

# Transition from communism to democracy in Romanian advertising



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**ABSTRACT:** This study discusses the way the advertising industry underwent important changes in many ex-communist European countries, considering Romania as a prime example. The reinvention of advertising in Romania after 1990 is firmly related to features of the political system, professionals' training, and consumer needs. Given that consumer behavior is constantly evolving, as is the entire industry, the present paper investigates the views of Romanian professionals on local advertising in democracy, as well as on the transformation of advertising agencies, using the primary method of the semi-structured interview. To be more credible, the chapter presents the relevant case study of ROM chocolate, a brand that was awarded 9 Lions at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival. Consequently, we hypothesize that advertising developed two contrasting attitudes during the transition: firstly, brands denied their past; secondly, they began to use it to prove their endurance and stability

**KEYWORDS:** democracy, communism, transition, advertising agency, consumer, localization



## INTRODUCTION

Communism was one of the most powerful social philosophies of the past century. In Eastern-European countries, it established a different type of globalization based on similar lifestyles and political systems. Everything functioned as in a factory, based on the same regulations, constantly estranged from the capitalist world, mostly characterized by freedom of choice, variety, autonomy, media and business. On November 10, 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the beginning of the destruction of this apparently invincible communist puzzle. Revolts began in Poland and developed throughout Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. According to Gruegel (2008), the main feature of the Communism collapse in Central and Eastern European countries was simultaneity. Similarly, Fukuyama stated that the year 1989 marked “the decisive collapse of Communism as a factor in world history” (1992, p. 25), because democratic countries aspire to homogeneous political and economic systems. In a sense, Central and Eastern

European countries reacted similarly to this transition from an authoritarian, dictatorial system to a democratic one, but they proceeded to adapt differently to the Western mentality. Even today, this political situation is far from stable, as citizens of formerly communist countries need time to learn to live and work differently, after so many years of monopoly. As stated by Grzymala and Jones Luang, “post-communist states are neither stable, nor consolidated” (2002, p. 532).

Although a few communist countries consumed capitalist products which belonged to global brands, many people did not even have the chance to see, taste, or buy them, as was the case in Romania and Bulgaria. The main reasons were media restrictions and trade regulations. Central and Eastern European countries were only allowed to sell products within the “Iron Curtain,” which substantially limited consumption and communication. In this context, Lascu et al. focused on analyzing the Romanian market transformation in comparison with other ex-communist European states when it confronted democratic challenges:

As a result, Romania entered the post-communist era far behind countries such as Hungary and Poland in terms of overall acceptance of considerations regarding consumer satisfaction, marketing mix, and operational efficiency. (1993, p. 103)

Besides, socialism developed its own specific symbols of power, which continue to influence public mentality and behavior long after it historically ceased to exist in Romania and not only there. Wydra outlines the notion of building a new society from scratch, because communism created many indestructible life-patterns that cannot be changed overnight or reconverted to democratic customs:

*The red paradise* was pursued by two systematic destructions of the past, including political institutions, established social hierarchies, economic structures, traditional rural environments, as well as the symbols and identities. (2012, p. 56)

Therefore, people from post-communist countries usually denied their past, because it was highly connected to “red values” and generated unpleasant memories. The problem is, however, that citizens are still anchored in their personal past, lifestyles, and, sometimes, fears. This reality was tolerated for a while, as transition was a difficult challenge for people hovering between communist lifestyle nostalgia and a new paradise full of expectations. Nostalgia is primarily connected to the elderly, for whom the new system was almost dangerous because they lacked the abilities or knowledge to fit in. It was too late to improve themselves, and change their jobs without being professionally prepared. Besides, the communist ideology supported and developed a collectivist social mindset emphasizing the same rules, whereas democracy liberates individualism and encourages differences between people. Nonetheless, consumerism, market variety, freedom of choice, poverty, and globalization became a real burden, causing nostalgia towards the “Gold Epoch,” as Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime was called. In our opinion,



In this respect, most post-communist markets and their consumers were not prepared enough for this complete opening to Western opportunities and access to large amounts of goods. Serazio and Szarek provide a brief understanding of this harsh situation by stating that: “both businesses and consumers waded into a market economy lacking the experience that Western populations had accumulated over nearly a century of advertising encounters” (2012, pp. 756–757).

The adaptation has been differently developed from one country to another and this situation is still in process. Besides, consumer mentality depended on their education, and abilities to change lifestyles under these circumstances.

