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Secular spirituality versus religiosity – communication strategies in advertising

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of the article is to identify the specificity of religious and spiritual content in advertising aimed at different markets.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The article demonstrates that the use of religious and spiritual content is specific to image advertising and is a trend that is functional: it serves to disguise the purpose of persuasion, to increase the contextual effect, to build community between sender and receiver and to inspire trust in the addressee. The methodology used in the text is content analysis, desk research, research into the persuasive potential of advertisements, and ancillary semiotic research.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: Preliminary considerations introduced the concept of faith and secular spirituality. The body of the article then analyses the research material, which is a selection of television and online advertisements for the Merci brand, the jewellery manufacturer and retailer Pandora A/S, the Cartier brand and Ikea shops. In collecting the material for the article, purposive sampling was used, taking into account commercials aired in Italy, Poland, Germany, France, the Czech Republic and Russia before Christmas Eve between 2014 and 2022.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The research showed that content relating to religious values and secular spirituality is selected syncretistically in order to broaden the group of planned ad addressees. The very construction of the advertisements

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resembles a multi-level structure, the elements of which, by levelling the criticism of the recipient, serve to achieve the inference planned by the sender.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The process of secularisation is evident in advertising, which is reflected in spots aired during religious holidays, which are explored by advertising broadcasters. This is facilitated both by the temporal context and by different consumer experiences derived from knowledge structures built on religious and cultural perceptions.

KEYWORDS:

religion, secular spirituality, advertising, communication strategies, consumer

1. INTRODUCTION

Both product and image advertising appeal to the needs, values, memories and beliefs of consumers. The content and form of the message are adapted to the characteristics of the audience in each country: nationality, place of residence, language spoken, religion and values. These factors are as important as other criteria, such as gender, age, education, interests, media use and types of products purchased. Among these messages, advertisements appealing to traditional religiosity and secular spirituality associated with humanistic values constitute an important group. All of them make functional use of the factors indicated here in order to attract the addressee, persuade them to buy the product and inspire trust for a longer period of time.

Religion and spirituality have long been an area of research in many scientific disciplines, and the relationship between religiosity and spirituality is currently experiencing a golden age. Researchers are increasingly interested in redefining the concept of spirituality without reference to the sphere of the sacred, finding characteristic elements for this kind of inner experience, but also with points in common with traditionally understood religiosity (Smick, 2014; Royal, 2012; Comte-Sponville, 2009; Ferry, 2002; Cupitt, 1998). In the literature there are various names to describe this kind of inner experience: secular spirituality, atheistic spirituality, spirituality related

to humanistic values, non-religious spirituality. In spite of the many names, it seems that the concepts of religious faith and non-religious faith most accurately define this. On the one hand, they indicate the inner origin of these experiences. On the other hand, they show from what source these experiences come.

In Christmas advertising, references to religiousness (religious faith) and secular spirituality (non-religious faith) appear most often in a mixed form. This is due to the desire to get people with different beliefs to purchase certain products. The content and its form are a kind of bridge that advertising creators want to build in order to reach recipients of different nationalities and with different attitudes to faith. To this end, they employ a number of communication strategies: they vary the length of spots, present characters and events differently, select motifs and individual elements, use the characteristics of different languages. We intend to present this specificity of advertisements by verifying the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) The use of religious and spiritual content in advertising is functional: it serves to conceal the purpose of persuasion, to increase the contextual effect, to build intimacy between sender and receiver, and to inspire trust in the addressee.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) Ad creators use religious and spiritual content by relating it to the attitudes, beliefs, memories and values of audiences in particular countries to more strongly influence consumers.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) The use of religious and spiritual content is linked to the selection of images, words, their juxtaposition, sound and musical background, which evokes superficial associations, builds a good mood, appreciates the addressee and leads to simplified conclusions.

