_Pollution.pdf)).

This is strongly felt in the large urban areas where the aggressive outdoor advertising (posters, banners, billboards, pictures, neon etc.) became more than just unbearable. Experts consider that Graffiti, for example, has a strong negative influence, which may cause depression and acts of vandalism.

The **visual pollution sources** are:

- *administrative negligence* – the local public administration loses control over what is built or assembled in public spaces, it does not know what and where is displayed, does not solve the problem of buildings in ruins no matter who the owner is.

Logic, architecture, cleanliness, space harmony must be kept in the urban jungle, but they are all suffering because of the business interests and the obtaining of the profit.

It is well known the skyscraper building type, with 19 floors, ground floor and four underground levels, called the Cathedral Plaza, built near St. Joseph Cathedral in Bucharest by Millennium Development Building.

Other changes in the environment are determined by the location of all kinds of items (terraces, public transport stations, garbage cans, huge panels so powerfully illuminated that they can blind drivers at night, stalls, tents, booths installed for commercial purposes, different network cables, etc..) on the public spaces.

- *excessive advertising* - literally suffocating because not even the green areas (trees, land, parks, etc..) are not spared in the desire to ensure good visibility. The existence of giant billboards, outdoor display in general, which is present from the means of transportation to garbage bins is also suffocating.

A frequent complaint against advertising is that it is simply too much advertising and that is annoying. With the rapid introduction of the new communication technologies, the fragmentation and the interactive nature of the future advertising vehicles will undoubtedly reduce much of this criticism, obviously, when the interactive media will allow consumers to select programs, advertising or info-advertising you want, it is unlikely that advertising will be considered troublesome.

While the economic contribution of advertising is, specifically, the major preoccupation of both companies and consumers, in the recent years its social implications are increasingly analyzed. Almost everyone, even the fiercest of his critics, agree that advertising plays an important role in informing consumers about the new products, locations, prices and markets. These are the economic functions of the institution of advertising. On the other hand, the social and cultural roles of advertising are much less clear and are increasingly becoming a subject of discussion in some circles.

Many observers point out that advertising is both a **mirror** and also a **shaper** of public opinion, social manners and standards. They state that by the absolute value of exposure, advertising sets a social agenda on what is expected, what is fashionable and what is of good taste for a

considerable number of people. This influence is manifested especially on young people, poorly educated and impressed people.

But image is not universal language, even if there is an illusion that it forwards meaning because of its analog capabilities. There is this confusion between perception and interpretation

- *vandalism* – from the Graffiti mentioned above to offensive messages, obscenities, street markings of different groups, all made without the owner's consent of course.

The study of the individual and group territoriality is important in terms of reactions that can be caused by an intrusion into the intimacy of a person or in a group territory. Thus, the proxemical research, discipline that deals with the study of nonverbal communication through fixed distances between individuals reveals the characteristics of each culture regarding this issue. The communicational action in ET Hall's studies shows the trials of individuals, often unconsciously, to give a certain distance of communication (intimate, personal, social and public) (Pascu 2002: 79). The failure to comply, as the studies in this area emphasize studies, determines the feedback from participants in the process of communication, such as: the increasing of the blood pressure and heart rate; confusion; the trying to regain territory or the acceptance of an intruder; the lowering performance; the increased verbal aggressiveness; the diminishing of the sense of cohesion within the group.

According to the survey, we shall refer forward to the reactions resulting from intrusion. We have as types of intrusion the following: *violation of territory* by using the territory without permission and looking at someone when they are not expected to be observed, *invasion of territory* by trying to „grab” the group territory and *land contamination*, namely to leave something undesirable on the territory of a person/group.

#### **4. Results of the authorities involvement in the visual pollution**

In front of this wave of attacks on the human security made in the name of progress and marketing, the authorities in some states and cities have passed effective measures. Of a particular importance in this context is the need to develop anticipatory policies and to prevent, mitigate and monitor any adverse impact on the environment in general and in a transboundary context in particular.

In *Norway*, severe restrictions have been imposed in Bergen since 1990.

The great city of *Beijing* is recognized as a pioneer of this struggle. The layout of any street advertising is reviewed by a special commission, which sets out its beneficial or polluting role, the harmonization with the urban area, and the possible distraction of drivers in congested areas with heavy traffic and only after that it is approved.

