

Advertising as a cultural discourse. Elements of rhetoric in a multicultural context

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Abstract

Advertising constitutes a multifaceted form of communication that integrates persuasive, cultural, and strategic dimensions within the context of globalization and intercultural diversity. An integrated theoretical and applied framework highlights how some advertising messages are constructed, adapted, and reinterpreted, taking into account the cultural specificity of audiences. This perspective enables understanding advertising not only as a promotional tool but also as a system of meaning production in which meanings are negotiated between sender and receiver across diverse global communication contexts.

In this article, advertising discourse is examined through discursive strategies, including argumentative, affective, cultural, identity-based, and linguistic dimensions. These operate in complementary ways, activating rational, emotional, and symbolic modes of persuasion. The theoretical foundation draws on classical rhetoric, emphasizing the role of ethos, pathos, and logos in shaping message effectiveness. In this context, discursive creativity is essential for differentiation and memorability. From an intercultural perspective, research underscores the importance of cultural values, identity representations, and multilingualism in adapting advertising communication. Advertising both reflects and constructs identity through symbols, narratives, and visual codes, while multilingualism functions as a strategic tool for cultural adaptation, facilitating successful interaction in a multicultural society. Concepts such as glocalization, transcreation, and discursive inclusion are understood as key mechanisms that mediate between global coherence and local relevance. The findings highlight advertising discourse as a dynamic space for negotiating meaning, where success depends on the authentic and coherent integration of cultural diversity, enhancing both symbolic impact and social relevance.

Keywords: advertising discourse, identity, cultural values, multilingualism, intercultural mechanisms.

Introduction

Modern advertising is a complex, dynamic, and profoundly multifunctional phenomenon, far beyond the strict commercial sphere. Organically integrated into the structure of contemporary society, it reflects and simultaneously influences the interdependencies among the economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Through its discursive and symbolic mechanisms, advertising shapes individuals' perceptions, values, and behaviors, contributing to the configuration of the collective imaginary and the redefinition of cultural landmarks. Thus, it becomes both a promotional tool and a true vector of popular culture, shaping how identities and social relations are constructed.

Advertising discourse evolves in parallel with societal transformations, assuming multiple functions – ideological, educational, psychological, and aesthetic. In this sense, it

not only transmits persuasive messages but also legitimizes values, norms, and behavioral models, thereby influencing moral and social standards. This influence is essentially mediated by argumentation, which constitutes the core of the advertising message's construction, organizing the relationship among content, form, and the effect on the receiver. Advertising argumentation does not operate exclusively at the rational level; it combines the logical dimension with emotional and symbolic appeal, generating hybrid forms of persuasion adapted to the diversity of contemporary audiences. (Dhaouadi, 2012, 50)

In the context of globalization and cultural diversity, the efficiency of advertising discourse depends decisively on its capacity to adapt to the symbolic, linguistic, and axiological codes of different communities. Contemporary advertising functions simultaneously as a persuasive instrument – activating the rhetorical resources of ethos, logos, and pathos (Martins, 2024) – and as a mechanism of symbolic integration, through which messages are adjusted to the audience's cultural specificity. This process involves strategies such as glocalization and transcreation, which maintain the brand's global identity while adapting to local particularities.

Within contemporary interdisciplinary studies of advertising discourse, these strategies are theoretically conceptualized and defined in terms that allow them to be viewed not only as practical tools for adaptation but also as analytical categories reflecting the underlying processes of interaction between the global and the local in communication. The concepts of glocalization¹ and transcreation represent various levels and mechanisms of cultural adaptation of advertising messages. Their interpretation in scientific and encyclopedic sources allows us to clarify the semantic boundaries of these concepts and identify their functional significance in the context of a globalized media space:

"Glocalization, the simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems. The term, a linguistic hybrid of globalization and localization, was popularized by the sociologist Roland Robertson and, according to him, coined by Japanese economists to explain Japanese global marketing strategies. [...] In the marketing context, glocalization refers to creating products or services for the global market by adapting them to local cultures. For example, in France, McDonald's replaced its familiar Ronald McDonald mascot with Asterix, a popular French cartoon character" (Britannica Dictionary).

"[...] papers defining transcreation in the advertising field connect it quite frequently to marketing purposes. Most of them consider transcreation as a tool for adapting advertising campaigns to reach customers in international markets. The idea of internationalizing a product to enable it to reach local markets is present in most reviewed works" (Díaz-Millón et al., 2023). "The results indicate that inclusive advertising significantly improves brand trust, provided that consistency and authenticity are essential for maintaining and strengthening brand trust across all consumer demographics" (Mahangade 2024, 43). So to say, advertising discourse becomes a space for negotiating meaning, in which global values are reinterpreted through local cultural filters, generating hybrid forms of expression and meaning.

