21th century advertising might just be the most powerful weapon a marketer has and a quite efficient one if we think about the way it changed our world. But all that power comes with great responsibility: used accordingly by planning everything in the smallest detail possible it can be the best thing that ever happen to a company, used without any kind of strategy it can very well be a large scale disaster. Because of the great costs that advertising is much too often associated with and also the long term affects it haves on the consumer a company should never start an advertising campaign without knowing every single last detail concerning their product and consumers. The study of the promotional message will show its capacity to gain the attention of the targeted audience, to stand out from other messages, to be associated with the product/service it promotes, to generate a positive reaction towards that specific product/service and to encourage its purchasing.

Marketing research in promotional policy issues is the most developed field of research from all the other marketing mix components research fields. The studies, in this field are primary focused on advertising, being oriented on three main topics: promotional message, promotional channels, and evaluation of advertising efficiency.

The message itself is a pathway to reaching a goal, a way for the marketer to communicate with the consumers, to listen to them, to learn from them and a way to let the world now that the particular product/service is available with all its numerous advantages. In a world dominated by accessible technology is quite hard to be different or to remain unique through the products/services offered and advertising is just the tool to transform a ordinary product or service into an idea as close as possible to the desires and needs of the customers.

The study of the message itself it is being done in two different ways depending on when it is taking place: before or after testing the message. The study of the message before testing it will show its capacity to gain the attention of the targeted audience, to stand out from other messaged, to be associated with the product and to encourage the purchasing of the product. Regarding the method chosen to deliver the message (press, TV, radio...) we can identify the following methods for analyzing the message previously to testing it:

a) **Singular testing** analyzes the effects generated by exposing the subject to only one message and haves the following approaches:

- The subjects are being confronted with different forms of the title of the announcement and they are asked to choose the one that they consider as the most interesting. Afterwards they will receive the rest of the announcement and some questions regarding it will be applied. This way the researcher can identify the way in which the title of that announcement gains the attention knowing the fact that in real life the title is the one responsible for standing out in the eyes of the consumer, only afterwards (and if this condition is satisfied) the consumer will actually read the entire message text.
Before being presented with the announcement the subject will be asked regarding their actual intention of purchasing that particular product. This variable will also be analyzed after the exposure to the message in order to establish the way in which the message influenced the purchasing intention for that specific product on that particular consumer. A particular attention should be given to products with a high grade of dedication (like high level electronics, professional tools and equipments) that stand out of the general consumer product category for which the purchasing intention is quite hard to be changed.

b) **File type testing** consists in a set of 6 to 8 announcements among which the one being analyzed, each one printed on a different sheet from the same copy-book. This copy-book will be handled to the subjects to look into and afterwards they will be asked what brands they can remember to be promoted inside and to evaluate the announcements without looking over the copy-book. The next step in this method is showing (again) the announcement being analyzed in order to determine in what manner the respondent trusts the message, is being attracted by it and how clear he understood it. Some of the main advantages of this method are: the short time needed to apply it, low costs, easy understanding of the results and as problems the fact the memory effect depends also on the interest shown by the subjects towards that specific product and not exclusively on the announcement itself. Again it is necessary to know the respondent and its interest towards that specific market product or service, his knowledge in the field being one of the strongest influence factors for the memory effect.

c) **The imaginary magazine method** consists on making a couple of magazines containing some rather interesting subjects and advertisings so they will appear as real as possible. The announcements that represent the subjects of the test will be inserted in some of the magazines which will be distributed thru the postal service or through some designated operators to families from different geographical areas. The respondents will be asked to read the magazine in a usual manner in order to rate the publication. The analyze will be made thru a form that the respondents will return after completing it and which includes among other things (questions regarding the articles and the advertisements in generally) some questions designated to the announcement being analyzed. This last type of questions will determine the memory effect, the way respondents are being attracted by it, the way they trust it and the attitude towards purchasing the promoted product. The questions regarding the product can be used to compare the answers given by families on which the message was tested on and families on which the message was not tested in order to see the effect that the announcement had. As in any research method based on respondents acting on their own, without any assistance from the researcher it vital for the value of the entire research that the selected respondents will behave as instructed and that all the responses received will be analyzed firmly before being taken into consideration.