In the *U.S.A.* we are witnessing a limitation on the size and number of panels according to various criteria, such as the number of houses on a street. In certain areas there are allowed only small panels, the large ones being history. States such as Alaska, Vermont, and Maine have partially or totally banned them and in about 1500 cities, the outdoor advertising is prohibited.

*The Czech Republic* took a number of measures on the visual pollution caused by the excessive use of neon.

The mayor at *Moscow* has introduced a regulation to reduce the size of the outdoor advertising.

But the most radical response was recorded in *Brazil*, in the largest city, Sao Paulo, whose population has exceeded 11 million. The outdoor advertising is considered illegal here. The metropolitan local council decided it in September 2007, which triggered strong reactions from firm's discontent. For example, lawyers from America's Clear Channel Outdoor, the largest firm in the world, considers this decision as unconstitutional, saying that it would lead to the destruction of business and, therefore, they sued the government. The „Clean City” Law prohibits advertising on public transport and strictly regulates what can appear on the frontispiece of the shop signs.

The residents have noted that Sao Paulo became a more beautiful and clean city after this demarche. Taking the example of the city which became free in terms of advertising and being inspired by its success, the authorities in Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre and Brasilia discussed similar measures.

The authorities in **Seoul** invest in innovative technologies and construction that respects nature, and they are also supported by the largest research and development institute in Europe, Fraunhofer Institute - Germany. The researchers here are working on developing an environmental project involving a prototype building efficiently built in point of energy, incorporating all the principles of modern technologies of saving the energy and using alternative energy like the sunlight, the wind and the geothermal heat.

The most recent reaction of the authorities in **Seoul**, however, is on the economic crisis and the increasing of oil prices, fueled by the turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa. They announced severe penalties for the „insignificant” lighting starting on 1 March 2011. Thus, many commercial buildings, bridges, houses etc. are obliged to shut down the lights after midnight. Amid the measures taken, the countries, regions and cities mentioned above are increasingly becoming a tourist attraction. In their promotion, there are sold as items of attraction the restrictions mentioned above, which is likely to offset any losses caused.

The localities and the urban population in **Romania** face the same problems and the voices and initiatives in the domain begin to be visible. For example, on 27 March 2010, 37 cities marked the Earth Hour by interrupting the lighting of prominent buildings in the hours 20.30 to 21.30. In 2011, the same action took place on March 26 at the same time slot, with extensive participation of 50 cities, which synchronized with the similar demarche of a great number of people, more than one billion in 5000 cities in 130 countries.

The increasingly used concepts are *the ecological landscape* and *the ecological architecture*.

Formed about 40 years ago, the *ecological architecture* has not yet been clearly defined. Two approaches are highlighted: the “green” (ecological) architecture and the sustainable one. The first one represents the practice of increasing the efficiency with which buildings and adjacent land use and take energy, water and materials, and the reducing of the negative impacts of such buildings on the environment and human health by improving the design, construction, use, maintenance and demolition, and the last one means the conformation of the „green” architecture with the principles of socio-economic and ecological sustainability. In practice, the ecological architecture products are represented by the passive housing, with zero emissions, green, ecological, durable and sustainable.

About *ecological landscape* it can be stated that it represents the dialogue between the buildings and their surrounding area, in compliance with the environmental regulations. In such an organization there cannot be outside display to jam this dialogue. Finally, the public spaces will not be used for private business, and the reducing of pollution will lead to social benefits that will delight many.

Even the problem of plastic waste, which often fly blown over us and which is known that they are not biodegradable has a very simple proposal to be solved, recently coming from a 16 years old student in Canada, Daniel Burda. He discovered the process of decomposition of the plastic bags in less than three months. Some water, very little carbon dioxide and Sphingomonas and Pseudomonas bacteria are needed for this.

The outdoor advertising supports businesses and businesses support the economy of an area. It is known that large amounts are collected by renting the public spaces and the rights of the display.

## **5. Conclusions**

One will not definitely give up this kind of trade - *public spaces for information by means of advertising and money by renting*, due to the earnings. People are aware of the both sides of the phenomenon; the measures can be seen, especially in the local communities. It is a vicious circle,

only that the rules will be better written! That is why business will give the both sides a strong impulse to work together.

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