

# A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVERTISING OF PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS

Andrzej Kokiel <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph. D., WSB MERITO University in Szczecin  
„Synergy” Centre for Psychotherapy and Coaching  
e-mail: andrzej.kokiel@wsb.szczecin.pl

Klaudia Gręda <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> MA, psychologist, pharmacytechnician, „Apteka Pod Wagą”  
e-mail: kkokiel@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This publication deals with the psychological aspects of pharmaceutical advertising. The issues underpinning these considerations are presented, and reference is made to the effectiveness of advertising and the validity of its use, particularly in the field of pharmaceutical products. The research results complement the theoretical considerations. They illustrate the specific features of advertising campaigns and the influence of advertising on cognitive processes, i.e., the reception of advertising, emotions arising under its influence and determined consumer behaviour.

**Keywords:** psychology of advertising, marketing communication, pharmaceutical advertising, advertising effectiveness.

## 1. Introduction

Pharmaceutical advertising is a special form of influence. It reaches, with its message, people who need help in the fight against illness and pain. It should therefore be understood as a source of information. Its contents indicate the scope of application of the preparation, thereby delineating the possible effects on the human body and the potential effects. The presented

publication addresses the psychological aspects of pharmaceutical advertising. Through the analysis of selected campaigns, its specific features were illustrated, while the quantitative research results analysed showed the extent of the influence of advertising on human cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes. They indicated the scope of perception of advertising, the emotions experienced under its influence and the consumer actions taken. Thus, the advertising of pharmaceutical products is guided by an important mission to reliably inform the recipient about the product and its use in the treatment process.

## **2. Effectiveness and efficiency of advertising**

The creation of effective and efficient advertising messages is an issue that is being addressed more and more frequently and more extensively by specialists in many fields of marketing, but also sociology and psychology, which has become firmly established in the field of advertising psychology and marketing communication. There are a number of assumptions in this area that aim to familiarise advertising creators with how to construct an effective message. This is very valuable information; nevertheless, the changes taking place in the human life space are conditioning a change in consumer habits, expectations are increasing regarding product quality and thus the forms of advertising message. Objective facts supported by market research [Wegner-Jeziarska, 1999, p. 279] including psychological research, which indicate the activation of cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes, appear to be extremely valuable in this area. Thus, the development of advertising standards adequate to consumers' needs appears to be an extremely valuable tool for the construction of personalised advertising campaigns. For this reason, the effectiveness of promotional activities is contained in the mutual relationship of the financial outlay that is incurred for promotional activities in relation to the financial effects that are obtained as a result of advertising campaigns [Łopaciński, 2015, p. 69].

It is worth emphasising that advertising today is a ubiquitous phenomenon. It is difficult to imagine the world, the economy, the media and everyday life without its existencencia [Nowacki, 2005, p. 9]. However, when the face of the market and the companies operating in it become apparent, the question arises as to why some are successful and others not, despite the advertising campaigns. What is the reason that some products reach their target market and quickly disappear from the shelves, while others are lost in the anonymous mass of various goods which we do not notice or quickly forget about?

The answer to this question is very prosaic - in fact, advertising is not as simple an issue as it commonly appears. Its complexity relates to the complexity of human nature, of the human psyche, which determines certain reactions. This is because advertising is not a single activity, but a set of interrelated actions that are undertaken in a specific sequence. These are activities that take into account not so much the resources and capabilities of the company, but above all the conditions that flow from the environment in which the company operates.

Thus, the effectiveness and efficiency of the advertising message appear to be extremely important. It can be assumed that effectiveness is the degree to which certain objectives are realised, while efficiency as the relationship between the outlay (costs) and the results obtained [Sarna, 2019, p. 164].

Advertisements that force the recipient to demonstrate cognitive engagement in reading the message have considerable effectiveness in producing the intended effect. The means of communicating an advertisement (its form) is just as important as its content. On the basis of knowledge of the techniques that influence the perception process, specific attitudes or preferences for a product or service can be created [Wąsikowska, 2016, p.414].