¹ From globalization, the world has moved to "glocalization". What does this change imply? <https://tvrinfo.ro/de-la-globalizare-lumea-a-trecut-la-glocalizare-ce-implica-aceasta-schimbare/>, accessed April 26, 2026.

Furthermore, multilingualism plays a crucial role in this process, serving as an effective tool for intercultural dialogue in advertising discourse. Using multiple languages within a single communications strategy not only expands the audience but also enhances the message's cultural relevance. Multilingualism facilitates more accurate meaning conveyance, accounts for local linguistic and symbolic characteristics, and fosters a sense of closeness and trust among consumers. In this context, language becomes not just a means of conveying information but also a strategic resource, ensuring the inclusion of diverse cultural groups in the global communicative space and facilitating dialogue among them (Rautchi 2014, 69).

In the study of communication and advertising discourse, the contributions of theorists and practitioners such as Stephen Toulmin (2003, 97), Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (2008), Luke Sullivan (2023), Jacques Séguéla (2010, 278-284)²David Ogilvy (2023, 6), Edward T. Hall (1976, 105), Geert Hofstede (2011, 5), and Charles Forceville (2002, 72-74) have played an essential role in substantiating the analytical framework. Argumentative models, theories of modern rhetoric, approaches to advertising creativity, and the analysis of the visual dimension of discourse provide relevant tools for understanding how meaning is constructed and transmitted in advertising. These perspectives converge in an integrative vision that defines advertising as a persuasive, narrative, and cultural discourse situated at the intersection of communication, semiotics, and cultural studies.

Within this theoretical framework, the present research is based on the hypothesis that contemporary advertising discourse capitalizes on the cultural and linguistic differences among global audiences to develop effective, adaptive persuasive strategies. Cultural identity and multilingualism thus become strategic resources, functioning as tools for symbolic legitimation and intensifying emotional impact. Through these mechanisms, international advertising campaigns maintain coherence in brand identity while adapting to local contexts, thereby facilitating both global recognition and cultural relevance. Moreover, this perspective highlights that contemporary advertising actively builds bridges between cultures, contributing to the global circulation of values and their reinterpretation in local contexts. In this sense, advertising discourse can be understood as both a space of cultural convergence and a terrain of symbolic tensions, where the global and the local coexist, influence each other, and generate new forms of identity expression.

Corpus

The empirical basis of the study is a corpus of advertising materials selected for their representativeness, global reach, and cross-cultural relevance. The case studies include advertising campaigns of international brands operating in diverse cultural contexts and demonstrating a variety of persuasive communication strategies.

The study materials include advertising messages from brands such as Nike - the "Just Do It" and "You Can't Stop Us" campaigns, Dove "Real Beauty", and Coca-Cola "Share a Coke", as well as advertising practices of Volkswagen, United Colors of Benetton, Chanel No. 5, Gervital, etc. These examples were selected for their wide international coverage, high creativity, and pronounced cultural adaptability. The analysis

² Leading Creative People: Lessons from Advertising Guru Jacques Séguéla. *European Management Journal* 28, no. 4 (2010): 278–284. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2010.04.002>.

shows that these brands build coherent global messages, grounded in universal values – performance, authenticity, beauty, community, or innovation – which are subsequently adapted according to the cultural specificity of the target audience.

Methods

The study is based on a discursive-rhetorical and intercultural analysis of advertising, structured on several levels of investigation: (a) rhetorical analysis to identify persuasive strategies (ethos, logos, pathos); (b) the study of cultural discourse to examine symbols, values and identity representations; (c) comparative examination of international campaigns to observe cultural adaptations, processes of glocalization, transcreation and discursive inclusion; (d) visual exploration to interpret visual narratives and meaning-making strategies, as well as the use of multilingualism as an expressive and strategic resource. This multidimensional approach allows for an integrated understanding of advertising discourse, in which linguistic, visual, and cultural dimensions are dynamically interconnected.

Methodologically, the research capitalizes on interpretative qualitative analysis, selecting representative case studies of contemporary global advertising to identify discursive patterns and mechanisms of cultural adaptation. Correlating the levels of analysis highlights how meaning is constructed textually, visually, and symbolically, depending on the context of reception.