This issue is important because there is still a lack of research that explains the influence of religion and spirituality in advertising, and that which exists mostly does not take into account the complexity of religion and spirituality in the construction of advertising (Waller, & Casidy, 2021, pp. 349–353). The call for research to reflect the phenomenon is also highlighted by other researchers (Gil Soldevilla, Palao Errando, & Marzal Felici, 2019, p. 141). They recognize both the scarcity of works presenting a cross-sectional (especially from communication sciences) view of the use of religious and spiritual content in advertising and, at the same time, the increasingly important

impact of this content on consumer perception and behavior. It must be added that these topics are rare – especially in the field of comparative research. They require not only interdisciplinary knowledge, but also persistence in finding advertising variants. This makes it possible to indicate communication strategies appropriate to the linguistic, national and worldview conditions of different countries. We will try to demonstrate this on the basis of the collected material of television and internet commercials of the German chocolate brand *Merci*, the Danish jewelry manufacturer *Pandora A/S*, the French watch and jewelry brand *Cartier*, and the Swedish (now Dutch) interior design brand *Ikea*.

2. BEST TIME TO PROMOTE: CHRISTMAS TIME

The use of religious and spiritual content is most evident in TV and online ads aired before Christmas Eve, which, depending on the religion, begins on 24th December (Catholicism, Protestantism) or 6th January (Orthodoxy). This is why in our research we used purposeful selection of commercials, choosing those broadcast between November and January. We regard the consideration of the temporal context of the adverts to be a key factor for research into the use of religious and spiritual content, which has not been taken into account by other researchers who conclude that the use of such content is marginal in advertising (Maguire, & Weatherby, 1998, pp. 171–178). For comparison, we selected advertisements aired in European Union countries (Italy, Poland, Germany, France, Czech Republic) and Russia between 2014 and 2022. The choice was based on the religious map of the country and the religion declared by the population. National, mental and value system characteristics were an additional factor. To analyze the sample, we used a mixture of content analysis, desk research, research on the persuasive potential of advertisements, and ancillary semiotic research.

We obtained the material using search engines: google.com, <https://duckduckgo.com/>; <https://yandex.com/>. In the search, the following keywords were selected as the most representative: holiday advertising, Christmas advertising. To get the most representative results all entries were made in national languages: Italian, French, German,

Polish, Czech and Russian. Based on the collected data, Christmas ads for brands that periodically appeared during the Christmas season were selected.

Previous studies of religious and spiritual content in advertisements have already established that Christmas time is used in advertising as symbolizing values (the viewer is valued through the prism of qualities they would like to have or possess) or as a background for promotion (Ryłko-Kurpiewska, & Kujaszewski, 2020, pp. 133–143). To the first group, based on search results, we assigned ads for food products, toys, jewelry or watches. To the second group, we selected ads for hypermarket chains and home furnishings stores. On this basis, we selected for analysis the ads of the brands *Merci*, *Pandora*, *Cartier* and *Ikea*, which offer their products in various national markets. It also became clear that religious and spiritual content is used in the promotion of only selected products, and does not appear in ads for, for example, cold remedies, hygiene products, cleaning products or life insurance, the specifics of which make it impossible to value Christmas as a holy time.

Commercials aired in the run-up to Christmas are often criticized for showing a distorted character of Christmas and a shallow portrayal of it. We will consider whether popular sentiments translate into the construction of ads: the choice of content and their form. We will also point out the function of the impact of messages and their types.

3. BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY

It is characteristic that the choice of content and its form vary in advertising campaigns in different countries. The attitudes indicated here correspond to the relationships between religiosity and spirituality indicated in the literature, which fall into four categories:

- spirituality is a component of religiosity,
- religiosity is a component of spirituality,
- religiosity and spirituality are separable and can be opposed to each other,
- religiosity and spirituality whose areas of meaning overlap (Piotrowski, 2018, p. 19).