## **ADVERTISING DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES**

### **Advertising activity in communist countries**

This section of our article aims to present the way advertising agencies underwent the transition from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one and how they make changes in organizing its activities. We chose to investigate this issue by focusing on the development of advertising agencies and their activity in Central and Eastern Europe. First, advertising was an almost non-existent concept during the last decades before the anti-communist Revolution in 1989, because the field was considered “[a] capitalistic virtue [...] an engine of free market economy” (Mittal, 1994, p. 35). In Romania, for example, any possible advertising activity was prohibited after 1950. According to Petcu (2002, p. 71), any form of promotion was monopolized by the company “Pavoazarea Capitalei” (“Capital City Adornment”) in Bucharest starting in 1958, which explains consumers’ subsequent attitude towards advertising and the free market. Similarly, in Czechoslovakia, advertising was meant to promote only state or cooperative department stores (Čulík, 2004), while an anti-consumerist attitude was included in daily propaganda.

Surprisingly, the Soviets did not completely reject the most effective way to promote market resources, given that advertising is important for increasing economic growth. Nevertheless, in the context of World War II and of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, the realm of advertising was labeled as wasteful because production was constantly associated with people’s needs and distribution was uncomplicated and non-competitive, as Markham asserts: “absence of competition and product differentiation either among manufactures or retailers did nothing to create a need for advertising” (1964, p. 32).

Despite this, the Soviet Union did not promulgate any form of legal interdiction towards advertising. In this favorable context, the expansion of commercials and wide media placement (especially radio) became a reality by 1949. Its main goal was to attract consumer attention and increase sales and production. As a result, products needed to become brands, which involved the creation of advertising agencies. As stated by Salisbury in *The New York Times*, the first Soviet agencies were called

“Advertising Bureaus” (1949, p. 10) and their number rose considerably on a yearly basis.

Hungary was the second European country to officially create a national advertising association (The Hungarian Advertising Association) followed by The Association of Communication Agencies in 1975. Consumers had access to the free market because of this early exposure to commercials. According to Wilson, market freedom was directly connected to the Hungarian support of Soviet foreign policy. Consequently, “Hungary was allowed to experiment with liberal economic policies and thereby gained an economic head-start over its neighbors” (Wilson, 2007, p. 69). Equally significant was the evolution of advertising in communist China, where advertising was embraced earlier when compared to many Central and Eastern European countries. It was reintroduced in China after the Cultural Revolution of 1979, and the first advertising agency in Asia was created by Japanese business (Dentsu). In the light of the Chinese communist environment, the country developed advertising quite successfully, as stated by Ciochetto in an analysis of the present market metamorphosis: “Advertising is an intrinsic part of the capitalist system so the expansion of advertising into a Communist system is a fascinating study on the merging of the two systems” (2005, p. 57).

Consequently, markets were faced with two different attitudes towards advertising in Europe: first, complete prohibition, as was the case in Romania, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, and, second, the recognition of advertising with the mission of promoting industrial goods among consumers, as was the case in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Hungary.

### **Advertising agencies in post-communist countries**

Furthermore, this study focuses on discovering the way global agencies emerged in communist countries and how their activity inspired local agencies to compete on the market. Obviously, there was a real difference between the states that encouraged advertising even during communism (Russia, Hungary, Poland, East Germany) and those that practically rediscovered it later (the Balkan states). Romania belongs to the latter category, despite its rich activity before the communist monopoly.

As a result, in 1989 Hungary received more funds to rebuild its market than any other country in Europe, owing its success to early economic reforms and investor-friendly policies in the advertising field (Reed, 2000). According to Wilson (2006), Hungary is currently a serious competitor of countries in the region — such as Slovakia, Ukraine, or Romania — whose free-market debut was not as confident or supported by foreign investments. Moreover, local agencies entered the market mainly through creativity and BTL (below-the line) services and were steadily involved in promoting domestic brands, while the global focused on both BTL (below

the line) and ATL (above the line) services, considering their financial and organizational capital. The agencies' development has significantly relied on the consumers' view on advertising role in society, as not everybody understands transformation of products to brands and the necessity to communicate their values. Heyder et al. state that consumers from Western Europe use advertising to deal with competition, while buyers from Central and Eastern Europe get knowledge about products (1992).

A similar situation occurred in the Czech Republic, which rapidly recovered its cultural and financial capital after the fall of communism, thus accelerating market and agency development. Compared to Hungary, which began developing during communism, the Czech Republic opened its doors to multinational agencies in 1990 (Young & Rubicam, Mark BBDO, Leo Burnett Advertising), as did Romania, but organized its human and business capital faster than the latter.

As Simon (1999) asserts, the new consumerist and democratic society has been called "adtopias," considering that the main values of the community became pleasure and beauty. Therefore, Russian professionals created socio-cultural associations with very conservative feelings such as nostalgia, patriotism and pride. In the first decade of the post-communist Romanian advertising, local brands run similar nostalgic campaigns to reactivate consumers' loyalty. On the young market, global and local brands met each other and started a serious fight for notoriety, by using the above feeling.