This research aims to demonstrate that advertising discourse functions both as an instrument of influence and as a cultural actor, capable of reflecting, shaping, and negotiating the differences between symbolic worlds³. In this sense, advertising contributes to the articulation of hybrid forms of identity, located at the intersection of the global and the local. Advertising discourse, located between persuasion and diversity, thus becomes fertile ground for exploring the relationship between language, identity, and global communication, highlighting its role in mediating cultural differences and facilitating intercultural dialogue in a globalized society.

Results and discussions

The analysis focuses on how global advertising discourse integrates rhetorical dimensions and intercultural mechanisms to construct messages. The study applies an analytical model of intercultural adaptation to representative advertising campaigns, enabling a comprehensive interpretation of the interaction among ethos, pathos, and logos with processes of glocalization, transcreation, and discursive inclusion. This model views language as an identity marker and cultural representations as symbolic resources that shape the semantic and value structure of an advertising message. Thus, communication, culture, and persuasion are interconnected elements of a single discursive space.

In the case of the Nike brand, the advertising discourse illustrates the preponderance of the affective dimension (pathos), which is emphasized through the mobilization of emotional resources that stimulate identification and motivation. An example of a successful adaptation is Nike Japan's "You Can't Stop Us" campaign, which emphasized

³ "The symbol in advertising", retrieved from <https://pdfcoffee.com/simbolul-n-publicitate-pdf-free.html>, accessed April 25, 2026.

diversity, social acceptance, and inclusion in the context of sports, with more subtle messages about collective effort—in contrast to the much more direct and confrontational tone of the American versions. Thus, advertising not only reflects cultural values but also helps to affirm, perpetuate, or visualize them in the public sphere. The global message is reconfigured through the integration of local cultural contexts, reflecting a process of narrative and symbolic glocalization. Message universality is sustained by culturally specific adaptations without affecting brand coherence.

Coca-Cola campaigns illustrate a balance between ethos and pathos (Figure 1), combining brand credibility with emotional engagement. Transcreation involves adapting messages to cultural and linguistic contexts through local symbols and personalization strategies, with language functioning as a tool for identity proximity. A relevant example in this regard is Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign, which used personalized labels with names adapted to the local language: "Share a Coke with Andrei" in Romania, "Partagez un-Coca-Cola avec Marie" in France, or versions written in kana characters in Japan, such as "Coca-Cola ユウキ (Yūki). This strategy helped foster an emotional connection with the brand, based on personal recognition and cultural familiarity.

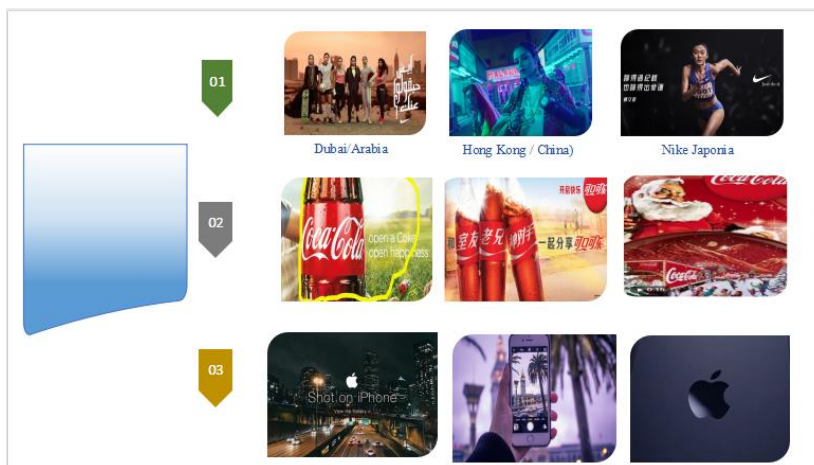


Figure 1. Comparative analysis of rhetorical strategies and intercultural mechanisms in global advertising discourse.

Beyond literal translation, multilingual advertising frequently relies on transcreation, a process that involves creatively reconstructing the message to preserve the original emotional impact while respecting the audience's cultural norms. In conceptualizing modern translation practices, Mar Díaz-Millón and María Dolores Olvera-Lobo (2023, pp. 181–191) provide a systematic review of the specialized literature, demonstrating that this phenomenon extends beyond simple linguistic or terminological adaptation. Transcreation is a complex, deeply strategic, and eminently creative process in which a global advertising text is structurally reconstructed to maintain its persuasive power while aligning closely with the cultural codes of the target audience.