It should be recognised that advertising objectives are essentially secondary elements to the marketing and business objectives of a company, in this case an institution constituting their operationalised and detailed formulation. They must meet the following conditions in order to be fully measurable [Miotk, 2018, p. 128]: they should relate to accurately described target groups; they should also be ambitious and understandable to those involved in the process. Success is thus determined by the personalisation of advertising, which is linked to psychological factors such as the content (message) and its understanding by the recipient, which in turn determines certain emotions that determine purchasing needs.

### **3. Measuring the effectiveness of advertising**

The effects of advertising can be seen over a longer period of time, which is closely linked to a large number of factors. These include: the level and changes in buyers' incomes, their preferences and habits, demographic changes, competitors' activities or the general economic situation [Grzywacz 2006, p. 155].

In studying the effects of long-term advertising campaigns, mainly indicator methods are used, among which the following are worth mentioning:

- awareness of advertising – percentage of those viewers who remember the bank's advertising,
- effectiveness indicator – share of recipients who are aware of the service,
- product item indicator – share of customers who were willing to name a particular service first [Grzywacz 2006, p. 156].

An important element determining the effectiveness of advertising (apart from the message itself) is the communication channel. The message should reach the addressee in such a place, at such a time and in such a form that he or she will notice and remember it [Wiśniewska, 2011, p. 96]. The effectiveness of a campaign in terms of the extent to which a message reaches its addressees will be increased if different types of media are included in the campaign. This is when one speaks of the synergy effect.

When examining the extent to which an advertisement reaches an audience, its reach and frequency are analysed. It is generally accepted that the effectiveness of an instrument increases with an increase in the number of people exposed to it and the frequency with which the advertisement reaches its potential audience. The next stage brings an examination of the extent to which the advertising content is remembered and interpreted, as well as the correctness of the association of the symbols it contains. This is followed by an analysis of changes in the audience's attitudes and perceptions about the service or bank. The ultimate goal is to increase sales of the promoted product, which can be investigated by: comparing the impact of unconventional and standard measures on sales, examining sales as they have occurred in the past, studying test markets or specific consumer samples and using econometric sales models. [Grzywacz 2006, p. 156].

It is worth noting that making and measuring advertising effectiveness in many industries, including pharmaceuticals, is an extremely difficult process, due to the fact that the course of promotional activities is influenced by many factors, such as: macroeconomic factors, other marketing instruments, existing market conditions or competitive activities [Drzazga, 2006, p. 158].

The result is that a small number of companies are sufficiently concerned with the analysis and measurement of the effectiveness of their advertising campaigns, because they are not aware that in order to increase the effectiveness of their activities, the necessary elements are: making decisions on the expenditure of funds for promotion on the basis of the results of implemented campaigns, forecasting and stimulating the effects of planned activities, monitoring the course of advertising campaigns and their ongoing evaluation, analysis of the obtained effects in the cross-section of achieved communication and sales objectives,

appropriate selection of methods for measuring and analysing the effectiveness of conducted advertising activities.

## **5. Effectiveness of pharmaceutical advertising**

The empirical material presented here can be seen as a contribution to a deeper analysis of the issues surrounding the psychology of advertising. Its scope exceeds the horizons currently outlined. This evaluation forms the basis for a continuous exploration of the subject. However, the material presented has made it possible to establish cognitively important aspects. When health problems arise, respondents take steps to obtain knowledge about the illness from specialists in the form of a doctor or pharmacist, and draw information from Internet resources and the experiences of relatives or friends. Thus, the important determinant most strongly influencing the use of a pharmaceutical is the doctor's opinion, as indicated by just under 50% of respondents, and advertising, which was emphasised by 39.7% of respondents. The vast majority of the respondents (82.2%) are guided by their own well-being when taking medication and therefore do not see the need to consult a specialist, as indicated by less than 18% of the respondents. The vast majority of respondents, i.e., 72.6%, always follow the doctor's recommendations in the treatment process - 26% take steps to obtain an additional opinion from a specialist regarding their condition. It should be noted that less than 77% fully or partially read the leaflet accompanying the medicine. Thus, these people show a greater awareness of the treatment process. The results also show that there is a relatively high level of trust in the treatment process suggested by doctors for 56.2% of the respondents. The vast majority of respondents are in favour of conventional therapy - 61.6%.

