

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE “EMMA!...” OR “PAPER HAS A GREAT FUTURE” ADVERTISEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The focus of this paper is the “Emma!...” advertisement, considered particularly rich as far as the meanings conveyed, especially since it paradoxically lacks verbal communication between characters. The author’s endeavor is to delineate the plethora of signifying elements and their intended significations, touching upon aspects of psychology, marketing and communication. After a brief description of the advertisement and its underlying assumptions, we look at the reasons for empathizing and rallying with the perspective of the female character, Emma. This discussion bears on topics such as: the role of art therapy, of the tactility and tangibility of experience, the connotations of the physical objects that she uses, deemed as obsolete or vintage (authenticity, heritage, refinement etc.). The attention falling on the stereotypes foregrounded by the situation goes to show that there is a complex dynamic within which these are juggled, meant to further illustrate a critique of modern society and its postulations regarding the use of technology and human communication. In the hermeneutics of the ad, we resort to aspects from different theories of communication: the relevance of minding circularity, the appropriateness of the structuralist three-fold approach to the sign for interpretation, the transactional role analysis, and non-verbal and paralanguage considerations.*

**KEYWORDS:** *technology, books, advertisement, stereotypes, psychology, marketing, communication*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This analysis focuses on the “Emma!...” or “Paper has a great future” advertisement, which I consider interesting and expressive for a number of aspects. The main reason why it triggered my dedicated, scholarly attention, and which determined me to write a study on it was that, surprisingly, a lot can be said about and inferred from this commercial despite its considerably synthetic nature (only thirty-eight seconds), and in spite of the fact that verbal communication between the characters featured in it is virtually absent – if we do not take into account the six times the man pronounces his wife’s name, on different tonalities.

The paper is divided into sections. The first two after the introduction deal with the psychology behind the making of the advertisement and its targeted effects, tracking,

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firstly, the affective responses and dynamics that take place in the viewer, and, secondly, the reasons for siding with the female character. Then, we take a look at the meanings behind the six pronunciations of Emma's name by her husband, pinpointing the attitudes behind them. Section five presents the stereotypes associated with the protagonists, the way these are destroyed and reinterpreted as a result of the unexpected outcome of events, resorting, in all this, to some elements present in various theories of communication, as well as filtering what is happening through the lens of transactional role analysis. The paper ends with the overall conclusions.

Before going into the demonstration per se, we need to throw a quick glance at the actual advertisement, to describe what happens in it. While the woman is drawing with her small son, using colored pencils and paper, the husband comes in and takes away the sheet from the child, extending a tablet instead, and demonstrating with his finger on the screen how one can draw on it, and thus that it can replace the other objects. The second scene shows him heading for the fridge, where a great number of post-its are stuck on the door. As he points to them disapprovingly, he shows his wife the tablet, on the screen of which an image with post-its can be seen. In the third act, as she is cuddled on the couch in the evening solving Sudoku, he thrusts the tablet, where a Sudoku game in progress is displayed, under her nose. The next setting shows Emma seated at a desk, printing something, while the husband opens the door to the room and shows again his discontentment. Finally, while in bed next to each other, the two spouses read, her – a book, and him – out of his tablet, grinning suggestively at her as if trying to point out her funny choice. In all the contexts shown, he is always pronouncing her name as he notices her actions or in order to draw her attention, as a form of address, and every time in a different manner. The very last fragment of the video shows him on the toilet seat about to grab some hygienic paper, when he notices that it has finished. He cries out to his wife – pronouncing her name one last time – and he promptly receives her answer: she slides the tablet, which is now displaying a big picture of a hygienic paper roll, under the bathroom stall door to him, while the message “Paper has a great future” appears on our television screen.

## **2. PSYCHOLOGY – THE BENEFITS OF TRIGGERING AFFECTIVE RESPONSES**

The ad baffles the viewer's expectations, as it initially appears to be promoting a new model of a tablet. At the beginning, we are rendered this impression and are made curious about the device because of the prominence with which it appears, and due to the insistence of the husband on emphasizing that it eases all sorts of interactions, eliminating the need for (the handling of) other objects. However, our predictive horizon is confounded as we realize that the ad is actually for hygienic paper. The puzzlement of the viewer's expectations is already a manipulative marketing strategy. Let us further follow the process and the dynamic of the receiver's feelings and thoughts, and psychology behind it, as it occurs.

Our attention is bound to be caught by the introduction of a theme that preoccupies the modern-day consumer, as it represents an ability continuously required from him/her by society. (S)he is reminded of this necessity extremely often in both televised advertising and in everyday life – so often, in fact, that it puts a certain amount of pressure on

him/her: it is the crucial importance of being up-to-date with modernity and all the products that it puts forth in general, especially in what regards technology and expertise in using (advanced) technological devices and gadgets, in particular.