Dove redefines advertising discourse by foregrounding diversity and inclusion, relying on pathos and ethos (Figure 2). Dove's campaigns highlight a strong ethical and social dimension. They go beyond their traditional persuasive function, becoming spaces for negotiating beauty standards. Through strategies of discursive inclusion, Dove affirms

the plurality of identities, transforming diversity into a pillar of its brand image. Its campaigns adopt an intercultural approach grounded in identity plurality, highlighting advertising's role in negotiating social norms rather than merely persuading.

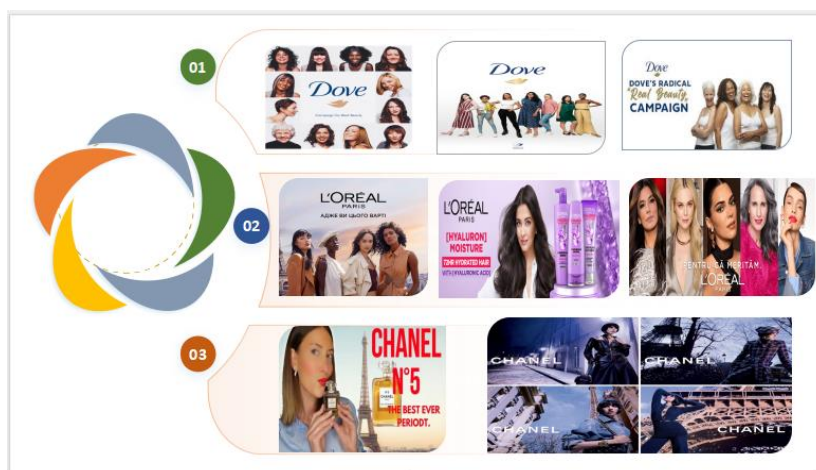


Figure 2. The application of the mechanism of the symbolic dimension in the global advertising discourse

Similarly, L'Oréal and Chanel demonstrate how advertising integrates aesthetic and symbolic dimensions in brand identity construction. Intercultural adaptations are achieved through visual and linguistic codes aligned with local values, while maintaining global coherence, emphasizing the symbolic function of advertising in valorizing cultural identity.

In the case of Gerovital, the advertising discourse integrates ethos and logos, drawing on scientific legitimation and expertise, as well as symbolic representations of beauty and health. Communication combines rational arguments (efficiency, innovation) with the emotional aspects of self-perception. Transcreation involves adapting messages to cultural expectations of beauty, balancing universal standards with local aesthetic norms.

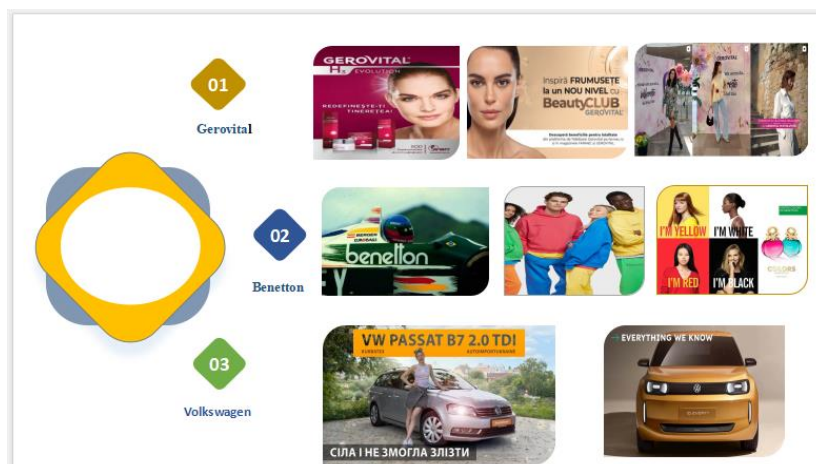


Figure 3. The functioning of intercultural mechanisms in global advertising discourse.

United Colors of Benetton's advertising practices (Figure 3) are characterized by the dominance of symbolic and affective dimensions, with pathos combined with a strong ethical message. The campaigns extend beyond commercial advertising, becoming a form of social statement. Discursive inclusion serves as a key mechanism for representing diversity, identity, and global solidarity, creating a space for interpretation at the intersection of visual metaphors and social contexts.

Volkswagen's advertising discourse demonstrates the predominance of logos, combined with moderate pathos, that emphasizes reliability, technological advancement, and rational choice. Communication is built on argumentative strategies, reinforced by visual and narrative elements that shape the brand's ethos. At the same time, the global message is adapted to local contexts through culturally relevant stories, reflecting glocalization, in which the car's universal characteristics are linked to the audience's everyday experiences.

