

# Advertising, Values and Social Change



# Advertising, Values and Social Change:

*A Sociological Analysis*

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*To my mother Gillia and my sister Elena*



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## INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis of 2008 was a global crisis, and was so prolonged and intense that, in the long term, it caused deep economic as well as social and cultural changes in our lives. In Italy, the crisis has led to a fall in employment, the fragmentation of labour relations, industrial decline, the contraction of household budgets, as well as an income distribution that is clearly unfavourable to the working classes and to a large proportion of the middle classes. The progressive impoverishment of families, from 2001 to today, has translated into a significant reduction in consumption, a reduction whose implications reach far beyond the mere containment of expenses to overcome temporary financial difficulties.

The duration of the crisis has made the downsizing in consumption almost a structural phenomenon, in other words it has had a maieutic effect to the extent that it has raised the consumer's awareness of the actual value that consumption has in his or her life, with the realization that consuming does not make us happy. The euphoric and consumption addicted '80s seem very distant today. What prevails is a widespread awareness of the false promise of capitalism: it is not true that higher private consumption leads to greater democratisation of public wellbeing, and much less to personal happiness. Rather, as Lipovetsky argues, we seem to be faced with a paradoxical happiness, since material goods are in no way able to guarantee it. This is illustrated by the social inequalities experienced in an increasing number of countries, including the U.S. itself (which is no longer the home of the American Dream now that its social elevator has been stuck for quite some time).

A dramatically relevant phenomenon in our time is the Easterlin paradox, which states that the increase in economic wealth goes hand in hand with an increase in the level of individual life satisfaction or wellbeing only up to a certain point. After that the latter starts to decline, creating an inverted U-curve, so that wealth and, with it, the possibility of consumption, can no longer generate happiness after a certain point. Happiness then needs to be found in different dimensions (for instance, in relationships with friends, romantic relationships, or our relationship with nature) that cannot be exclusively identified with our work or our consumption. The deep disappointment or disenchantment with the big promises of capitalism and with the utopian conception of our planet as an

inexhaustible supplier of resources are now giving way to an awareness of the need for a radical change in our lifestyle. Thus, new value systems are emerging that attribute importance to the local area, to respect for the environment and nature, and to ethics and transparency as key drivers of the actions of manufacturers – all values that are translated into new and different consumption choices.

Therefore, the crisis in consumption has been not only quantitative but has also affected the beliefs, desires, needs, and values of all individuals. Besides, consuming does not mean merely, or simply, taking possession of a good in order to satisfy a need (in actual fact, mere need has long been replaced by desire) and using it until it is completely worn or depleted, but it means much more than that. Consumption is a social action imbued with meaning: it is a tool through which the individual defines his or her own identity. Goods are becoming increasingly de-materialised as their plain functional value is enriched with a strong symbolic component, which is a means not only to define our identity, as mentioned earlier, but also to build our relationship with others and the world. To the point that the symbolic dimension of goods – their meaning – effectively constitutes a language of its own: the language of consumption. This language, however, is not static and unchangeable, and therefore incapable of telling the individual's story, but acquires a historical dimension, that is to say, it changes with the individual and with society.

In fact, in recent years, green, ethical and critical consumption is gaining momentum (see, for instance, Ethical Purchasing Groups, urban vegetable gardens, farmer's markets, fair trade, etc.). A sharing economy, that is, a cooperative economy based on the concept of sharing (take Uber, Airbnb, swap parties, bike sharing, etc.), in a multiplicity of forms, is gradually developing. At the same time, we are seeing an explosion of social networks driven by the logic of giving, and all these new consumption patterns together are shaping the profile of a new consumer, an actor who feels like someone not only with rights but also with duties towards others and towards the environment.

We should also remember that, thanks to the Web, this new consumer has access to a vast amount of information that was absolutely unthinkable in the past. This leads to the consumer's empowerment or, put differently, it reduces the information asymmetry between enterprise and consumer to the advantage of the latter, who can count not only on a greater amount of knowledge, but also on the possibility of taking concrete action online by participating in conversations that have concrete consequences on the actions of businesses themselves. According to the logic of *Societing*,

these businesses are “social actors cast in a social context”.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, its actions cannot be driven exclusively by profit maximisation. Companies cannot entirely disregard their customers and their feelings, since brands - which are the symbolic interfaces between the company-product and the consumer - are built through a dynamic process of production and reception that involves both parties. This implies the brand’s capacity to tap into and then communicate the current *Zeitgeist* to ensure it remains in tune with the contemporary culture and thereby guarantee its communicative power and empathy.

In our society, the phenomenon of *slow living* is acquiring increasing momentum, citizen associations and volunteering are showing great vitality, waste is becoming a negative social value, and the “I want everything” attitude is being replaced by the “I have everything” mindset. Helped by the Web, new communities are emerging, based on passions and interests, emotions and the like. We are thus witnessing a co-evolution of consumption attitudes and behaviour that are consistent with the emergence of new value systems. A good example in this respect is hedonism. While still one of the characteristic features of consumption, hedonism now takes on new forms, and stripped of its more materialist components, it now focuses more on the quality than on the quantity of pleasures. It takes on social values and finds fulfilment in experiences that take others into account and attribute importance to relationships, to the environment, and to nature.

This reflection is based on the question of whether, in view of these important changes that our society, culture, and economy are undergoing, advertising – as one of the key tools of corporate communication putting the consumer into contact with the product featured in its messages – can truly absorb, and therefore effectively convey, the new value system that is currently becoming established. Is advertising in tune with the spirit of the times or do its narratives belong to a past which, with its values, is now far removed from the present and from the sentiment that characterises it?