Further adverts with local references (as opposed to global branding) sometimes ironically riff on communist imagery such as Coca-Cola adverts that deploy images of heroic workers waving a red flag. (Ray, 2009, p. 326)

Having considered all these cases, there is no doubt that multinational agencies took advantage of young democratic markets and brought their clients in soon after 1989 to extend their businesses regionally. Several markets, such as the Polish, the Czech or the Hungarian, immediately found the human and technical resources to draw closer to capitalist professionalism, being "sponsored especially by the German leadership" (Nagle, 2007, p. 2007). Advertising pioneers like Romania initially developed chaotically, with employees lacking advertising education or experience. Professionals learned to advertise by working directly in agencies, and the first entrepreneurs were foreign investors or Romanians studying and living abroad. According to M. Rhea, only 6 multinational agencies entered the Romanian market till 1994, because "little privatization of state-owned enterprises has occurred and few advertising-related enterprises even existed before 1989" (1996, p. 62). Additionally, most of the small local agencies founded after the Revolution were bought by multinational agencies, while some vanished or re-specialized in activities such as BTL. After a while, the top professionals working in multinationals decided to become independent and created new local and specialized agencies on the market. During the economic crisis that started in 2009, local agencies be-

came more competitive due to domestic brands, which started to communicate constantly to sell their more affordable products. Certainly, after the first advertising phase of transition from communism to democracy, the market has begun the process of transformation and adaptation to “Westernhood,” by encouraging the center-oriented economy.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Based on this theoretical framework, this paper aims to focus only on the Romanian advertising activity after the Revolution, emphasizing the way agencies have recently changed. We firmly believe that the Romanian industry is a good example of post-communist development given its dynamic evolution and successful participation in the International Advertising Festival.

### **Method and sample**

Our research method is a semi-structured interview applied to 15 professionals from prestigious advertising agencies, global as well as local, who hold various positions within the advertising process. The in-depth interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was analyzed using content analysis and an iterative, part-to-whole reading strategy. The interview questions aimed to uncover the evolution of Romanian advertising in the Post-Communist Era, to express its identity in Europe, to highlight local specificity, and, ultimately, to understand the agency transformations necessary to meet new consumer and client demands. The useful information was collected during face-to-face interviews held between November 2012 and December 2013.

The 15 interviewees, aged between 28 and 48, currently work in the largest advertising agencies in Bucharest in diversified positions as Table 1 shows. We consider that this number of professionals is quite relevant because they work in 11 agencies, most of them as manager, partner or director, which means they have a certain knowledge of advertising evolution. One respondent is the Executive Director of IAA Romania (International Advertising Association), who holds a comprehensive view of the entire advertising activity in the country. It is worth mentioning that IAA Romania was awarded at the 41st World Congress, in Washington DC, as the most active and creative worldwide branch, receiving the Golden Tulip prize for Excellence in its whole activity. Respondents’ names have been concealed, as they are well-known in this highly dynamic industry and some information may be related to clients and is, therefore, confidential. The most important aspect is that all respondents have been working in campaigns for both local and global brands, comparing their evolution over the years.

According to the above table, respondents have diverse studies, especially the ones over 40, considering communication and advertising colleges were founded

Table 1. Respondents' profile

No.	Type of respondents	Type of agency	No of respondents	Studies	Advertising experience	Interview time (minutes)
1	The Executive Director of IAA	IAA Romania	1	Polytechnic School	22	50
2	Agency Director	Propaganda	1	Management	6	60
3	Agency director and planner director	Arsenoaie & Mătășel	1	Marketing (Business)	14	70
4	Agency Manager Partner	iLeo	1	Management	10	50
5	Managing Partner and Creative and Strategy Director	Loco Branding and Communication	1	Liberal Studies and advertising UK	18	50
6	Managing Partner and Marketing Researcher	D&D Research	1	Communication and Sociology	14	55
7	General Director	Draft FCB Romania	1	MBA-marketing SUA	8	45
8	Creative Director	Draft FCB	1	Political Sciences	10	66
9	Integrated Communication Director	Graffiti BBDO	1	Psychology	19	90
10	Senior Account Manager	McCann Ericsson	1	Marketing and Management, advertising	7	83
11	Brand Director	Leo Burnett	1	Communication	9	61
12	Account Manager	Tempo Advertising	1	Marketing	8	62
13	Strategic Planner	Graffiti BBDO	1	Marketing, Political and Administrative School	9	75
14	Copywriter	Kaleidoscope Proximity	1	Communication	5	70
15	Strategic planner	Propaganda	1	Economy	9	50
	<b>Total</b>		15			937

Source: author.



after 1990. Still, 9 out of 15 professionals have skills in the marketing and communication field, including advertising. To get the main information from in-depth interviews, we conducted the research by using content analysis, which implies coding data and comparing answers.