The ever-presence of global telecommunications implicitly relies on updated devices and services that can supply the new software and offer the physical support needed for worldwide communication to take place. Statistics show that, among the ads that Romanians are most interested in seeing on YouTube, those for smart electronic devices and internet providers rank first. The globalization tendency comes from the western world – America and Western Europe, and smaller and Eastern European countries have felt the necessity to align to the trend. In a top ten of the most popular commercials viewed in Romania during the first quarter of 2017, YouTube Romania Adds Leaderboard shows us that seven advertisements are about technology and device performance [1]. The first three positions are occupied by, in the actual order: a commercial for the Samsung Galaxy S8 smartphone, followed by two ads for seasonal offers for products from Orange Romania, whereas the others bearing on the field of technology relevantly refer to two episodes from the “Boost My PC” series, an educational announcement on robotics made by Vodafone featuring a series of celebrities like entertainers and journalists, as well as the unboxing of a particular smartphone accompanied by a review [2]. These preferences show the Romanians’ awareness of the need to learn about, acquire and become users of new technology.

This global tendency does not come without stress and strain. Machine is bound to evolve faster than the average human’s ability to handle it adroitly. From this point of view, even the consumers who feel most comfortable handling new technology may at times become insecure about their adaptability and skills as users of gadgets, which may, moreover, remain obsolete or insufficient in tandem with the most recent advancements. In other words, as times are constantly changing at a head-spinning speed, it becomes increasingly difficult, even for the adapted consumer, to keep the pace with innovation, which results in a subdued but ever-present fear of falling behind. It is thus this fear and the pushing of this more or less unconscious button or soft/sore spot that guarantees catching the viewer’s attention in the commercial under analysis. Putting forth the theme of the need to keep up with the times (and activating, implicitly, the underlying fear that one cannot, or may not, at some point, be able to do it) is, first and foremost, a success recipe for drawing attention. It is only after this occurs, that we realize that the ad is about something entirely different than smart devices and last-minute technology; all the same, the purpose of the buzz topic, of getting our focus, has been served. The use of this fear of the public continues throughout the advertisement, until the very end of it.

The final sentence displayed on the screen, that “Paper has a great future”, together with the ending of the video convey the message that the consumer can relax, as this is not yet another ad that intends to make him/her feel guilty or incapacitated because (s)he is not fully synchronized with technology, as so many do nowadays, excluding and marginalizing technologically ignorant people, precisely by depicting individuals from categories that are not normally included among the usual users of advanced devices successfully handling such gadgets (the elderly, people from rural areas etc.). Moreover, numerous ads introduce the notion that technology has not only reached the categories that are less likely to be interested in it and converted them into users, but it has also

penetrated to and works in the most improbable spaces (on mountain tops, at sheepfolds, in chalets at high altitudes, in the countryside etc.) By rendering this message about paper, together with the humor triggered as soon as the actual intended meaning of the ad is revealed, the video under analysis manages to gain the viewer's liking and benevolence as a result of the psychological release of tension provoked with the help of the two elements in question. A disposition of favorability and goodwill has been subconsciously created, or induced, in him/her. The viewer has become far more open, willing and inclined to like the product that is being advertised, especially since it is something as banal, ordinary and thus non-threatening as hygienic paper. The viewer's attention is being piqued, then (s)he is threatened, scolded, patted on the back in reassurance, then allowed to laugh and unwind – in this order – in an emotional rollercoaster. Let us see the purpose of this rollercoaster of emotions.

Studies on the role of emotional response in consumer behavior have shown that, on the one hand, videos are “successful affect manipulations” and, on the other, that “some video manipulations can enhance more than one specific affective state at the same time”, the targeted effect of producing an affective response being a “better consolidation of memory traces under high emotional arousal” [3]. In other words, when emotions are involved (the more or the stronger, the better), what the potential consumer sees will stick to her/his mind, which increases the chances of subsequent purchase of the product being advertised because it will have prominence over others in the person's memory. Isen notices that research has shown that “negative affect appeared to reduce false memory” (i.e. it increases the capacity to accurately memorize details) [4] and, although it may not be the best strategy to put consumers into a negative state to the purpose of making them remember your product thoroughly in order to buy it later [5], this idea offers a rationale for the use of negativity-enhancing stimuli in the commercial.