On the subject of values and advertising, we can refer to the well-known positions on this presented by two scholars, Richard Pollay and Morris Holbrook, one being “apocalyptic” and the other “integrated”. According to Pollay,<sup>2</sup> advertising is not responsible for the creation of new

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Cova, “Societing ovvero la piccola storia di un grande concetto tra marketing e sociologia”, in, *Societing reloaded. Pubblici produttivi e innovazione sociale*, eds. Adam Arvidsson and Alex Giordano (Milan: Egea, 2013), 1. (Our translation)

<sup>2</sup> Richard W. Pollay, “The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising”, *Journal of Marketing* 18 (April 1986): 18-36.

values, but for the promotion and enhancement of those values that could be considered negative from a social perspective, such as materialism, cynicism, anxiety, social competitiveness and lack of self-respect. Holbrook,<sup>3</sup> in response to Pollay, takes a different view and claims that positive values can also be found in advertising, such as social relations, affection, generosity, health, patriotism, ecumenism, and so on.

This study accepts and sets out to test the validity of the latter of the two reflections mentioned above in light of the referentiality that needs to characterise the advertising text, which, in order to be heard by its interlocutors and in order for the communication to succeed, needs to represent ways of living and lifestyles which the latter can identify with. Based on a detailed analysis of the literature on the topic, we will argue that advertising does not have the power to impose any values on individuals, unless these values are already present and shared in the society that advertising draws from to build its narratives. We are naturally aware of the partial vision of the advertising message, which, obviously, builds stories that can highlight the product it intends to promote and, to that end, selects those “portions” of reality that are most useful for pursuing that goal.

In order to ascertain the presence or absence of the new set of values within advertising messages, we have carried out a qualitative and quantitative study. The research project started in 2012 and then continued in 2014, and uses data made available by Sponsorshop<sup>4</sup> for the period from 5 April to 4 July 2012, and then from 1 January to 3 March 2014.<sup>5</sup>

The quantitative part of this study involved identifying the spot ads broadcast by Italian television networks over a 24-hour timeframe on the following television channels: Rai 1, Rai 2, Italia 1, Canale 5, Rete 4, Sky Fox, Sky Cinema, SKY Sport, La 7, and MTV.<sup>6</sup>

As we well know, advertising is spread across a broad set of media that have grown enormously since the advent of the Internet, that is, after what has been correctly identified as the digital revolution, which has produced a new way of communicating. It has often been pointed out, in the rather

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<sup>3</sup> Morris Holbrook, “Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall. What’s Unfair in the Reflections on Advertising?”, *Journal of Marketing* 51 (July 1987): 95-103.

<sup>4</sup> Advertising monitoring agency located in Milan.

<sup>5</sup> It should, however, be noted that during the time frame between the two periods for which Sponsorshop provided the data, we continued to analyse TV as well as newspaper advertisements that we considered particularly significant and relevant for our study.

<sup>6</sup> This data was kindly provided by Stefania Andrello, Managing Director of Sponsorshop, an advertising monitoring agency located in Milan.

copious literature on the topic, that the advent of a new medium does not, however, imply the disappearance of those that preceded it. Rather, it triggers a process in which, as McLuhan claimed, “the content of any medium is always another medium”.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the expression “new media” can be understood as marking the temporal border with respect to the printed press, radio and television, since, in reality, the advent of digitalisation processes and the convergence between computers and Web technologies has led to the change or integration of traditional media within the new media.

We therefore considered it important to analyse the new media landscape and highlight how technologies are confronting us with a rapid and constant change which also involves the very structure of society. New digital media and mobile technologies in fact do much more than offer us the possibility to access a greater quantity of information and promote the empowerment of the individual-consumer. They also help us to develop and maintain relationships thanks to, for instance, social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, which we can access anywhere and at any time to post content related to the experiences, feelings or emotions we have in our daily lives, thus doing entirely away with the distinction between online and offline. Communication technologies and their related practices allow us to achieve a different social balance in which we are no longer passive recipients of communication: we are no longer the objects, but rather the subjects of communication. This role is also fostered by the very nature of almost all online services which are characterised by being interactive, i.e. by allowing/stimulating/requesting the participation of individuals. We are living in a “state of continuous connection”,<sup>8</sup> in an increasingly mediated reality in which the presence of screens in our daily lives is on a massive and growing scale, to the point that we could actually say that they invade every moment of our existence.

And an “old medium” like television, has been able to reinvent itself as part of this convergence. Not only is television not dead, but it has fully adapted to the new digital environment, so much so that it provides material for conversation on social media. Television content has always supplied material for conversation, but this social dimension now draws new strength from the fact that these conversations are spread across social

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<sup>7</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge 1964), 8.

<sup>8</sup> See Giovanni Boccia Artieri, *Stati di connessione. Pubblici, cittadini e consumatori nella (Social) Network Society* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2012). (Our translation)

media triggering immediate and widespread participation. Social TV seems to set itself up as a particular form of television experience, a “phenomenon born from the ‘spontaneous’ encounter between technological innovations and the audience’s social habits”.<sup>9</sup> Television seems to adapt perfectly to the new habits developed by contemporary individuals and is increasing viewers’ engagement thanks to second-screen applications (especially Twitter), which, in many ways, improve the television experience for viewers and advertisers alike. More and more viewers of television shows are in fact connected to the Internet while watching their favourite shows.

It therefore seems clear that the choice of studying television commercials needs to be connected to the space that Italians still reserve for television in their media-diet. The contents of television not only continue to be the object of everyday chats and conversations, but are now also attracting growing audiences on social media networks, thereby turning television into ‘social TV’ (drawing on the concept of “spreadability” developed by Jenkins, Ford and Green,<sup>10</sup> it should be noted that we are referring to active audiences who select and spread content, and not to passive audiences as in the concept of virality).