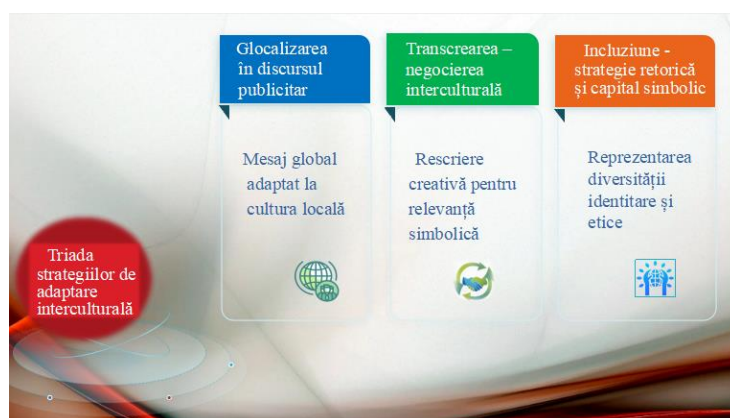


Figure 4. The cultural adaptation of global advertising discourse is achieved through three fundamental intercultural mechanisms: glocalization, transcreation, and discursive inclusion.

The visual materials presented allow us to consider contemporary advertising discourse as a system of interaction between global and local factors. On the one hand, brands strive to maintain a stable global identity and value base, as reflected in the conceptual frameworks (figures 4 and 8). On the other hand, successful communication requires adaptation to the cultural specifics of the audience, realized through the mechanisms of glocalization, transcreation, and discursive inclusion (figures 5–7). In this context, finding a balance between global consistency and local relevance becomes a key condition for effectiveness.



Figure 5. Glocalization becomes a balancing mechanism between global coherence and local cultural legitimacy.

Glocalization presupposes preserving a brand's holistic global identity while adapting the message to the cultural specifics of different markets through linguistic, visual, and narrative transformations. Transcreation is the creative reinterpretation of an advertising message, in which the original meaning is not simply translated but reconstructed to account for the target audience's cultural context. Discursive inclusion, in turn, is expressed in the integration of cultural, social, and identity diversity into brands' visual and narrative strategies. These mechanisms do not function in isolation, but rather in an interconnected manner, creating hybrid forms of adapted global discourse.

Analysis of campaign corpora from international brands such as Nike, Coca-Cola, Dove, L'Oréal, Chanel, United Colors of Benetton, Gerovital, etc. demonstrates that contemporary advertising strategies are built on a combination of universal values and culture-specific adaptations. These campaigns actively use cultural symbols, visual codes, and linguistic resources to foster an emotional connection with the audience and strengthen brand identification.



Figure 6. Transcreation becomes a strategic mechanism of cultural adaptation, a process of co-construction of meaning, and an instrument of global legitimization through local relevance.

Comparative analysis supports the hypothesis that global advertising discourse functions as a space of intersection between culture and persuasion, where meaning is constructed through the interaction of rhetorical strategies and intercultural mechanisms. The effectiveness of advertising communications is determined by brands' ability to balance the global integrity of a message with its local relevance through subtle contextual adaptations.



Figure 7. Discursive inclusion becomes a rhetorical strategy, a social value, and a mechanism for the brand's intercultural legitimation.

The contribution of this study lies in developing an integrated model for interpreting advertising discourse that combines rhetoric, discourse analysis, and a cultural approach. The proposed model has both theoretical and practical significance, as it can be used to analyze advertising campaigns and develop effective intercultural communication strategies.

The application of this model demonstrates that the effectiveness of global advertising is determined not only by the message's argumentative structure but also by its ability to account for and represent cultural diversity. The results confirm that contemporary advertising discourse is a complex process of producing, negotiating, and reinterpreting meanings in a globalized society. In this context, advertising serves not only as a tool of persuasion but also as a space for intercultural dialogue, where identities are constantly constructed and transformed.