### **Research hypotheses**

Based on the qualitative research, our paper aims to hypothesize the following issues:

**H1:** Romanian advertising found a glocalized way to develop brand identity. In this case, transition from communism to democracy turns into the transformation of market and consumer's mentality. The industry balances between global and local influences, depending on consumers' profile and economy development.

**H2:** The way professionals recovered the past incredibly fast has been perceived as a second hypothesis. This happened especially in the last decade of transformation when media progressed and started conveying a bolder message to promote global and even local brands.

**H3:** The evolution of an old-surviving brand, ROM chocolate-bar, could be associated with the evolution of the Romanian market and consumers' mentality.

Consequently, the following case study should be viewed through the lenses of creativity and autonomy at the European level. The ROM chocolate-bar seems to build its image based on transition stages from the communist view to the democratic one, and, thus, it deserves to be mentioned here.

### **FINDINGS**

The first part of this section focuses on professionals' view on the development of advertising in Romania based on the country's history and identity at the European level. The interview analyzed the evolution of Romanian brands during the past two decades in order to prove, not only the effort of adapting to the European level of advertising, but also the way local specificity was built through unfolding national pride. To fully understand the evolution of Romanian post-communist advertising, we similarly chose to present the history of the most well-known local brand, ROM chocolate, awarded 9 Lions at Cannes 2011 for a successful campaign designed by McCann-Ericsson Romania. In the second part of this study, interviewees detailed the way advertising agencies underwent transformations in Romania in terms of their organization and communication strategy. At the end of collecting both categories of results, we aim to compare them to understand how specific Romanian agencies communicate, enabling us to reach conclusions regarding the local advertising landscape in a capitalist, innovative context.

### **Local specificity and global influences in Romanian post-communist advertising**

As expected, the interviewees offered a wide range of answers, focusing on the Romanian adaptation to the global evolution of advertising. Two stressed the relevance of the English language in conveying commercial messages, while the other two considered that advertising trends prove a synchronization of Romanian advertising with European. All other 11 respondents revealed interesting aspects that should be analyzed thematically. From a semantic viewpoint, few interviewees believed that, overall, importing global values may be recognized under the name of a worldwide “advertising culture.” Thematically, the idealistic image of the world, happy families, entertainment, parties with friends, and a number of stereotypes undoubtedly unfold the global influence over local advertising. Two creative directors participating in this research highlighted the significance of narrative patterns taken over from top brands that belong to Procter & Gamble. This schema is invariable and, obviously, could be successfully applied to other product categories as well. On the whole, the schema means establishing a problem, looking for its solution in the form of a product, celebrating the success of overcoming the problem, and, finally, highlighting the brand signature. Actually, this pattern is nothing less than a fairy-tale in which the hero is the product or the brand itself. Finally, respondents admitted that production techniques, online networks, and international creative competitions are the most effective global influences over Romanian advertising.

The best way to find an authentic voice in European advertising, when the country has a new, reborn industry, consists in conveying its specificity through effective techniques of creativity, which are particular features professionals intentionally use to localize ads. Interviewees developed this subject either by explaining similar concepts or by identifying specific aspects of Romanian advertising. Consequently, we decided to synthesize their input by using keywords. Most respondents firmly believed that tradition, ethos, and anthropology-based approaches are the most widely-used specific features of local advertising. Professionals constantly mentioned the rural area, natural landscapes, and especially the myth of return to one’s origin, expressed in advertising by an unpolluted atmosphere, virgin soil, and fresh products. The feeling of patriotism was recently reactivated as national pride after being demystified through unpleasant or nostalgic memories about communism, as four of the professionals stated. Undoubtedly, interviewees agree that communism still affects the perception of some consumers and, consequently, that tradition and nostalgia have been consistently obscured behind childhood memories, the history of older brands, and everything connected to Romanianism (referring to the feeling and living in a Romanian way). Finally, humor was identified as an excellent strategy of promoting brands for any country or mentality, but especially for Romania, where advertising created popular characters, memorable jokes, and is associated with many product categories regardless

of price or quality. Indeed, Romanians prefer irony, banter and sarcasm to any other attitude towards life. Considering the previous debate, our issue about Romanian advertising identity reflects the entire effort of understanding and developing capitalist values, so that local consumers may be included in the European family. In this case, discussions led us to three categories of answers. First, the majority of respondents (10 out of 15) firmly asserted that Romania has already built its identity through advertising, due not only to its extraordinary resources of creative teams often awarded in advertising competitions, but also to the great enthusiasm and exuberance of its professionals. The second opinion (4 of 15) completely denied any Romanian identity in the advertising realm, because, according to some interviewees, local industry is similar to the one in other Eastern European countries. This explains the homogeneous communication strategies on the European market, which may have caused the rapid Romanian advertising evolution:

I believe that Central and Eastern European countries around Romania similarly communicate, only sensibly adapted to the target. What I mean is that we are similar as nations, here in Central and Eastern area; therefore, I don't think a Romanian ad could be easily identified by any specialized European from France, Germany; I believe he would fail to identify it as a Czech, Slovakian, Croatian, Romanian ad, even on the linguistic level. (account manager, Tempo)

From another angle, a planner from Leo Burnett recognized that Romania is a leader among other post-communist countries in the Balkans. To our surprise, the ability of Romanian advertising to adapt to capitalist standards seems to be perceived as a negative feature, because globalization means, for some, the destruction of Romanian identity. However, a significant issue to be considered here consists in defining the term "local brand," which raised heterogeneous opinions in our study. The most synthetic definition refers to the following aspects:

I think that the local brand is the one with local history. No matter who buys it in the globalization frame, it will still remain a local brand. (Creative Director, Draft FCB)

Debating this issue, the last respondent's opinion revealed the struggle between global and local aspects on every market. Finally, in the third category of answers only one interviewee believed that the industry is still in its pioneering stage, but that, despite this, it is very well-known in the Balkans. A particular perspective highlights an astonishing paradox: Romanian advertising goes beyond the economic power of the country. In other words, the national advertising potential seems to be higher than the financial and political resources.

### **Still-existing Romanian brands during transition**

After the Revolution, the market confronted three categories of brands, and their situation reflected the evolution of advertising and the transition from a communist producer mentality to democratic trade. First of all, several brands ceased pro-

duction after 1990, lacking the strength to improve and promote their products through effective communication. The second category survived through various strategies focusing on brand capital, while the last comprises the newborn brands of democracy. At this point, our study was very interested in professionals' opinions about surviving strategies of traditional Romanian brands. During the interviews, we discovered an impressive range of strategies used by surviving, successful brands such as ROM chocolate, Dacia (cars), Bucegi and Timișoreana (beer), Eugenia (biscuits), Dero (detergents), Napolact (dairy), Gerovital (cosmetics), or Plafar (herbs and teas), and tried to synthesize them accordingly. Some respondents (5 out of 15) really believe that these brands have started to communicate professionally; this means that they have accrued optimal budgets for developing new campaigns, thus ensuring a stable market presence.

Paradoxically, four other advertisers believe that brands liberated themselves from their past and history by modernizing their capital and, sometimes, this strategy was also meant to rebrand them. Only two interviewees agreed with the strategy of reminding consumers of brand heritage in order to develop national pride; the other two strongly asserted that foreign influence and management saved several Romanian brands from market failure. A single perspective emphasized the relevance of excellent marketing, while the final respondent, an advertising researcher, believes brand success results from trials, errors and unexpected events. Later, the same interviewee compared Romania with other East European countries and concluded that the Czech Republic, Poland and Democratic Germany recovered more brands than, unfortunately, Romania did. Consequently, old brands still survive, communication and advertising strategies developed their capital, so that some of them aimed to create their history on the market, due to their memorable campaigns. For brands, to have their own history in a field involves achieving a level of maturity, communicating constantly, and, most relevantly, being demanded by consumers on the market. This is a tough goal, but also a confirmation of the culture and history of advertising in any country. The general answer to this question was quite positive for 11 of the cases, and all respondents supported their opinions with examples. Expectedly, respondents reiterated the most successful Romanian brands, highlighting the ones that most often communicate with their audience, such as Timișoreana, Bergenbier (beer), Bonux, Dero (detergent), Petrom (fuel), Boromir (bakery), and Altex (household electronics). A strong argument consisted of brand positioning and product innovation. Two appreciated creative strategies focused on powerful stories from brand history during the past 24 years. Some of these stories became memorable and helped consumers establish personal relationships with brands, creating brand events and experiential marketing. One of the professionals constantly highlighted an essential detail: such brands have a good background in advertising and their prosperity should be entirely attributed to multinational management and investors. Three interviewees were rather skeptical about real history, as local brands have only re-

cently started to advertise professionally and are much fewer in number than their global counterparts. Finally, two professionals totally rejected the idea of building a history of ex-communist and newborn brands in such a short time, despite their awards and marketing recognition at European level.