The material analysed in this study also includes advertising messages published by the printed press (another “old medium”, albeit, as mentioned, only from a temporal point of view), since they are particularly interesting for the purposes of our research. The author firmly believes that effective and relevant creativity generates positive results regardless of the medium through which it is conveyed. The qualitative part of this study uses content analysis to examine a series of spot ads, together with the analysis of the value representation they convey, based on the value model proposed by Schwartz and his colleagues,<sup>11</sup> which constitutes the most recent and interesting contribution to the theoretical as well as empirical

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<sup>9</sup> Fausto Colombo, “Introduzione: la social tv nell’era digitale”, *Social Tv. Produzione, esperienza e valore nell’era digitale*, ed Fausto Colombo (Milan: Egea, 2015): 7. (Our translation)

<sup>10</sup> See Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Shalom H. Schwartz and Wolfgang Bilsky, “Toward a Psychological Structure of Human Values”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53 (1987): 550-562.; Shalom H. Schwartz and Wolfgang Bilsky, “Toward a Theory of the Universal Content and Structure of Values: Extensions and Cross-cultural Replications”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (1990): 878-891.

study of human values. Their study is in fact the result of an extensive and rigorous research programme, carried out in more than 60 nations worldwide and on more than 200 samples, which gives it a high degree of validity and general applicability.

According to the results of our research, it is possible to identify a series of “languages” employed increasingly frequently in advertising messages which show that advertising seems to actively listen to and absorb the social, economic, and cultural changes that have taken place. These languages are underpinned by the same values that are acquiring growing importance in society today and which, in Schwartz’s circumplex system, are identified as Universalism and Benevolence – which can be ascribed to the area of Self-Transcendence – and whose representation is predominant in the sample we have analysed here.

According to Schwartz, Universalism can be identified in the values that inspire attitudes of understanding and protection both of the wellbeing of humanity and of nature. These values include justice, equality, global peace, altruism, and respect for the environment, for example. Benevolence, on the other hand, sums up the set of values that encourage individuals to take care of the people with whom they have frequent interpersonal relationships. According to Schwartz, these values are: faithfulness and loyalty, honesty, being helpful, being responsible, knowing how to forgive, the ability to establish strong and sincere bonds of friendship and stable and mature sentimental relationships. This does not imply that we should not acknowledge the presence, especially in narratives referring to certain product categories, of values such as Achievement and Power, which belong to the area of Self-Enhancement. However, we should point out that in the sample we have considered here, these types of narratives are fewer in number compared to the ones inspired by the values falling into the area of Self-Transcendence.

This study ends with a section dealing with the thorny issue of gender representation in advertising messages. It is a delicate issue because, even within society itself, in our everyday life, different genders are subjected to a series of more or less tacit, more or less widely shared, rules that govern their different roles. Advertising cannot therefore be asked to take on a pedagogical task which is not its responsibility and which should instead be performed, first of all, by the big agencies of socialisation, namely the family, schools and institutions. It is however right and proper to expect that – as the Art Directors Club (which represents the “ethical” heart of advertising) has in fact pointed out – advertising should stop its abuse of stereotypes (using a silly alibi, which is also in bad taste, which claims that advertising basically reflects whatever is happening in society)

that demean women and relegate them either to being exclusively identified with their body as an object of pleasure from a male dominated perspective, or to the role of a brainless housewife who gets excited about a new detergent or kitchen appliance. The same could be said for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) world, which deserves to be represented in all its richness and “normality”, and not only portrayed in its most transgressive and deviating aspects in the name of a prevailing heteronormativity. Advertising, in fact, cannot – and should not – forget that it also has responsibilities towards the social fabric it addresses whenever it spreads narratives that strengthen discreditable attitudes and behaviours.

Advertising can avoid being stupid, banal and vulgar. Advertising can stage beautiful and useful stories, creating narratives that speak about emotions and are realistic, not in the sense that they adhere faithfully to reality, but in the sense that they are capable of portraying the guiding sentiments and values of this century.



# I.

## ADVERTISING, CONSUMPTION AND VALUES

### ***I. 1 Brief history of advertising in Italy***

We will not attempt to trace the entire history of Italian advertising here; others have done so effectively and we refer the reader to their works for a more detailed account.<sup>1</sup> However, it is useful for our purposes to recall some of the main features of advertising in Italy relating to the time of its birth and evolution, which it is essential to be aware of in order to fully understand its specific nature.

“Advertising does not have a clear date of birth. It is actually an extremely complex and multifaceted form of communication, which has changed its skin several times throughout its history”.<sup>2</sup> We could say that modern advertising in Italy was born with the second industrial revolution in the 19th century. The first advertising posters in Italy were true works of art and their production involved great artists like Dudovich, Cappiello, Metlicovitz, Mataloni, Nizzoli, Depero, Mauzan, Terzi, Villa, Mazza, De Carolis, Hoenstein, and many others. While these first ads, known as *réclames*, were exclusively advertisements for stores, restaurants and pubs or companies, in the second half of the 19th century, the change that had taken place in the methods of product manufacturing, distribution, and marketing, “that went hand in hand with the new phase of industrialisation – made of large enterprises, and of widely available and just as widely advertised products – caused advertising to move from the store to the product, which could now be found everywhere and needed to differentiate itself from other similar products and have more visibility. These advertisements, now no longer featuring the places but rather the

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<sup>1</sup> Among others: Gian Luigi Falabrino, *Pubblicità serva e padrona. I protagonisti, la storia e i retroscena del mondo della comunicazione* (Milan: Il Sole24 Ore, 1999); Vanni Codeluppi, *Storia della pubblicità italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2013); G.P. CESERANI, *Storia della pubblicità in Italia*, /Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1988); Daniele Pitteri, *La pubblicità in Italia. Dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Codeluppi, *Storia della pubblicità italiana*, 9. (Our translation)

products that customers could find in their nearby store, thus started to become much larger in size”.<sup>3</sup> The urban landscape became literally invaded by posters.