d) **The consumer panel test** consists on 50 to 100 people that are being presented with a couple of announcements promoting the same brand in order to make a classification after their preferences, their interest towards the message and the influence it had on their purchasing intention. Standard questions for this sort of research will also focus on identifying the way the consumer sees the message transmitted through the announcement, on the way the message is being presented and on the most appreciated parts of the announcement. The test can be applied on individual or group interviews, in the respondents’ home or in special prepared rooms. Among the limitations of this particular method there are the influences between individuals in group interviews and the potential classification errors when confronted with a large number of announcements.

e) **The D.A.R. test (Day After Recall)** consists in transmitting a commercial on TV in 3 or 4 designated localities. From those localities the next day after transmitting the commercial the researcher will select a number of people that watched the TV program. They will be asked on the phone if they saw the spot and, if so, to tell what they can remember from it. After this they will be asked to rate the message by its capacity to inform, its credibility and its clarity. The evaluation of the efficiency will be done by comparing the scores obtained from the respondents with other standard scores like the ones obtained by similar products. Also, an interesting thing to test when using this method is what other similar commercial is the one in question being associated with and in what manner this association affects its image and message.

f) **The theatre test** consists in inviting a group of consumers in a theatre room under the pretext of watching a pilot TV program. Before the show the subjects will be presented with a list of brands among which the one being tested and asked to chose their favorite one under the pretext of a lottery and they could win the chosen product (the quantities of products will be chosen in such manner that their general
value to be as close as possible). After this moment the consumers will be presented with the actual TV program in which there will be inserted a couple of commercials representing the brands from the lottery including the brand being tested. At the end of the TV show the respondents will be asked again to mention their favorite brands (for another lottery, to increase their chances or to increase the quantity of the product chosen earlier). This way the researcher can measure the way in which viewing the commercials influenced the attitudes of the respondents. In order to maintain the story of a pilot TV show the respondents will also be asked about the program and other commercials.

In order to analyze the messages before testing them a series of measures based on various equipments and technologies that test the physical reaction of the human body are also available. These methods are based on the fact that the emotions generated by a particular message will provide physical reactions that can be measured and therefore deduce some of the attitudes of the respondents towards the message they were presented with. Such methods are:

a) **The G.S.R. test (Galvanic Skin Response)** uses a device named the galvanometer that analyzes the physiologic reaction of the individuals presented with particular messages. The subjects will be connected with measuring probes (electrodes) to a measuring monitor while different commercials will be running. With the help of the measuring probes the monitor will record the perspiration on the inside of the palms of the subject that is considered as an important indicator for the intensity of the emotions felt. This particular method is not a very popular one due to the fact that it is not able to make the difference between a positive reaction and a negative one and it needs time to adjust the equipment to the body of each individual. Also the way people sweat depends on a large variety of factors such as room environment compared to the outside environment, skin properties, different anti sweating methods used by each person. Because of this it is very important for the researcher to normalize the room temperature, to ensure the same conditions for all the respondents, and to establish the normal behavior (the base) for each individual being tester.

b) **The ocular receptor** is an observation technique based on a high sensitivity video camera that follows the movement of the eye retinas when the subject is being presented with the message. By using this technique the researcher can identify the parts of the message that were the most viewed by the respondent and the order in which he read it. The main disadvantage of this method is that it is not able to tell if the respondent is being attracted by the message (if he is actually reading it or looking at some parts of the announcement) or if he is just confused and looks at the message in a random manner. For types of messages that are known to have a standard form (like web pages, articles…) the respondent will tempted to follow the same known pattern and will be confused when being confronted with something different. Also, when being confronted with color rich graphics the way the respondents react to the black and white form often differs from their reaction to the full color one. The researcher should be informed is some of his respondents are having trouble seeing one or more colors or textures (as an ocular medical affection) and if they are using eye glasses to enhance their sight (if so, what are the differences when viewing the message with and without the glasses)

c) **The PDR test (pupil dilatation response)** measures the degree of pupil dilatation of a respondent when he is being presented with a certain commercial. The theory behind this method says that in similar conditions of lightning in the environment and distance to the screen the way pupils react can show the measure in which the respondent is interested on a part of the message. Studies show that a commercial with a bright white background will score much more than a dark background one no matter how interesting la last one is. Therefore the scores are being normalized with the quantity of light the commercial generates to counter the independent physical reaction of the retina. Also the reaction time of each individual must be perfidiously tested and recorded to normalize the scores obtained in the real test. The researcher should not look for perfect healthy subjects because that is rarely the case in real life and by doing that the research results will not be that rich.