### **Case study — ROM rum chocolate**

In order to get the whole picture of the advertising evolution in Romania after 1990, we decided to present the ROM chocolate case-study, because it summarizes the creative directions that have been employed until recently and because it is the most successful local brand. This was the year when the European industry recognized the value of Romanian advertising based on one of its campaigns related to national identity. The chocolate-bar was created in 1964 and its recent slogan, *Strong Romanian sensations since 1964!* is meant to evoke its communist history. Basically, the entire Romanian advertising history relates to this brand development, which proves professionals' effervescence and their maturity. Before 1990, ROM was only a product whose particular ingredient was rum, so the real process of branding happened after 1990. The agency McCann-Erickson has been building ROM's brand image during the past 10 years using professional communication techniques. Creative strategies underwent many transformations according to target demands and categories. First, between 2005 and 2006, the brand appealed to loyal consumers by using communist nostalgia in several TV spots ("Rocker," "Work Visit," "May 1st") featuring dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. This approach reminded consumers of their youth and childhood, when capitalist values were entirely prohibited. Later, in 2008, the strategy focused on contemporary consumers with capitalist aspirations, albeit rather exaggerated and regarded with irony — owning a yacht, for example.

In 2010, a creative team from McCann Erickson thought of a great approach: rediscovering the national values of Romanian traditions and folklore. In this case, the big idea was a reaction against the global celebration of St. Valentine's Day, based on honoring the traditional Romanian celebration of Dragobete, on February 24. Obviously, this was the first step to a new type of ROM positioning relying on Romanian identity, given the direct connection between the name of the country and that of the chocolate.

The next campaign, "American ROM" represented the real advertising boom of this brand, because it started to communicate boldly, appeal to patriotism, and engage consumers at a very high level. Basically, this strategy could be, metaphorically, called "a revolution of Romanian advertising" whose voice became particular, creative, and smart enough to draw the attention of the European industry at the Effie and Cannes international festivals in 2011. The "American ROM" campaign was awarded 9 prizes, among which were two Grand Prix Lions for Promo & Activation and Direct Lions, one Titanium Lion at Titanium and Integrated,

three Gold Lions at Integrated, Direct Lions, Promo & Activations, one Silver Lion at Media Lions and two Bronze Lions at PR Lions. During this campaign, the genuine chocolate wrapper with the Romanian flag was replaced with the American flag to challenge the national ego of young people who, disappointed by their country, dream of living somewhere else. The incredible message was conveyed in English: "Now ROM is a star, too. We replaced the Romanian flag with the American one. Romanians can shine, too. Try the new ROM. With the American flag, the taste of coolness." As expected, consumer reaction was immediate and highly patriotic. Young people assaulted the internet sharing their opinions, feeling offended by brand transformations. During only the first 6 days of this campaign, the ROM site registered 75,000 unique visitors and their number of Facebook visitors increased by 300%. Consumers started debates to defend national values and the agency team dynamically answered their concerns. Romanians also organized a flash mob in the streets to state "We want our ROM back!" and fight for their national flag. This was much more than the entire creative and strategic team from McCann Erickson had expected. Outdoors, everywhere one could see messages displayed in English: "Let's build America here," "The American dream now in Romanian chocolate." Additionally, the new American ROM appeared on shelves in stores and supermarkets and people really believed that Romanians had lost one of their national symbols. Because of that, the agency swiftly created a TV advertisement titled "It was a joke," which simply says: "ROM stays ROM no matter what. Romanian flag and all. Strong Romanian sensations, guys!" After the commercial aired, ROM became available wrapped in the traditional Romanian flag. The debate extended into prime-time TV shows and media events, which was followed by composing the ROM hymn. The main results of this campaign were that ROM became the leader of the chocolate-bar market with 79% and that the brand successfully appealed to young Snickers consumers, first, and Romanian citizens, second. Since 2011, ROM has intensively addressed consumers through patriotic feelings and national pride, creating the web site *Romanians are smart* and new campaigns have aimed to improve their identity in Europe. In 2011 and 2012, the online message was "Let's change the image of Romania on the internet!" and there were many debates about Romanian gypsies causing problems in Europe. In 2013, the brand came up with another creative idea for its online channel based on confusing Bucharest and Budapest, which tourists, the media, and sometimes artists often did (Michael Jackson, Heavy Metal). Nowadays, ROM keeps conveying a message closed to Romanians' needs: they want to work at home, not abroad, and to be respected by Europeans. Thus, the ROM brand opened the borders of Romanian advertising to the world of creativity and other real, even global brands have started to steadily support national Romanian pride since 2011. This brand has undoubtedly inaugurated another age of Romanian advertising during transition, as the brand's communist roots and historical heritage were creatively developed, not only as nostalgia about the past. This case confirms one of the assumptions of this paper: Romanian ad-

vertising already has an identity in Europe, even if the situation of genuine brands was not managed very successfully after the anti-communist Revolution. This case study and its success on the market led us to investigate not only memorable campaigns, but also the advertising agency development that encourages professionals' creativity so much. There is a whole story behind the modern walls today, and another kind of revolution, entirely triggered by enthusiasm and motivation.