The relationship between art and advertising was one of mutual influences “which continued to expand also into the years that followed, when futurism discovered the revolutionary reach of advertising and fell in love with it, a precursor of many more future flirtations that advertising had with artistic movements, from impressionism to expressionism, to art nouveau and deco, to surrealism, right through to its great, and reciprocated, love for pop art”.<sup>4</sup>

In particular, futurism discovered advertising as an “art form”, so much so that Depero wrote: “The art of the future will be a powerfully advertising art form. [...] Art, too, should [in fact] proceed side by side with industry, science, politics, and the fashion of the time, and glorify them [...] the art of advertising is a highly colourful art that is forced to be concise – a fascinating art that boldly places itself on walls, on the facades of buildings, in shop windows, on trains, on the pavements of the streets, everywhere [...]”<sup>5</sup>

Depero goes on to say: “although I paint freely inspired paintings every day, with my imagination I nonetheless exalt our industrial products with equal harmony of style, with the same love, with no less enthusiasm and care”.<sup>6</sup> This statement sums up the contradictory condition of advertising as a form of artistic communication which, due to its hybrid nature (*bastard art*<sup>7</sup>) that feeds on the most diverse materials and communicates them by drawing on the language of all media, has been the object of prejudice that has downgraded its creative/artistic dimension while seeing it exclusively as a professional reality.

The politics of economic and cultural autarchy imposed by fascism led to the so-called “two black decades of advertising”.<sup>8</sup> Although Mussolini

<sup>3</sup> Elio Grazioli, *Arte e pubblicità* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2001), 8. (Our translation)

<sup>4</sup> Giampaolo Fabris, *La pubblicità. Teorie e prassi* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1997) 29. (Our translation)

<sup>5</sup> Fortunato Depero, *Numero unico futurista Campari 1931, omaggio della ditta Davide Campari&C. Milano* (Rovereto: Tipografia Mercurio); the text of the poster appears in a previous short version in “La città futurista”, a. I, no 2, Turin, May 1929; then with the title “Manifesto dell’arte pubblicitaria futurista”, in *Futurismo*, a I. no 2 (Rome, June 1932) 15-30. (Our translation)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21. (Our translation)

<sup>7</sup> Giuseppina Elisa Bussi Parmiggiani, *L’arte bastarda. Analisi del linguaggio della pubblicità inglese* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1988), 20. (Our translation)

<sup>8</sup> Codeluppi, *Storia della pubblicità italiana*, 71. (Our translation)

skilfully used the techniques of rhetoric and persuasion to impose the myth of imperial Rome, the language of advertising was only tolerated in order to exalt Italian made products. Advertising messages were also subjected to an “ideological type of censorship” and, for instance, rejected the image of the independent woman which had come to be a strong feature in the posters of the early 20th century when women’s progressive emancipation had developed across society.<sup>9</sup>

The situation in Italy, ravaged by two world wars, was well behind with respect to the development taking place elsewhere in the world and, particularly in the United States. As it emerged from the devastations of the First and then the Second World War, Italy was a poor country, still essentially made up of peasant farmers strongly tied to the land. “If we look back, it becomes clear that we would need to write two parallel and contrasting histories: on the one hand, the history of growing consumption from 1955 on, or rather, of how Italians rushed to embrace the new lifestyles; and, on the other, the history of the intellectual condemnation of and political protest against those new lifestyles, and those new consumption patterns”.<sup>10</sup>

As is well known, advertising has never really had a good reputation anywhere. This is particularly true in Italy, where the two major and dominant subcultures – Catholicism and Marxism – have always negatively influenced people’s view of advertising. In the Catholic culture, advertising, as one of the main drivers of consumption, is seen as guilty of drawing individuals away from moral and spiritual values, and, consequently, from the aspiration to an afterlife, since it promotes the pursuit of material goods and the pleasure deriving from them. From a Marxist perspective, on the other hand, participating in a consumer society automatically involves the legitimization of capitalism, which has produced that kind of society, as well as to the homogenisation and potential disappearance of social classes as they all pursue a single goal: consumption.

Almost as if to counter, or at any rate limit, the role played by left-wing parties,<sup>11</sup> which at the time were directly linked to the Soviet Union, those same years saw the arrival in Europe and in Italy of numerous American agencies promoting American culture and the American way of life. So side-by-side with Italian agencies, which were more like craftsmen’s workshops that revolved around the owner’s personal charisma, American agencies, inspired by a specific marketing culture

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Falabrino, *Pubblicità serva e padrona*, 12. (Our translation)

<sup>11</sup> See Pitteri, *La pubblicità in Italia. Dal dopoguerra a oggi*.

strongly based on market research, gradually became firmly established in Italy.