In the end of the “Emma!...” ad, humor has the role of appeasing the potential stress associated with the idea of the insufficient technological adroitness of the viewer, as, besides realizing that this ad is not the type of ad that requires him/her to be adapted from this point of view, (s)he has the opportunity to make fun of his/her own flaws or shortcomings in this respect in a safe context. Also, what the commercial ultimately does is turn the tables on the technologically competent – punishing the punisher/abuser. Humor comes therefore from a double source – the unexpectedness of the type of ad we are dealing with, and the way in which it makes fun of the arrogant mocker (husband) by putting him in difficulty based on his own haughtiness and assumptions (which get invalidated). The quality that humor has, of bringing about relaxation or “relief” – an observation made by Freud as early as his “Relief Theory” [6] – and thus the possibility of a lighter approach to difficult or stressful situations, here also functions as an element that establishes openness towards the product that is actually being advertised, thus constituting a component of the marketing strategy. In the emotional rollercoaster that we have mentioned above, we may wonder why there is a choice to end on a positive note. Positive emotions have been considered to broaden attention, to favor “a global focus” [7] or wider perspective, as well as flexibility, as the viewers “conceptualize and integrate more material and see it in more different ways” [8]. Hence, the consumers in positive emotionality “think more broadly about brands” and are more likely to accept “brand extensions” [9]. There is even a “Dopamine Hypothesis”, which postulates the “positive affect's facilitative effect on thinking processes” such as “working memory, attentional

flexibility”, monitoring etc. because of the effect of dopamine release in the frontal brain areas [10]. The judgment passed on the products tends to be more favorable, biased in the sense of highlighting their qualities and overlooking the flaws: “Objects are typically evaluated more favorably when the evaluator is in a good mood than when the evaluator is in a bad mood” [11]. The introduction of “playful peripheral, secondary material” on the background of a stressful state has been recognized as an effective focalizer [12]. So, one explanation for the humorous turn in expectations would be this one. There may also be another, which does not eliminate the one we have just mentioned, but may come as a corollary, thus increasing marketing effectiveness. It may be that the ad is intentionally trying to make the viewer feel worse before making him/her feel better, as, in this way, the positive affect resulting from the emergence from a stressful state of anxiety is greater and more significant than the one that would be obtained as a result of merely stimulating him/her out of a neutral state. This is because the relief that is thus experienced heightens and intensifies the pleasure or satisfaction felt afterwards, because the contrast between states is greater and because it contains a type of survival reassurance. We now have a more accurate picture of the rationale of the emotional rollercoaster.

One last point needs to be made here, in what regards affect, its influence on consumer behavior and the way in which it is used in the ad under analysis, before moving on. In order to make this point, we need to understand two realities. Firstly, that affect can be categorized, besides into the broad classes of positive and negative, as: “integral”, in which case the emotional response is directly connected with the object of decision-making; “incidental”, i.e. “unconnected to the object to be evaluated” and, thirdly, “task-related”, meaning that affect is related to the “task or process of making judgments and decisions” [13]. Secondly, we have to take into account that “affect is often seen as having information value—an idea known as the ‘affect-as-information’ hypothesis” [14], and “in the course of evaluating objects, people are often inclined to inspect how they feel about these objects—a process known as the ‘how-do-I-feel-about-it?’ heuristic” [15]. If, for a regular consumer, the topic of choosing one type of hygienic paper over another may not seem crucial, a priority, or arise strong preferences on its own, the marketing ruse of capturing the viewer’s focus to it indirectly, by pressing more stressful buttons – such as the necessity of being in tune with technology – may turn out extremely useful. This is definitely, also, a case of incidental affect, performed through a clever recontextualization of the concept of paper into a perspective in which it is made to stand in contrast with (excessive) technologization and the abuses that it performs on the individual directly and indirectly, which is a buzz topic that is more likely to incite strong emotional response. In this latter context, paper stands for tradition, comfortableness, warmth, undemanding, simple contexts and realities, and relaxation. In this way, paper that opposes stressful technology is associated with positive feelings, which then get transferred to hygienic paper as well, as a result of “assimilation effects” [16]. Under the effects of the affect-as-information hypothesis, the consumer will translate to and project on the hygienic paper all the emotional charge felt previously in relation to paper in the other context. The humor deriving from the comical *recontextualization*, which starts by placing the viewer in a totally different area of the conceptual field of the notion of paper, adds to the positive affect accompanying this notion.

The play upon the consumer’s fears and potential guilt, then the sudden lifting of the burden of these off his/her shoulders goes a long way towards acquiring the viewer’s

attention and benevolence, and strikes points for the popularity of the product, transforming the viewer into a potential buyer. Hence, the advantages of producing affective responses, as well as the exact way in which this reality was capitalized upon in the “Emma!...” commercial have been analyzed in this section.

### **3. PSYCHOLOGY – SIDING WITH EMMA AND EMPATHIZING WITH HER PERSPECTIVE**

The fear of failing to rise to the expectation of being a skilled user of technology, as well as the husband’s indirectly arrogant and insensitive behavior make us side, from the beginning, with the female character in the video, Emma. However, since we understand the need to be in tune with technology usage, we initially tend to comprehend and empathize with the man’s perspective. Thus, it can be considered here that the “focalizer”, namely the character whose point of view we are encouraged to adopt [17] is him. We are supposed to side with the husband, and we tend to believe that this is expected of us, especially as we are manipulated into thinking that this is a commercial for tablets, but we incline, nevertheless, towards Emma, because of our underlying fear and because of the husband’s aloofness and lack of empathy. Hence, it is, in part, out of a mirroring fear and frustration with the forever-advancing technology, as well as a tendency to reject the male character’s obnoxiousness verging on a passive-aggressively abusive attitude that we rally with her. Perhaps it is also out of a subconscious resistance to novelty present in any human being, to various degrees, that we do that.