d) **The diaphanometer test** is based on transmitting a message starting from an unclear presentation and gradually increasing the quality of the transmission in order to measure the reaction of the respondent in different stages of this presentation. Counting on the particularity of the commercial the scrambling of the message can be audible, visual or both. In some variants specialists are using real noises to simulate the normal conditions (traffic noise, colleagues speaking at work, children playing at home, a construction site nearby, rain, sun, graffiti, or other problems affecting the print). Here for the researcher will use as scrambling methods sounds and print alteration simulations specific to the environment where the respondents come from and to the environment where the messages will actually meet the general public.

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e) **The tachistoscope test** is about playing the same commercial at different speeds in order to determine the elements memorized by the respondent at different stages. This way the specialist can determine the minimum time needed to send the message with maximum effects and also to determine the elements of the commercial that stand out. The main idea here is to see which is the minimum time needed for the main parts to be understood by the respondent due to the ever increasing price of advertising space. Also a variant of this test was used to determine how fast can a banner go pass the respondent eye so that it will be seen accordingly (the banner print can be on a bus or the respondent might pass it at different speeds and distances). As a result of this technique the very interesting animated frame ads were developed (the coca-cola subway advertisement is a good example here).

Analyzing the promotional message after testing it determinates the effects it had after being practically applied to the consumer through one or more specific media types for which it has designed. The evaluation methods used here can be classified into three main categories: the recognition test, the memory test and the triple association test.

**The recognition test**, developed by Mr. Daniel Starch, evaluates the degree in which the message gains the attention of the subject when printed in a publication (newspaper, magazine…). The moment on which the test is being applied depends on the frequency of that particular publication. For the publications that are being published weekly or twice a month the test will begin after three to six days after the publication is sent to the shops and for the monthly publications the test starts after about two weeks and can take about three weeks. The selected respondents are readers of the publication, the size of the panel will be between 100 and 150 people. The basic questions used in this method generate the following categories:

- Subjects that do not remember seeing the message
- Subjects that can only remember seeing the message previously
- Subjects that remember seeing the message and associate it to the product/brand it is promoting
- Subjects that read at least half of the announcement

Contrarily to the easiness of using this method there are a number of limitations like: the interest showed by the respondent can also be influenced by the previous interest regarding that subject, the possibility that some confusions regarding the understanding of the message might appear, the situation in which the subjects read more than one magazine with similar adds and the fact that recognizing a product from the add does not mean that the respondent will go ahead and buy it.

**The memory test** consists in accessing a panel of respondents that were exposed in a particular moment with a certain communication channel (press, TV, radio…) and asking them to speak about the commercials seen or heard. In this sense there is: **unassisted remembering** when the subjects do not receive any information regarding the particular commercial and **assisted remembering** when such information are provided. In the case of assisted remembering the main purpose will be the analysis of the popularity of the message by presenting the respondents with different publications that they read and asking them what ads they can remember from those publications. One of the techniques specific to this method of analysis is the Galup-Robinson technique which has the following steps:\(^{240}\):

a) the respondent must remember and describe correctly at least one article from the publication that is being analyzed;

b) the respondent is being presented with a number of paper pieces with the names of some brands that were advertised in the publication and also some that were not present in the publication. He is asked to select the brands that he remembers being advertised in the publication

c) for each brand remembered correctly the respondent is interviewed in order to establish the accuracy and the strength of the information remembered (how many details he remembers and how precise they are)

d) afterwards the magazine is opened at every ad that the respondent remembered and he will be asked if that is the ad he was referring to when answering the questions and if is the first time he

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\(^{240}\) Serbanica, A., *Cercetări de marketing în sprijinul politicii de comunicații a întreprinderii*, Teză de doctorat, ASE, București, 2005, pp.94-95;
sees it. If that is the first time the respondent sees the add, the paper containing that brand will be disregarded in order to focus only on the brands clearly remembered.

e) Finally the information is classified accordingly to the gender, age, education and other socio-demographic data regarding our respondent.