At that time, advertising fulfilled the important function of generating socialisation around consumption, of improving people's material living conditions, and of female emancipation from domestic chores. This was no simple task, since it was experienced – particularly by women, who until then had been the “queens of the home” and “angels of the household” – as a kind of dismissal of the female role. And this is where the reassuring function of advertising came in, as it offered the new products as “subordinate” helpers. The changes in consumption in fact became a vehicle and a sign of transformation for Italian women (despite the many drawbacks). Alberoni points out that “female consumption, more than any other behaviour or political declaration, was the ultimate expression of women's achievement of equal value to men”.<sup>12</sup> And this did not refer exclusively to the alleviation of domestic chores. “For a girl from the decade 1950-1960, wearing the night gown seen in a movie instead of her traditional attire meant refusing the austerity of marital duties, it meant asserting her right to a different sexual life, to the enjoyment of pleasure and to a family with other freedoms”.<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, therefore, advertising had a positive function, as an agent of modernisation including in terms of values, but this is often overlooked, since the fact that it tempts people to buy often superfluous goods makes it the object of suspicion. This is why advertising in Italy was made to “wear the meek clothing” of *Carosello*,<sup>14</sup> starting from 3 February, 1957, in order to make the phenomenon more acceptable to the Italian public. *Carosello* is a short show, offering one minute and forty seconds of entertainment, which was meant to have no explicit link to the product, followed by a thirty-five second advertising message: the so-called ‘codino’ (a sort of tagline). This hybrid form of entertainment was invented to overcome the widespread diffidence towards consumerism mentioned earlier, by offering a national-popular show with a simple narrative structure featuring the most famous singers, actors, and comedy stars of the time. It was a show that spoke the language of fairytales, presenting the world of consumption to the Italian public as an authentic paradise.

Unconsciously, *Carosello* turned into a piece of entertainment and gripped the average Italian with its magical stories, educating him about new lifestyles and leading him towards a new and more tolerant

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<sup>12</sup> Francesco Alberoni, *Consumi e società* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964). (Our translation)

<sup>13</sup> Falabrino, *Pubblicità serva e padrona*, 27. (Our translation)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 198. (Our translation)

relationship with the world of commodities. Paradoxically, the rather “forced” structure of *Carosello*, in which no reference could be made to the advertised product during the show, with the consequent and necessary difficulty experienced by advertisers in finding some link between the product promoted in the tagline and the story preceding it, turned out to be a winning strategy. First of all, because it allowed the consumer to approach the product in a pleasant and entertaining way, and secondly because the programme seemed to grasp, albeit unconsciously, how important it was for advertising to move beyond the purely referential dimension and become an actual “show”, a moment of relaxation and fun for the viewer. The entertainment in *Carosello* was conveyed by Italian celebrities such as, to mention a few, Totò, Rascel, Aldo Fabrizi, Gino Bramieri, Macario, Vianello, Mondaini, Tognazzi, and so on. “[With them] advertising harnessed [...] the theatrical heritage [of TV] and easily transferred the variety show acts, the sketches and solo performances, the character actors, the jokes [...] into the episodes of *Carosello*. All these things were considered as being too close to comedy by the television variety show, which in Italy was clearly inspired by the American model”.<sup>15</sup>

The ’60s witnessed the final affirmation of advertising in Italy. Large sections of the Italian population attained a state of relative prosperity, and the “lifestyle that emerged focused on the consumption and enjoyment of goods that became the distinctive signs of belonging to a community and of recognition and esteem for its other members”.<sup>16</sup>

The favourable attitude towards advertising in the ’60s came to a sudden halt with the student revolt of ’68, the birth of feminism, the economic crisis, the energy crisis, mass unionisation, and so on. All these factors had significant negative consequences on advertising. Advertising stood accused of manipulating consciences (think, for instance, of David Riesman’s book *The Lonely Crowd*,<sup>17</sup> and about Vance Packard’s publication *The Hidden Persuaders*<sup>18</sup>) by underhandedly creeping inside the individual’s subconscious. It was also criticised for generating false needs by driving people to adopt consumption patterns that were a source of alienation (under the influence of the Frankfurt School, an important point of reference for the young protesters of ’68), it was accused of cultural colonisation, and so on. It was therefore a cultural crisis as well as

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<sup>15</sup> Katia Ferri, *Spot Babilonia* (Milan: Lupetti&Co, 1988), 7. (Our translation)

<sup>16</sup> Fabris, *La pubblicità, teorie e prassi*, 526. (Our translation)

<sup>17</sup> David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: a Study of the Changing American Character* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956).

<sup>18</sup> Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1957).

an economic crisis. This led to the proliferation of advertising messages that tried to react to this criticism by producing long rational messages in which the written text prevailed over the visuals. Alongside this less “brilliant” production, however, there was also a stream of advertisements that attempted to translate the rebellious and politicised ideologies of the time in their messages and embraced the sexual revolution of the young generation. Take, for instance, the two ads for Jesus Jeans created by advertiser Emanuele Pirella and photographer Oliviero Toscani, with their transgressive claims bordering on the blasphemous, such as “Thou shalt have no other pair of jeans before me”, and “If you love me, follow me”. In the first case, we see a topless girl in the foreground emerging from a pair of buttoned-up jeans, and in the second case the behind of a girl dressed in a pair of mini shorts that leave very little to the imagination.

The early Eighties, by contrast, saw a significant decline in criticism of advertising. The consumer had matured by then, so that, as Fabris would say, he had completed his apprenticeship in the world of consumption and developed a more pragmatic/realistic attitude towards advertising communication whose mechanisms he now knew quite well. In that advertising, the consumer increasingly expected to see the formula of entertainment. Advertising thus needed to be entertaining and to know how to be liked. The logic, as Fabris claims, is that of “do ut des”, whereby the viewer/reader lends advertising his attention provided that advertising awakens his interest and offers him a pleasant and relaxing break from everyday life.