The specificity of these references in advertising stems from social beliefs and practices (Zaltman, 2003, pp. 84–85) and the observed influence of religiosity on consumer attitudes (Juliana, Asnawi, & Sihombing, 2021, pp. 127–135). The use of religious and spiritual content in advertising is combined with the use of knowledge structures related to the portrait of the national audience: its value system, habits, experiences, practices and rituals. Knowledge of the target group enables advertisers to initiate contact (phatic function) and to model the judgments of the audience with the greatest possible contextual effect. This is possible thanks to the linguistic form of advertising, which does not use direct exhortation to purchase (it is an indirect action). In addition, the amount of information is limited and the duration of exposure is shortened. Christmas advertisements in the European Union are between 15 and 60 seconds long, in Russia between 10 and 50 seconds. However, both groups are dominated by 30-second adverts. A clear tendency here is to replace dialogues with vocal or instrumental background music, which increases emotionality and gets closer to the way the audience feels. References to religious and spiritual attitudes in advertising are combined with the deliberate omission of verbal information to engage the viewer. Typical of this is the use of a communication strategy where the viewer is expected to complete the message according to their experiences and knowledge, and cultural horizon.

3.1. Spirituality in the shadow of religiosity

The first example is a campaign for the German chocolate brand *Merci*, which consists of ads targeting the German (www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZL4JTG6f7A), Czech (www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYiIuqfrWP0&ab) and Polish markets (<https://www.grupa-tense.pl/blog/rzut-okna-na-swiateczne-reklamy-2021/>). The advertisements differ in length (the German version lasts 60 seconds, the Czech version 59 seconds, and the Polish version 42 seconds). The events depicted in the ad, as well as the props, are analogous in all three language variants. The exception is the color of the mailbox: yellow in the German and Czech versions, and red in the Polish, which corresponds to the everyday experience of the recipients of the respective countries.

In the image layer of the ad, the religious nature of Christmas is emphasized by a church with a bell tower, typical of Alpine villages. It is depicted from outside and inside during the gathering of the faithful, during a performance by a children's choir of angels. The threshold of the temple separates secular and religious space, which the protagonists connect by opening the temple doors. The juxtaposition of abstract nouns ('peace', 'brightness', 'time') and concrete nouns ('candles', 'stars', 'bells'), typical of carols, resounds in all language versions. Also notable are the phonetic features of the texts that evoke the unique atmosphere of the magical Christmas time. In the first parts of the ad, one can hear an overrepresentation of sounds characteristic of particular languages. In the Polish advertisement, these are the humming and hushing sounds (cf. "dźwięki dzwonek", "śnieżny czas", "dzieci szczęścia"), and the hissing sounds in the German (cf. "Sterne", "Warmes Licht", "Merci", "dass es dich gibt") and Czech (cf. "Svíčky", "hvězdy", "hlasy zvonů") advertisements. This effect was further enhanced by transaccentation (displaced accent) to emphasize regularity and sublimity. To this end, trochei (accented and unaccented syllables) were used in the adverts to emotionally evoke the rhythm of the heart. Also noteworthy is the melody, whose sections repeat with change. This change within the same structure evokes affect in the listener. The melody develops upwards until it culminates in a solemn conclusion, which gives the listener the satisfaction of an anticipated continuation. In this way, the material and daily, comes into contact with the transcendent and timeless. This can also be seen in the order of events: the boy puts the letter in the mailbox and looks up to heaven, the man and the woman head for the temple, and by opening its doors they enter the space where the mystery takes place. The tabernacle is visible in the center.

In the *Merci* ad we observe attitudes intersemiotically expressed proper to spirituality and religiousness. Spiritual attitudes are related to the tradition of celebrating Christmas: meetings with family, choosing a Christmas tree, lighting candles, giving presents, visiting a Christmas market. Religious attitudes are referred to by the image of the church, the behavior of the characters (participation in the liturgy) and the words of the advertisement. The Czech song speaks of angels watching over the hearts of children [cf. "Andělé bdí v dětských srdcích"] and dark cribs [cf. "V tmavých jeslích hvězdný

prach”]. German advertising refers to a dark stable [cf. “dunkler Stall”]. Religious attitudes are also indicated by the implicit existential question about the meaning of Christmas. However, it is immediately apparent that these attitudes are not equally characteristic of the Polish, German or Czech audience.