### **The evolution of advertising agencies in post-communist Romania**

Centrade was founded in 1990 by Radu Florescu, a Romanian who has been living in the United States for years with his family, but who returned for an amazing adventure. He hired students, because at that time there were no marketing or communication professionals in Romania. In his book on advertising, *The First Advertising Year*, Petre Barbu interviewed Florescu and other pioneers. One of his questions referred to agency structure in 1993, as Saatchi & Saatchi took over his agency. Florescu's answer can be applied to the entire market in 1993: "We didn't have any structure with departments, as later things evolved. We didn't have briefs or a production department, account planning, creative, or media" (2013, p. 179). According to his confession, the Romanian industry was again in its infancy, because of the lack of knowledge, professionals, experience, global connections, and even brands.

The way the agency keeps preserving departments' organization and allocates the work based on their specificity<sup>1</sup> is another aspect to be discussed here.

According to the majority of our respondents, a full-service agency still preserves the classic structure of departments (client service, strategy, creative, media, production, traffic, BTL, marketing) supplemented with digital and online production. There is a general opinion that work must be finely divided in an agency, but also effectively connected, especially given the fact that campaigns are usually integrated for multinational companies and brands. A single opinion considered that digital media created "real chaos" at first, and was subsequently perceived as another channel of message dissemination. In the case of small, local agencies, their structure cannot omit the departments of client-service, creative, and strategy, whereas media and production may be outsourced. In brief, agency structure essentially depends on its clients and communication tools.

From other viewpoints, 3 out of 15 advertisers considered that the typical structure of an advertising agency has recently changed. For example, a creative director from Draft FCB revealed a "hybridization" phenomenon that even extends to the organization of advertising agencies. This respondent stated that the creative de-

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the information provided by this question has been used in another article as well, titled *The Evolution of Romanian Advertising Seen by Professionals*, recently published in *Manager* journal, 18 (1), (December 2013), pp. 59–74.

partment has diversified, because digital and social media have become much more important lately. A director of integrated communication from Graffiti BBDO asserted that agencies are facing “perpetual, writhing reinvention.” Finally, one of the most well-known account planners in Romania, who owns and runs his own planning agency, deeply believes that “full-service is an old-fashioned concept,” because ideas are currently considered more important than media and production. 4 professionals out of 15 argued that specialized agencies have lately been developing more according to clients’ needs and have become successful during the economic crisis. Undoubtedly, the triangle of strategy, copy and art represents the best formula to develop any kind of campaign.

As for the interdepartmental mobility, the agencies have underwent significant transformations during the past 24 years in terms of job flexibility, professional evolution, and even industry standards. Our interview provided a range of answers that proved a lack of homogeneity in the field. Most respondents (7) encourage flexibility for several reasons: to find the vocation of their employees, to not get bored, and to be able to multitask the way it happens in small agencies. Professionals who work in multinational agencies entirely agree with vertical and horizontal promotion — within the same job category, from junior to senior, and changing the department, respectively — because of the variety of work in such companies. Besides, professionals also estimate that the beginning of one’s career involves oscillating between jobs and agencies. Only 3 professionals believe that interdepartmental mobility is rare, because people need to be the best in their positions and not hover between departments and agencies. As for the proper positions that could be switched, 3 interviewees considered that the best choice is to move from the client-service department to planning, whereas the other 2 respondents motivate the mobility from creative to planning. Respondents provided very interesting opinions of digital agencies, revealing that the organization of roles and departments disappears at this level and that employees usually multitask. This might be the future of the advertising agency, but for the time being Romanian professionals seem to be in a dynamic process of discovering and rediscovering themselves in both local and global agencies. Besides, responsibilities during each campaign are equally important, and, thus, the relationship between departments developed as well. In search for the Romanian specificity, the best campaigns are the result of the steady connection between planning and creativity, or of strategic thinking.