This increase in goodwill towards advertising reached its peak just when, with the advent of the first private television channel created by Berlusconi, a new benchmark for Italian television was set, one supported entirely by advertising funds. The 1980s thus mark a shift from “paleo-television” to “neo-television”,<sup>19</sup> in other words, from a model of public television (with didactic aims) that aimed to “show reality just as it was” to a “commercial and consumerist model [responding to the viewer’s need for escapism] that could make people dream of a world of wellbeing [without] any reference to concrete reality”.<sup>20</sup>

The liberalisation of the airwaves and proliferation of private television channels, together with the economic boom of the ’80s, led to a rich advertising output, mainly in quantitative terms and not, however, matched by the same degree of qualitative energy. To sum up, we could state that

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<sup>19</sup> Umberto Eco, *Sette anni di desiderio* (Milan: Bompiani, 1983); Francesco Casetti, ed., *Tra me e te. Strategie di coinvolgimento dello spettatore nei programmi della neotelevisione* (Turin: Rai-Eri, 1988). (Our translation)

<sup>20</sup> Codeluppi, *Storia della pubblicità italiana*, 124. (Our translation)

while advertising in the '50s and '60s was more referential and informative, and therefore focused on the benefits of the product, the advertisements of the late '70s, by contrast, enhanced the emotional and spectacular dimension of goods, while those of the '80s focused on personal gratification and on individual achievement, linked to an increasing emphasis on narcissism, expressed in the scenarios that act as a backdrops to the featured products.

The '90s, a period of multiple financial crises, put everyone's feet back on the ground. The economic crisis also hit Italy and forced Italians, who saw their incomes fall, to consider what they were buying more carefully and to be more selective. While in the '80s "objects gained significance by being displayed, in the '90s their importance was once again associated with owning them, with an increased level of awareness in people's choices and the fulfilment of their dreams".<sup>21</sup> Italian advertising in the '90s proved its backwardness compared to other countries "above all in the massive use of what could be considered as genuine communication 'shortcuts': endorsers from the world of show business, particularly attractive soundtracks, and both male and female nudity. That is, all those tools that have always been used in advertising to conceal a shortage of ideas".<sup>22</sup> There were, however, also some exceptions, such as Diesel and Benetton. The former used irony in a clever and effective way to create an original kind of communication,<sup>23</sup> while the latter embraced social issues in an often provocative manner.

Those years gave rise to "advertainment", a communication strategy derived from British creativity. Advertainment consisted in "selling a product or service 'by telling stories in episodes'".<sup>24</sup> Thus, after 1998 a new strategic line started to be adopted in Italian advertising agencies, which started to produce spot ads structured in episodes. These included, for instance, the ads by Omnitel with Megan Gale, and the ones for Lavazza coffee, set in Paradise, first with Tullio Solenghi, then with the Bonolis-Laurenti duo, and finally with Brignano.

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<sup>21</sup> Donatella Cannizzo, *Le vie infinite della comunicazione pubblicitaria*, in *Fabbriche del desiderio: manuale delle tecniche e delle suggestioni della pubblicità*, ed. Daniele Pitteri (Rome: Luca Sossella editore, 2000), 105. (Our translation)

<sup>22</sup> Codeluppi, *Storia della pubblicità italiana*, 149. (Our translation)

<sup>23</sup> See Maria Angela Polesana, *La pubblicità intelligente: l'uso dell'ironia in pubblicità* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Patrizia Musso, "Advertainment. La comunicazione pubblicitaria alle soglie del Duemila", *Comunicazioni Sociali*, no 2, XXI, Vita e Pensiero (April-June 1999), 246. (Our translation)

The year 2000 saw the publication of Naomi Klein's book *No Logo*, an all-out condemnation of brands, which she blamed for outsourcing their production, employing child labour and adopting manipulative strategies. The big scandals that shook the business world (Enron, Worldcom, Vivendi, Baring, Parmalat and Executive Life) considerably diminished the trust of a substantial part of public opinion. Scandals concerning food safety (mad cow disease, pesticides, GMOs and carcinogenic products), as well as the raising awareness about a series of health related issues (such as child obesity and active and passive smoking), started to undermine the credibility of brands and led to their loss of legitimacy. Brands could no longer count on the almost uncritical and positive attitude people once had towards them, which equated the brand with quality, service, safety, innovation, and trust. They now had to deal with increasingly critical, demanding, selective, and unfaithful consumers. And above all, they had to address an individual for whom the company's ethical dimension was playing an increasingly important. Advertising, which is one of the brand's voices, suffered under this climate of disappointment and disillusion, exacerbated by a growing sense of insecurity and precariousness that became more and more tangible and widespread after the attack on the twin towers in New York in 2001.

To this we should add the process of audience fragmentation which affects the entire world of media. Mobile advertising (2009, in particular, was a key year for mobile marketing) is rapidly increasing its sales volume and it estimated to have grown by 49% between 2013 and 2016,<sup>25</sup> due to both the increase in the use of smartphones and tablets and the consequent explosion of searches and media consumption on mobile devices, and thanks to the use of apps. Internet, mobile phones, laptops, MP3 readers, satellite and digital televisions have thus made it more difficult for advertising to reach large numbers of people at the same time.<sup>26</sup> People are not only increasingly "interactive", but also have different "media diets". So-called digital natives, in particular, are multi-taskers in the sense that they use several media simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

All this in fact fits in with the idea of convergence which, as Jenkins points out, not only indicates the communication of content on all possible channels, but also points to an increase in consumers' desire to play an active role in the production and communication of content. And this is why advertising, in view of this changed and increasingly rich media scene

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<sup>25</sup> Engage –Contemporary Marketing & Media", 16 June, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Codeluppi, *Storia della pubblicità italiana*, 158.

<sup>27</sup> John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital. Connecting with a Global Generation of Digital Native* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 2008).



and the ever more active consumer, has felt the need to become integrated. Integrated marketing communication reflects a kind of marketing communication planning that acknowledges the added value of a coherent and global plan. This plan must assess the strategic role of a set of communication disciplines, from general advertising to direct response, promotions, sales and public relations, and puts all of them together for more clarity and consistency as well as to maximise the impact through the continuous integration of messages.<sup>28</sup> Integration here is effected through a series of mutually supportive actions in order to achieve the so-called “multiplier effect”.