Studies of religiosity in these societies reveal great differences. The level of religiosity in Poland, according to analyses by the Center for Public Opinion Research, is 84% (CBOS, 2018, p. 2). According to European statistics, in Germany 70% are considered religious (Pew Research Center, 2018). In the Czech Republic, only 18% consider themselves religious, of which 49.5% describe their religiosity as insignificant and only 1.2% consider themselves “very religious” (Mikołajko, 2014, p. 41).

The example of the Czechs and the progressive atheization of society is a good starting point for discussion. It shows that statistics alone do not provide complete knowledge about the religiosity of society. This is confirmed by works on the religiosity of Czechs. Publications by Czech theologians show that most people who leave the Church do not become atheists. As Halík writes “many Czechs, considering themselves atheists, want to express their distance to a certain type of theism (the way faith is presented) and to the institution of the Church (anticlericalism)” (Halík, 2020, p. 20). The thesis of atheization of the Czechs, as well as other European nations (Grün, Halík, & Nonhoff, 2017, pp. 77–84, 93–106; Taylor, 2007, pp. 513–514), as emphasized by researchers, is a simplification, based on ignorance of religious awareness and related social attitudes in individual countries (Róžańska, 2019, p. 47). These attitudes do not stem from a conscious rejection of religion, but only from a rejection of one’s own idea of what believers believe (Halík, 2005, p. 22). More and more people declare belief in something like God and believe in a kind of impersonal force (Taylor, 2007, p. 513, Hervieu-Léger, 1999, pp. 44–46).

For these reasons, advertising does not divide recipients into believers and non-believers, but precisely and on different semiotic levels (verbal, phonetic, pictorial, musical) selects content and means of impression. This makes it possible to attract recipients with religious convictions and to valorize recipients with humanistic values. In this way the target group is broadened. Secular spirituality corresponds to religiousness, is an element of it, but does not take its place and

meaning. This is emphasized by the brand slogan “Merci, that you are” and the last frame of the ad in the form of a greeting card. They leave the customer with either belief, room for interpretation and serve to bring them closer to the brand.

3.2. When religiosity is part of spirituality

The impression of religiosity as a component of spirituality evident in the celebration of holidays is also evident in the campaign spots of the Danish jewelry brand Pandora. These were broadcast in December 2021 in France (30s spot), Italy (15s spot) and Russia (10s spot). In these commercials, the most noticeable of the features of Christmas advertising can be seen, which is the exposure of the family as a community that is united by a system of values and close relationships, with the aim of evoking emotional memories from the addressee’s autobiographical memory (LaTour, LaTour, Zinkhan, 2010, pp. 328–336). The family home is here at the same time an example of hierophany, and coming to it as a sphere of the sacred provides contact with a supernal world that stands in opposition to the profane (Eliade, 2008, pp. 9, 43). The viewers of the advertisement are invited into this space by means of doors that open in the first shot of the advertisement. Additionally, mirror neurons are used (typical for Pandora’s advertisements), giving the viewer the impression of being a participant in the situation. Sympathy is provided by gestures of hugging, grasping the product and facial expressions of characters who are happy to receive a gift. The effectiveness of such procedures in advertising is highlighted by neuropsychological research (Lacoste-Badie, Droulers, 2014, pp. 195–202).

The different variants of advertising, despite the plot analogy, vary. In Italian and French advertising, the sense of family togetherness is emphasized: “the presents are for all the sisters” [a tutte le sorelle, pour toutes les soeurs], “for all the mothers” [pour toutes les mamans] and “for those who have puppies” [a chi ha dei cuccioli]. On the other hand, in Russian advertising, time and presents are valued above all: cf. the expressions “the brightest moments” [для самых ярких моментов] and “ideal gift” [идеальный подарок]. One can see here a typical for Russian advertisements – exaggeration in the