In addition, analysis of selected advertising campaigns for painkillers has identified common elements, which in particular involve an attempt to build a sense among patients confirming that drugs in this group are dedicated to pain regardless of its source. Thus, a vision of a universal medicine emerges. Another premise relates to its effectiveness and safety of use. The messages here are also about speed of action. These are key premises that were extracted at the level of the analysis of the selected painkiller campaigns. In this case, there were no references to authorities, well-known figures or celebrities, but to „ordinary people”, who face the feeling of pain and, after taking the drug, by their behaviour presented in the advertisement try to make it credible that the painkiller is effective, universal, safe for health and does not have many side effects. These are premises that may suggest a number of benefits of taking

them, because, as the advertising campaigns show, it is a pity to suffer as the world and physical activity, participation in beautiful moments spent with the family, is open.

Medicines dedicated to children also carry in their message information about the effectiveness of the action, the speed of the reaction of the active substance and the length of time the effect of the medicine lasts. The advertising is dominated by the image of children who are smiling, especially after taking the medicine their condition improves. One can see a change that affects not only the child's mental and physical state, but also their activity and inclination to play. Adverts of this kind visibly relate to those aimed at adults. They speak of efficacy, speed of action and length of the treatment effect. The heroes of the adverts, mainly children, lend credence to the effectiveness of the active substance through the change in their state of health that becomes apparent after taking the medicine. Smiles start to dominate and the state of health enables playful activities. This message is very clear and it spreads a vision to the parent which is possible to achieve with the drug. As before, the decision is in the hands of the parent. He or she can effectively influence the improvement of the child's health by making a specific decision to use the drug. Such an image is created in the parent's mind through the messages presented.

A campaign of pharmaceutical products dedicated to seniors not only informs about their efficacy, but also particularly emphasises the context of active time spent with relatives. This is a message that says do not waste time and live life to the full by enjoying nature and culture with your family. A message that is constructed in this way reaches the recipient, creating the feeling that, with the use of the given medicine, he or she can function as they used to, i.e. without ailments or limitations resulting from age, and enjoy life to the full. This is to be confirmed by the smiling faces of the characters in the adverts, for whom time has almost stood still.

In addition, when analysing the level of perception of advertising and marketing communication of pharmaceutical products, it was found that there is a very high awareness of the legitimacy of reaching for pharmaceutical products, in this case medicines. The leading rationale for choosing a drug is its efficacy, as indicated by 46.6% of the respondents, and the comprehensible communication of the drug's effects, as highlighted by less than 33%. Thus, in advertising, the people surveyed are specifically looking for this content, so confirmation of the effectiveness of the medicine and a message that is not complicated for them, such as „yellow gel from the pharmacy”, „it helped me and it will help you too” „it works in just ten minutes after application”, etc. It was also found that the predominant source of advertising and marketing messages for pharmaceuticals is the Internet and social media, as highlighted by

almost 85% of respondents. This state of affairs is the result of civilisational development, a characteristic of the times for which the Internet has become a place of work, sometimes of study, but especially often a place from which information is drawn, including information about pharmaceuticals. The vast majority of respondents identify the areas of advertising that are important to them. These are mainly product information content, as indicated by almost 61% of respondents, but also graphics or sound, which were emphasised by a total of 12.3%. The study also established the high effectiveness of the advertising and marketing message of pharmaceutical products, as it reaches a total of 87% of respondents with varying intensity, leaving a trace in their memory. In addition, the research found that less than 80% of respondents understand all or selected elements of advertising and marketing communication concerning pharmaceutical products, most often those that appear useful for their choice (for example, concerning the efficacy of the therapy or the possible consequences of the treatment).