Furthermore, today’s integrated advertising is characterised by a higher degree of participation by the recipient who, in fact, often becomes a producer of content. In this respect, among the various forms of digital interaction, it is worth mentioning blogs, chat rooms, forums, photosharing websites (Flickr, Instagram), video uploading sites (YouTube), online communities, social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace), and finally Twitter, which combines the features of a social media network and a microblog.

It thus becomes necessary to integrate online and offline communication. “The central role of the TV spot ad [which requires visual synthesis and is a dense and powerful centre of gravity] does not require the other supporting technologies to passively replicate its creative mechanism”.<sup>29</sup> It is a question of “making the best of the opportunities offered by each specialisation”.<sup>30</sup>

## ***1.2 Values: some attempts at a definition***

In everyday language, values are identified with the ideals to which people attribute importance and which inspire their choices. In the social sciences, on the other hand, the concept of value is more complex and problematic: it lies at the crossroads, so to speak, between various disciplines (from philosophy to psychology, sociology, political sciences, anthropology and economics). However, despite the variety of disciplines and the different theoretical and methodological approaches used in the study of values, there seems to be absolute agreement among scholars on one point: the

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<sup>28</sup> See Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, *A Framework for Marketing Management* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Marco Lombardi, *La creatività in pubblicità, Manuale di linguaggio multimediale: dai mezzi classici al digitale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010) 265. (Our translation)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 267. (Our translation)

study of values is a prerequisite to understanding human behaviour, the individual and his/her relationship with society as well as his/her social interactions.

Concerning values, Gabriele Pollini reminds us of the etymology of the term “symbolic”, which comes “from the Greek σύμβολον, from *συμβάλλειν*, meaning to place, put together, join, as opposed to *δια-βάλλω*, devil, which means to separate and divide”, and he goes on to point out that values “allow individuals to recognise each other and make social interaction and relationships between them possible”.<sup>31</sup> The sociologist then stresses the more immediate and direct relevance that values (understood as evaluative symbols allowing us to select among the alternatives of orientation, attitude, and, consequently, action imbued with meaning and behaviour, which a given situation presents to the social actor) take on with regard to social interaction and social action. Values act as “interfaces” or “mediators” between the symbolic-cultural system they are a part of, as symbols, and the system of social interaction they are a constituent of, since they are institutionalised elements shared by all social actors as they play a given role.

It is undoubtedly of fundamental importance for the social sciences to study the values that characterise a given society and culture, to understand how they are generated, how they influence behaviour, how they spread and change, to analyse the mechanisms that induce individuals to adopt some of them rather than others, and the reason why individuals are prone to let themselves be guided by them.

The concept of value holds within it an individual as well as a social and cultural component. Durkheim underlines that every moral has an objective and a subjective character.<sup>32</sup> The former refers to the moral principles of a people during a specific historical period, that is to say, the moral principles shared by all individuals who are part of a community. This morality, however, is accompanied by a so-called subjective morality, that is, an undefined number of other morals and therefore ways in which individuals experience the norms of morality. The concept of value belongs both to the sphere of the individual and personality (since each individual interiorises and assimilates values in an absolutely subjective way) and to the social and cultural sphere (since our hierarchy of values is also a result of our education and of the process of socialisation).

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<sup>31</sup> Gabriele Pollini, “La sociologia dei valori: teoria e analisi”, in *L’Italia nell’Europa: i valori tra persistenze e trasformazioni*, ed. Gabriele Pollini, Albertina Pretto and Giancarlo Rovati (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2012). (Our translation)

<sup>32</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique* (Paris: Alcan, 1895).

The notion of value as an assessment criterion and benchmark for every choice was developed above all by Max Weber.<sup>33</sup> Weber believed that values are of primary importance for the character of a society and its members, and he set out to investigate their effect on people's choices and behaviour. In Weber, values take on a normative connotation, in the sense that they have the power to strongly condition social actions, since they are convictions linked to a sense of duty, to an actual moral imperative in which, however, the individual has freedom of choice: values are thus the fruit of human decisions.

According to Talcott Parsons,<sup>34</sup> values perform a regulatory function for individuals as well as a function of social cohesion when they become part of the motivational structure of human beings. In fact, it is through the process of socialisation that shared values in a given society are assimilated and transformed into an individual's character traits. Consequently, values perform a fundamental bonding function in social life, which would be impossible if those values were not shared.

As Daniela Barni has pointed out, in the abundant psycho-social literature on the subject, a recurrent definition of value is that of "stable conviction" and the value-action dyad is one of its constants. Among the many scholars, we would like to refer to Schwartz and Bilsky in particular,<sup>35</sup> since they highlight another feature of values, which many scholars seem to agree on, i.e. that values concern desirable purposes and behaviour. "Value refers to that which is desirable: it brings along an evaluative dimension (what is and what is not desirable) and, since the desirable – what the person must or should do – does not always coincide with the desired – what the person wants – it also has a normative connotation".<sup>36</sup> Essentially, if we analyse the psychological literature, it would be possible to identify some qualities of values on which the majority of scholars seem to agree, which are that values:

- are long-lasting beliefs concerning the desirability of a given status or a behaviour;

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<sup>33</sup> Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: Verlag Mohr, 1922).

<sup>34</sup> Talcott Parsons, "Values, Motives, and Systems of Action", in *Toward a General Theory of Action*, eds. Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1951), 45-275.

<sup>35</sup> Schwartz and Bilsky, "Toward a Psychological Structure of Human Values"; Schwartz and Bilsky, "Toward a Theory of the Universal Content and Structure of Values: Extensions and Cross-cultural Replications".