use of adjectives that are supposed to distinguish the product and the situation. The background music (an atmospheric song – “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” sung by Emilie Mover) also dispenses lyrics about the carefree time of Christmas with no troubles [“Make the Yule-tide gay, From now on, Your troubles will be miles away”]. Warmth and everyday life are relegated to the background. This way of promoting goods in Russian advertisements is usually combined with an emphasis on the superior position of heroes and the promotion of national culture. The latter aspect is evident in another Christmas campaign by “Pandora”, where in the commercials aimed at the Russian market (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYtpHFcLz0s&ab_channel=PandoraBraslet), the nature of the background music of the original American “Jingle Bells” was changed to bring to mind Russian or Soviet songs (it is worth comparing, for example, the song “Kalinka” or the song by Russophile Gilbert Becaud – “Nathalie”).

Pandora’s advertisement is an example of a stereotypical take on Christmas advertising, in which the timing of the message becomes a favorable tool for marketing activities. The layer of religiousness is emphasized in a minimal way in order to highlight humanistic values in a smooth way through associations and indirect references to Christmas time. An impression of religiosity is created, but this is only a background for showing a non-religious way of experiencing Christmas.

3.3. Religiousness versus spirituality

A clear example of differences in worldviews and related mental attitudes are the spots of the prestigious French brand Cartier intended for the Russian (https://vk.com/video-47253716_163955362) and European markets (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aGOxaeHYcw). The variants of the campaign ads are linked by the brand symbol (a panther), winter scenery, the motif of presents and references to Christmas Eve.

Christmas memories in the Russian advertisement are evoked by the music of Pyotr Tchaikovsky (here: “Dance of the Sugar Fairy”) composed for the ballet “The Nutcracker”. Thanks to the music

(introduction of a celesta with a sound similar to bells, melodic line, change of pitch, tempo) the listeners are spiritually moved and transported to the world of transcendence. The myth of “rich Russian culture” resounds here, which corresponds to the icy landscape, deformation of Christmas trees and brutalism of the masses. All this is combined with a propaganda effect. One enters the world of advertising through a gigantic door, which is deceptively reminiscent of the golden doors of the Kremlin opened in front of Vladimir Putin. The analogies are striking: the proportions of the door, the golden handles, the floral ornaments and the gap through which the cold blinding light falls. From here, as if from a fortress, a panther sets off, its tough silhouette and aggressive way of moving highlighted by animation. The construction of this advertisement brings out those elements from Russian culture which, being emotionally attractive for the viewer, appeal to the sense of individuality and independence. It is a world in which even snowflakes perversely float upwards instead of falling from the sky. The magical time here has nothing to do with the religious nature of Christmas, although it originally alludes to it.

The advertising for the European Union market is dominated by the motif of animals playing. Their drawing is soft, and the presented scenery (images of a lit-up city, windows of houses) and props (a Christmas tree and presents) evoke autobiographical associations with Christmas. The advertising narrative is reinforced by the musical background: the song “Here Comes Santa Claus” arranged by Bing Crosby and The Andrews Sister in 1949. This is done firstly, by taking into account the effect of frequency of exposure, according to which audiences prefer stimuli they have encountered before (Zajonc, 1968, pp. 1–27) and secondly, from the desire to valorize the recipient. They are supposed to derive satisfaction from finding the source of the evocation.

To sum up, Cartier’s advertisements can be regarded as an example of treating religiosity and spirituality as disconnected phenomena, or even contradictory in some respects. References to religious reality even in advertisements intended for the European market are too marginal for a viewer who is primarily driven by religious values to identify with them. This is not changed by the time context of the ad, the setting or the props. A glaring example of this is Russian advertising, which refers to the psychological and cultural features of

the domestic addressee. However, these references are sufficient to give the viewer the impression of communing with spiritual content. This is done, however, with references to different needs. In Russian advertising, it is primarily the need for self-esteem, while in advertising for the European market, it is the need to belong and to relate to others.