It was also found that the emotional level determined by the perception of advertising and marketing communication of pharmaceutical products seems to correspond strongly to the nature of the advertisement, which is in the area of consumer interest and may result, among other things, from the current state of health of the respondent or his relatives. With this in mind, it can be concluded that pharmaceutical advertising and marketing communication, due to its nature, evokes feelings comparable to indifference or positive feelings in almost 90% of respondents. This may suggest their openness to advertising and curiosity about the products presented. Furthermore, it was found that advertising and marketing communication of pharmaceutical products, regardless of its source, determines positive emotions in more than 30% of respondents, leading to the activation of cognitive processes and concentration on the communicated content. It should also be emphasized that respondents identify in themselves an increase in positive emotions when receiving an advertisement that presents a product in line with a person's purchasing preferences, which was emphasized by more than 44% of respondents. In second place were the aesthetic and content-related qualities of the advertisement – 32.9%. Thus, emotionally active advertising is that which responds to consumer needs related to, for example, health. In relation to this area of knowledge, the specific problem took the following form: what is the emotional level determined by advertising and marketing communication of pharmaceutical products among the people surveyed? Against this background, the following specific hypothesis emerged: I assume that the emotional level determined by the advertising and marketing communication of pharmaceutical products among the persons surveyed depends in particular on the product presented and the need to acquire it.

An empirical study of the behavioural level determined by advertising and marketing communication in the pharmaceutical market found that advertising reaches less than 30% of respondents and makes them think about whether or not to purchase the presented product, while among 25.3% of respondents it is a source of inspiration that is reflected in the purchase of the product. Thus, it can be assumed that, according to the respondents, advertising appears to be more than 50% effective. This is also a premise for shaping new marketing strategies and improving advertising tools in this area. The results presented also established that the effectiveness of advertising depends on the source of the message. The hierarchy of importance indicates an increase in the dominance of the broadly understood Internet, including social media, which nowadays seem to be the natural environment for modern man to work and live. Thus, it is the source that reaches its audience most fully, influencing their purchasing decisions. The dominance of the Internet is very evident here, as it was ranked first by almost 55% of respondents, compared to less than 24.6% for advertising brochures and only 10.9% for television. Thus, almost 55% of respondents chose the Internet as the most important medium, which seems to be the most effective in terms of advertising and marketing communication in the pharmaceutical market and at the same time the most effective in reaching and influencing the respondents' consumer behaviour. The survey also established which practices adversely affect purchasing preferences by blocking such decisions. Particularly prominent in this area, according to almost 40% of respondents, is unreliability in advertising. Next in the hierarchy, according to almost 35% of respondents, is a factor that is related to the lack of adaptation of the advertised product to the customer's purchasing needs. These are the inadequacies highlighted by respondents ranking them highest in the hierarchy of factors that contribute to reduced purchasing needs for pharmaceutical products. Thus, space is created to base contemporary advertising on the guidelines indicated here, which can contribute to improving advertising as a marketing tool.

## **6. Completion**

The empirical material presented here provides a premise for further research into advertising, which, especially nowadays, appears to be an important element of social and economic life. It is available at almost every step of a person's life, and its influence seems to be a space that calls for constant analysis due to the evaluation of this sector. This is particularly true of improving the quality of advertisements for pharmaceutical products in terms of adapting their messages to the age of patients, their ability to understand the content presented, the use of the product in the treatment process, and the possible consequences. It is important

to ensure that advertising in this area not only encourages the use of the medicine in question, but also stimulates awareness and reflection on the treatment, the effects of the preparation and the possible consequences of this process. This is an important mission of pharmaceutical advertising, which should set standards in the contemporary psychology of advertising this type of product.

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