The triple association test is based on analyzing the association capacity between three sets of information regarding the distinctive category of product, brand, and promotional message. The respondents are being presented with information regarding two categories and they should provide the third one to complete the set.

Another area in which marketing research is used to assist the decisional process regarding the promotional strategy is the study on the potential message transmitting methods. Such researches help in the substantiation of the decisions regarding choosing the proper communication methods (TV, radio, and press), establishing the channel selection criteria (entertainment, business or news oriented) and choosing the most benefic type of programs when the advertising spots will be transmitted.

The fields covered by this type of research are: the message distribution methods (for example the number of TVs or radios), the people who watch/listen to them, the exposure to the messages, the efficiency of the message. The types of studies vary on the method used to distribute the message.

For the written press the main interests are the distribution of the publication and the main characteristics of its readers. The distribution of the publication means the number of printed issues, the number of sold issues, territorial coverage, the profile of the selected location for the distribution, the fate of the unsold issues (donations, free issues, paper recycling plants…). The profile of the readers of a publication represent the total number of persons who got the chance of reading it even partial and does not limit to those who actually purchase it. The analysis of the readers of a publication is being done through three main characteristics: number of readers (the number of persons that read the publication), structure of the readers community (socio-demographic, psychological and behavior related characteristics of the panel), level of exposure (how many times does a person read the publication, for how long he reads it, number and types of articles read…). The general term reader used here there will be understood a person that reads that particular magazine completely or partially in a certain interval of time from the moment it went out on the market, one day before the interview for daily papers, 7 days for a weekly publication… (Practically the interview will be done before the next issue will be out).

The information regarding audience is obtained through inquires. In Romania, these kinds of studies are being developed under the direct supervision of BRAT (The National Biro for Circulation Auditory) as a part of the National Auditory Study research program. This study involves people living in cities with over 50,000 inhabitants with ages between 14 and 64 years. The interviews are taking place in the residence of the respondent, face-to-face, by recording the answers in a printed questionnaire. The field activity is divided into two research campaigns that were established by BRAT after a selection from the offers received: CSOP – the Centre for Marketing Research and Opinion Studies and IMAS – the Institute for Marketing Research, each with 50% of the interviews.

In television the audience can be measured through various methods like: random phone call method, people meter an the journal method.

The random phone call method consists in calling random phone numbers and asking them if they are watching TV in that particular moment. If so, they must say what channel they are watching and the TV program that is running at that precise moment. This method is not really proper for evaluating shorter TV programs because there is rather hard in obtaining a representative panel during the show. Also the shows running early mornings or late at night are not suitable for this type of research.

The people-meter is a device that is connected to the TV of each household involved in the research that records the total time in which the TV is on, the time spent watching each program and the number of family members watching. In order for th device to work properly each family member must press a button when joining the other viewers and again when leaving the room, this way the people-meter records not only the time spent watching TV but also the structure of the viewers. The recorded information is sent in

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real time to the main server that stores the data from all the panel members and measures the general audience. As good as it might sound in theory this method has a big limitation due to the difficulty of getting all the family members to cooperate by pushing their button each time they enter or leaving the premises of the TV.

The journal method involves asking the selected respondents to register in a journal the chosen channel, the viewing period and the programs watched. The journals are not made for each viewer in part but for the TV no matter who is watching it. This method is cheaper but is often affected by the fact that the respondents will forget to write down some aspects of their behavior or will do so in order to avoid being judged for the programs they watch. Also by using this method there will be a rather big delay between the moment when the behavior happens and when it is recorded in the data server and analyzed.

For radio audience measuring the random phone call and the journal method are also being used. Marketing research plays a crucial role also in evaluating the efficiency of the advertising campaigns using qualitative (interviews, focus-groups) and quantitative research methods for this purpose (the investigation).

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