<sup>36</sup> Daniela Barni, *Trasmettere valori. Tre generazioni familiari a confronto* (Milan: Unicopli, 2009), 22. (Our translation)

- guide, but do not determine, actions and assessments;
- are embedded in priority systems.<sup>37</sup>

These priorities can be found, and have been studied in depth, in Schwartz's *Universals in the Content and Structure of Values*.<sup>38</sup> As a reference for our reflection, we will use the model posited by Schwartz and his collaborators,<sup>39</sup> which is also the most recent and stimulating contribution to the theoretical study on human values as well as to their empirical investigation. This work is the result of an extensive and rigorous research programme, carried out in more than sixty countries worldwide and on more than 200 samples, which gives it a high degree of validity and general applicability. The table below illustrates the classification of values according to Schwartz.

Value domain	Definition
Power	Social status, prestige, control of resources and dominance over people (authority, social recognition)
Achievement	Achieving personal success by proving our competence in accordance with social standards (ambition, skill, success)
Hedonism	Personal pleasure and gratification of the senses (entertainment, pleasure, gratification)
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and search for stimulating challenges (risk, audacity)
Self-direction	Independence of thought and action: choosing, creating, and exploring (creativity, freedom, curiosity, independence)
Universalism	Understanding, respect, tolerance and protection of the wellbeing of the people we are in direct contact with (help, honesty, forgiveness)
Benevolence	The motivational goal of benevolence values is preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (helpful, loyal, forgiving, honest, responsible, true friendship, mature love)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Shalom H. Schwartz, "Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 25 (1992), 1-65.

<sup>39</sup> Schwartz and Bilsky, "Toward a Psychological Structure of Human Values"; Schwartz and Bilsky, "Toward a Theory of the Universal Content and Structure of Values".

Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that belong to the cultural and religious tradition (faith, respect for traditions, modesty)
Conformity	Limitation of actions, inclinations, and impulses that could disturb or damage others and violate expectations or social norms (obedience, education, respect)
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of interpersonal relations and of self (national security, stability of interpersonal relations, order, health)

According to Schwartz, values are the product of the cognitive representation of three requirements that apply to all individuals: biological needs, the need for coordinated social interaction, and the need for the functioning and survival of groups. From these three needs the scholar identifies ten value domains according to the expressed motivational aim.<sup>40</sup> For instance, as shown in the table above, the value domain of Hedonism is connected to the organic needs of high levels of activation and personal pleasure. The value domain of Conformity, which includes values such as obedience, respect, and education, responds to the individual's need of interaction; an interaction which must however avoid actions that could be harmful to others or disappoint social expectations. The domain of Universalism, which includes the values of tolerance, justice, peace and harmony, performs an important function for the survival of groups and the cultivation of good relations between them.

Research has often stressed the "universal" nature of this typology, a universal nature which Schwartz traces back to the fact that values have their origin in needs that are common to all human beings: what varies, from individual to individual and from culture to culture, is the importance that is assigned to each value.

The value system is conceived as an integrated system and a set of dynamic relations has been identified and specified among their ten domains.<sup>41</sup> Values make up a continuum that can be represented in a circular structure in which the adjacent values are compatible with each other, while the ones opposite to each other are in conflict. The intensity of the relations between the different domains decreases as their distance

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<sup>40</sup> Shalom H. Schwartz, "Value Priorities and Behavior: Applying a Theory of Integrated Value Systems", *The Psychology of Values: The Ontario Symposium* 8, eds. Clive Seligman, James M. Olson and Mark P. Zanna (Hillsdale: NJ Erlbaum, 1996), 1-24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

increases and reaches its highest negative value for those domains that are represented in opposite positions in the system, a system which is graphically represented by means of a circular figure. Therefore, for instance, certain actions that are the expression of hedonistic values can enter into conflict with others which, on the other hand, are the manifestation of values linked to tradition. Also, actions that are related to values of self-direction can be in conflict with actions based on the values of conformity, and so on. The “almost circumplex model of values” represents the dynamic relations of compatibility and conflict between the ten basic values.<sup>42</sup>

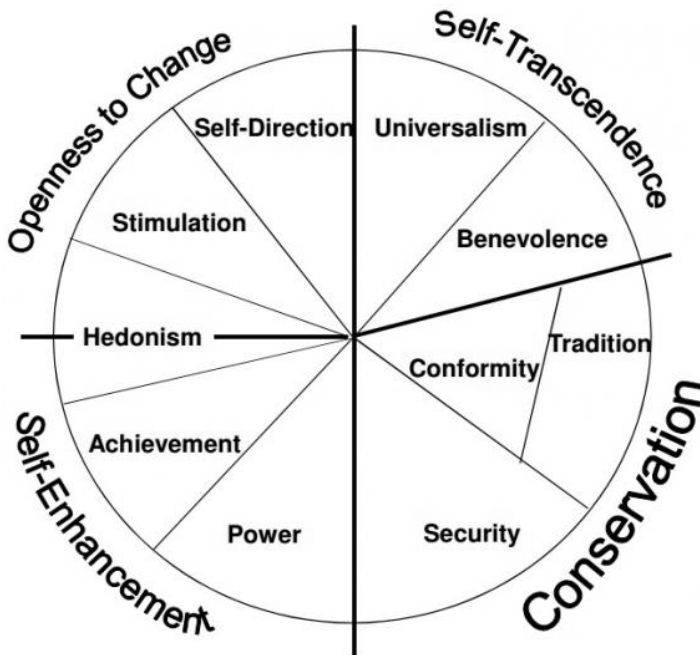


Fig. 2 Source: Shalom H. Schwartz, “Value Priorities and Behavior: Applying a Theory of Integrated Value Systems”, *The Psychology of Values: The Ontario Symposium 8*, eds. Clive Seligman, James M. Olson and Mark P. Zanna (Hillsdale: NJ Erlbaum, 1996), 1-24.

<sup>42</sup> See Schwartz, *Universals in the Content and Structure of Values*.