3.4. Between religiosity and spirituality

The choice of different content as well as forms of evocation is evident in the Christmas campaign of IKEA shops for the Russian (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYtuR7rjxyA>) and Polish (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEFiYOPWVm0&ab_channel=IKEAPolska) markets in 2021. The Russian advertisement shows simultaneous intersemiotic references to religious and spiritual attitudes. Religious attitudes are referred to by props symbolizing the time of waiting for Christmas: the Advent candlestick, the Christmas tree and the motif of the Julian calendar (Christmas is celebrated here later than in the Gregorian calendar, i.e. 7–8th January). Secular spirituality refers to preparations for the celebration of the New Year, which in Russia is considered more important (celebrated by 57% of the population) and more festive than Christmas. These attitudes correspond closely with opinion polls conducted by the Levada Center in December 2021 (<https://www.levada.ru/2022/01/19/tserkov-i-gosudarstvo-3/>). The survey shows that half of Russians consider themselves religious: Orthodox Christmas is celebrated by 59% and the New Year by 91% of the respondents surveyed.

The characteristics of Russian society are reflected in Russian advertising as in a mirror. Customs derived from the Orthodox Church (or Christianity more broadly) can be seen here, which indicate Russia's secularized social identity. This includes buying a Christmas tree on 30th December, preparing a festive meal according to the Christmas Eve ritual (festive tableware, an empty place at the table) and giving presents on 31st December. It should be added that gifts are offered in Russia both on the occasion of the coming New Year (cf. the figure of Grandfather Frost) and on the occasion of the Generous Evening, the day of St Melania of Rome. The games that start

the New Year celebrations are called “Małanki” (after St Melania). The vertical orientation that forms the axis of the domestic world between earth and sky also plays an important role in this advertisement. The protagonist looks up in search of the tallest Christmas tree, and on its tip he places a spike and at that very moment his gaze rises to the heavens.

The Polish IKEA ad, on the other hand, is dominated by the Christmas and New Year theme of overwhelming excess, associated with the remnants of Christmas. Christmas abundance, which is a sign of prosperity resulting from God’s blessing, is replaced by food leftovers symbolizing gigantic consumerism (products, although individual, are hyperbolized here). The meaning of Christmas for the Catholic Polish society is here nullified in the storyline at the level of the motif of escape from a spectacular threat proper to the cinema of new adventure. The background music (“Carol of the Bells”), in contrast to the original performance, is more reminiscent of a fight song than a Christmas melody.

The elements linking the Russian and Polish commercials are a star hung in the window – one of IKEA’s flagship products – a Christmas tree and a New Year accent: fireworks and New Year’s wishes spoken in song. The whole spot and its slogan (“Think before you throw away, because it only takes a little to change a lot”) deprives Christmas of its proper spiritual dimension. This advertisement is reminiscent of the Scandinavian IKEA messages, where a gradual departure from exposing religious content in Christmas advertisements is observed, which are replaced by universal values (Ryłko-Kurpiewska, & Kujaszewski, 2020, pp. 133–143). Interestingly, in Scandinavian countries the pattern of identification with the national church (participation in the most important rites) seems to be strong, although it is devoid of primary theological connotations. In other countries, the strength of theological influence also means a decline in identification with the Church (Taylor, 2007, p. 514)

In Ikea advertisements, religiosity and spirituality are phenomena whose areas of meaning overlap. References to religious reality are symbolic enough to be accepted by viewers guided by humanistic values. On the other hand, the choice of secular values makes it possible to expose problems that also touch upon the religious dimension. In the Ikea advertisements for the Polish market this phenomenon is

illustrated by the issue of wasting food. For some, it may be a denial of proper management of goods and a problem of hunger, or an important ecological issue. For others, it may be the vice of profligacy, failure to observe the commandments of faith, lack of imagination in works of mercy and solidarity between people (Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego, 1994, no. 2831).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There is a perception that religious and spiritual content is rarely used in advertising. It is believed that their use is marginal and of little significance (Maguire, & Weatherby, 1998, pp. 171–178). However, when the context of the time in which the Christmas ads operate is taken into account, it turns out that it is important here in its symbolic dimension (reference to rituals, traditions of celebrating Christmas) as well as its real dimension (Christmas is a time of increased demand for religious and spiritual experiences, which is combined with increased participation in religious practices by people of different nationalities). The eternal need for the sacred, like other human needs, is subject to fluctuations over time, which is also noted by advertisers. Thus, the correlations between the timing of the ad (month, day of the week, time of day) and the perceived needs of consumers are translated into a range of communication and marketing solutions.