Considering how important strategy has become for developing integrated campaigns, its relationship with the creative departments of a young Eastern European industry represents a real challenge to understand professional standards in agencies. After Romania’s integration into the Planning Association (2007), the relationship between creation and strategy revealed the way the industry itself has evolved, adapting to the latest directions. This research issue encouraged interviewees to debate the strategic or creative direction of a successful campaign, a fact that visibly explains the boundaries between and the roles of both activities, which are not



completely established in the Romanian industry. Therefore, every answer could raise other questions, and even the arguments for the same approach are different. Still, the majority (6 interviewees) firmly asserted that strategy and creativity are complementary. For example, the manager of a local full service agency, Propaganda, metaphorically compared this relationship with “the clock’s winder, because one challenges the other, it stirs it.” The head of account-planning of Leo Burnett Romania argued that this relationship could practically be termed, “the fight of good with good (itself).” Although this question was not meant to decide which of the above activities is more productive, two respondents with experience in planning and development believed that strategy leads to good copy. Contrary to that, two participants still argued that creativity is the key of smart campaigns, embracing the type of ads common from the 50s to 70s. The other three respondents highlighted the relevance of human relationships in strategic and creative departments to achieve great perspectives for campaigns. Surprisingly, the last two people to take part in our research stated that there are several agencies with no priorities regarding the strategic development of their campaigns. This fact clearly explains that professionals have different opinions on conveying creative messages based on strong strategic approaches. Obviously, this perspective reflects a transitional stage in the evolution of advertising in Eastern European countries. Comparing these results with the first part of the present research regarding the Romanian brands evolution, an obvious idea comes out: the more specifically organized the agency, the more successful the campaigns are. Basically, the agencies’ specialization personalized professionals’ work and this fact encourages local agencies and brands to have a distinct voice.

## CONCLUSIONS

What happened to a young industry and democratic market like Romania during the past 25 years entirely reflects the transition and transformation stages in Eastern and Central European countries in advertising, but at a different pace, depending on their historical and economic backgrounds. Coming back to our initial hypotheses, the former findings confirm the glocalized style of transition in Romania, not only because advertising underwent again a pioneering stage, but because it took time to rediscover its identity, considering that consumers denied their local roots for the sake of global ones. This area of Europe has been heavily influenced by Western patterns in conveying brand messages, and global brands quickly gained the market through standardized commercials, and, subsequently, specificity. The “Hollywood culture” of advertising can be recognized everywhere in the first years of transition as a sign of globalization and professional standardization. Even if our study focused only on Romania, future research starting from this point could investigate the variety of local aspects across different countries. Customs, anthropological roots, and history are certainly the main topics that reveal local authenticity.

The brands survival in Romania owed to bold communication, (re)invention of brand capital, liberating brands from their past, accepting foreign influence and their management involves strategies available worldwide. What differentiates countries at this point comes from brands' adaptation to new consumer demands, as proven by the ROM case-study, and this happened thanks to professionals' exuberance. Indeed, this hypothesis is entirely confirmed: in Romanian advertising, professionals successfully recovered the gap between Eastern and Western countries, despite the hard transition, learning to cross the borders of economic limits to finally express their unlimited creativity. However, discussing the balance between strategic and creative work in an agency raised a challenging debate that certifies a paradox in contemporary Romanian industry: innovative professionalism and conservative attitudes. While the innovators clearly understand the strategic role of each communication campaign, the conservatives still believe in the creative dimension of every brand. In our opinion, Romania is not the only Eastern European country with such views, considering that professionals already belong to different generations: one that is still rooted in communist patterns and young, experiential ones.

As for the possibility of creating a fresh advertising history in the democratic age, this aspect could be more widely debated for every ex-communist industry, referring to well-known campaigns, powerful brands and even particular features of popular culture deeply influenced by local advertising. Much attention has paid to the ROM case study, because it is relevant for the Romanian advertising evolution and development of the local consumer. In that sense, the third hypothesis has been validated. Similarly, the identity of national advertising in Europe is another aspect still under discussion, as it depends on prestigious awards, externalizing local brands (like Dacia cars, Murfatlar wines,<sup>9</sup> Topoloveni marmalade) in Romania, and even the steady presence of local products on the continental market. Every ex-communist country fights to be respected and recognized in Europe due to the creative potential of its professionals.

To conclude, advertising in Eastern European post-communist countries is a transition still in progress and entirely based not only on market change, but also on a professional perspective. The market turned from a chaotic battle of sales into a rational field of competition. Definitely, political transition has been replaced by consumers' transformation and (re)branding processes. In terms of global brands, advertisements have progressively conveyed first a standardized message, then an adapted one and, finally, localized campaigns. Besides, international awards draw the attention of the worldwide industry, opening the doors of creativity and qualitative advertising, which liberate these countries from communist prejudices and stereotypes. This was ROM's case and, certainly, each Eastern European country focuses on intensively supporting national brands to regain their specificity and, ultimately, avoid becoming just another globalized branch of advertising. This study has several limitations, because it did not extend the research to other ex-



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