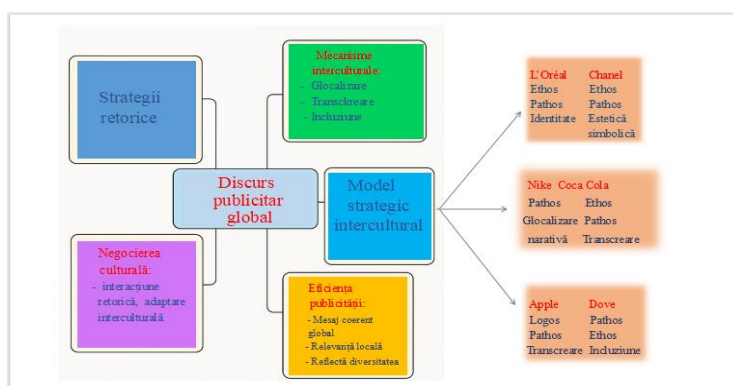


Figure 8. Conceptual diagram: Applying the analytical model in global advertising discourse.

The integrated model (Fig. 8) combines these mechanisms into a single analytical framework, allowing us to view advertising discourse as a multi-layered structure in which a brand's strategic goals are aligned with the specifics of cultural perception. Thus, the proposed approach views advertising communication as a dynamic, adaptive process focused on effective engagement with diverse audiences in a global media landscape.

Transcreation serves as a particularly significant mechanism of creative adaptation, ensuring the preservation of the message's emotional impact and semantic integrity across diverse cultural contexts. It also emphasizes the audience's active role in interpreting advertising discourse. Discursive inclusion, in turn, strengthens brands' openness to cultural diversity and promotes the expansion of communicative inclusiveness.

Conclusions

The analysis of advertising discourse, from the perspective of the relationship among persuasion, argumentation, and cultural diversity, highlights how rhetorical strategies and intercultural mechanisms contribute to the construction and adaptation of contemporary advertising messages. The results of the study confirm that advertising is a complex communicative phenomenon at the intersection of rhetoric, culture, and marketing strategy, in which persuasion is achieved through a sophisticated combination of arguments, images, and symbols.

From a theoretical perspective, the research highlights the importance of integrating rhetorical and cultural dimensions in the analysis of advertising discourse, demonstrating that its effectiveness stems from the interaction among logos, ethos, and pathos, in conjunction with symbolic representations and the cultural context. This theoretical integration enables a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is constructed and perceived within the cultural frameworks of the receivers.

From a methodological perspective, a three-dimensional analytical model based on glocalization, transcreation, and discursive inclusion is proposed to investigate how global brands adapt their messages to diverse cultural contexts while maintaining coherence of identity. The model offers a flexible analysis tool, capable of capturing both the discursive and symbolic dimensions of advertising communication.

At an applied level, the analysis of advertising campaigns shows that cultural adaptation strategies help create messages that are relevant to diverse audiences. Through glocalization, transcreation, and discursive inclusion, advertising discourse becomes not only a promotional tool but also a space for representing cultural values and identities, facilitating processes of identification and belonging.

The research results confirm that contemporary advertising functions as a complex intercultural discourse in which the brand's global identity is continually negotiated in relation to the audience's cultural diversity. Through the images, narratives, and symbols used, advertising contributes to the configuration of the social imaginary and the circulation of cultural values in the context of globalization. At the same time, it can generate new forms of cultural sensitivity, promoting inclusion and diversity as central values of contemporary communication.

The final reflections of this research emphasize that analyzing advertising discourse requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives from rhetoric, cultural studies, and communication sciences. In a society characterized by cultural mobility and identity diversity, advertising becomes a relevant space for observing how global values

are reinterpreted in local contexts and for understanding the tensions between cultural uniformity and differentiation.

Contemporary advertising must be understood not only as a commercial communication strategy but also as a complex discursive and cultural phenomenon in which persuasion, identity, and diversity intersect. The analysis of these processes offers a relevant perspective on how global society constructs its representations of itself, values, and forms of cultural interaction. In this sense, advertising discourse serves as a sensitive indicator of social and cultural transformations, reflecting the dynamics of the relationships among globalization, identity, and communication.

In light of the results obtained, it is appropriate to outline directions for further research, as additional approaches could deepen understanding of contemporary advertising discourse. In particular, expanding the cultural field of analysis to include brands from non-Western contexts is promising, as it may reveal alternative models of interaction between the global and the local.

Another important direction concerns the influence of digital technologies and algorithmic personalization on the construction of advertising messages, which would help clarify the evolving relationship between brand and audience. Equally significant is reception research focused on how advertising messages are interpreted across different cultural environments. A complementary approach may also involve comparative discourse analysis, contrasting advertising with media, cinematic, or political discourse to better understand processes of meaning production and transmission.

Overall, further research should integrate interdisciplinary perspectives and expand the empirical base to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of advertising discourse as a dynamic, multilayered communicative system.

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