In the article we showed that different types of relationships between religiousness and secular spirituality in Christmas advertisements are used to value the viewer and their inner convictions. This activity also has a deeper meaning: humanistic values, by showing them in a strictly festive context, acquire sacral values (Cartier's advertisement for the Russian market is an example). On the other hand, religious values are reduced as a result of evoking humanistic values (the Pandora campaign and the Polish IKEA advertisement). The process of "sacralization of what is human and humanization of what is sacred" (Ferry, 2002, pp. 30–31) transforms the fundamental connotations: human – profane, religion – sacrum. In the advertising narrative, there is a sacralization of what is human and a humanization of what is sacred. By changing the meanings of the human and the divine, the creators of advertisements create a new space of interpretation for

the recipient's faith. They allow them to believe in secular holiness and introduce a humanist ritual for experiencing Christmas.

Another question we tried to answer is: how is religious and spiritual content used in advertising? The senders of advertisements do not divide the audience into religious and non-religious, but skillfully appeal to common knowledge, experiences and beliefs. The spiritual needs of consumers meet material needs in advertising (the need to buy a product at a particular time). Thanks to this, the product itself becomes sacralized (it is a source providing experiences). Advertising, while remaining an indirect act, inspires the recipient to add value to the product based on his or her knowledge and experience, and to purchase it. Importantly, in all the cited advertisements it is the situation that is valued, not the product. This process is different in each country, which results from the national characteristics of the audience and different attitudes towards religiosity and spirituality.

We pointed out that in most of the commercials broadcast before Christmas, the image of family as a community and the situation of gift-giving are emphasized. This involves not only evoking religious and spiritual content, but also assigning the recipient the role of giver and referring to their experiences and memories of Christmas. The creators of advertisements use here the 'old-new' contract, well-known from communication theory (Kurcz, 2000, pp. 136–137). The use of what is known (common knowledge, beliefs, experiences) is combined with what is new (the presentation of the product). This way of presentation promotes the emotionality of the reception, builds understanding and serves to remember the product. Strengthening this process is possible due to the shortness of advertisements (most are 30s spots) and typical features of media messages, which take into account the superficiality of thinking juxtaposed with the fast pace of reception of messages received by the recipient every day (Gálik, & Gáliková-Tolnaiová, 2015, pp. 12–13). This effect is also achieved by deliberately omitting information about the product, which is replaced by valuing the situation itself. The key here is to evoke impressions related to the valuing of the holiday. This is achieved through lexical, phonetic, pictorial, musical and transactional means (i.e. the *Merci* ad). These procedures serve to reinforce the suggestiveness and emotionality of the message, which is in line with the need to experience the sacred.

In all the advertisements studied we noticed traces of religious valuation. Our attention was drawn to the reference of the heterogeneity of space, present in many religions, which is contrasted with the homogeneity of the world proper to secular man (Eliade, 2008, pp. 18–23). This pictorial representation of space is evident in the scene of the opening of the door to the temple in Merci advertisements and the transition into the space of the home (in IKEA, Cartier and Pandora advertisements). This heterogeneity is noted in relation to time and the division between weekdays and holidays, which is exhibited in ads aired before Christmas.

Our study of advertisements aired during the Christmas period does not support previous findings regarding the marginal importance of religious and spiritual content in advertising (Maguire, & Weatherby, 1998, pp. 171–178). The time of Christmas is an ideal moment for advertising creators to promote goods using religious and spiritual content. This trend is bound to gain momentum, providing advertisers with new ways to move audiences, and scientists with an opening for further exploration of the complex relationship between religiosity and spirituality.

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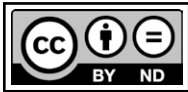
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