Nevertheless, there are other, more diversified reasons why Emma’s perspective is more popular with us. At the beginning, she is presented while drawing with her young boy. Even if we are not familiar with the importance and usefulness of drawing and/or painting, we perceive the husband as an upsetting element of the harmony that has been created between mother and child while engaged in this creative and educational activity. But let us understand more thoroughly the exact importance of drawing/painting that we have mentioned here. Firstly, these are part of the concept of art therapy [18] or art making, defined and recognized as “psychotherapy” and thus acquiring all the texture and seriousness entailed by such a concept. If we look only very briefly at some areas of application of art therapy, it is used as a remedy in neurodegenerative diseases, with results in curbing the rhythms of deterioration of neural paths, boosting mood, improving motor, communication and social skills, providing a sense of belonging and accomplishment, the satisfaction of self-expression, not to mention “alleviating the burden on caregivers” [19]. Besides assisting impaired adults in this way, it has been proven, with countless studies, that art therapy also offers support with children, not only when it comes to physically, emotionally or mentally challenged ones (suffering from autism, trauma, abuse, hyperactive or with attention deficits), but also in the development of healthy children due to the help that it provides with acquiring motor and cognitive skills; youngsters learn to create images of their inner thoughts and experiences (and thus have a balanced, normal psychic life); artistic activities lay the foundations for self-esteem, or boost the IQ from an early age etc., not to mention that they constitute a useful tool in diagnosing the developmental stages in children [20]. But even if we do not know or do not think of all these aspects when we see the mother drawing with her son, we at least perceive the activity they are involved in as one of bonding, and can appreciate it as

creativity-enhancing and therefore healthy for the psychology of the child. This much we know. Consequently, the husband who brings the tablet in the picture not only interferes with them, having a disruptive intervention, but also deprives the child of the above-mentioned benefits accompanying this activity, not to mention going against the popular belief that children's interaction with gadgets should be limited instead of encouraged.

If we have just stated that the man deprives the child of the advantages offered by drawing if he wants to make them use the gadget, the observation that we need to make at this point is the distinction between drawing with paper and pencils and drawing on the tablet, by merely using one's finger to trace lines. Let us see why tablet drawing is not the same. Firstly, the experience of using colored pencils and paper is a superior one because it involves tactile interaction with more objects, of various shapes and textures, which enhances motor skills. Then, this manipulation of various objects is, in its tangibility, more empowering. The child sees that his actual movement and object handling produce something that is also tangible in the real world. Thirdly, the child is healthily induced, subconsciously, the idea that the creation of something requires (complex) work and effort, which avoids granting him a too facile, false and dangerous sense of empowerment. Hence, the tablet experience is poorer in these respects.

The element of the pleasure derived from tactility and tangibility is part of the other activities that Emma is involved in throughout the commercial. She uses post-its on the fridge, solves Sudoku from a paper magazine, prints the information she wants to read instead of merely reading it from the computer screen, and reads an actual book instead of its electronic version. Every time, her husband is trying to make her give up the physical objects that she is using in the respective activities, and replace them with the versatile tablet, trying very hard to show and convince her that all can be performed with the wondrous electronic device, implying that the effort would be smaller as well, and that the tablet is, additionally, a more economical version of doing those things, since all the other objects can be discarded once the tablet is adopted.

Let us see the advantages and connotations that the activities enumerated above bring, if they are performed in their traditional manner, using the various objects that they involve, instead of only the tablet. As physical reminders placed on the refrigerator – one of the most visible places in the house – the post-its are a common practice. People have found a way to give the necessity to remember things, which can be a little stressful at times, a pleasant form with the post-its. This is so given the ludic element involved in both their actual appearance and their usability. Since they come in various shapes and colors, post-its are mood boosters due to the way they look. When important things are written on them and then placed in high-visibility places, it is as if the adult is playing a game with himself/herself. The post-it is a message usually addressed to oneself (i.e. in which the adult is thus sometimes both the sender and the receiver), which psychologically puts him/her under the impression that (s)he is in control of his/her life and has already successfully approached handling the task that the post-it reminds him/her of. The post-it is like a message in a bottle which reunites two versions of the self – an older one, from the past, who believed about oneself that (s)he can do the assignment, and the present-time one, functioning in this way as a reassurance for and proof of the survival and resilience of the individual despite being faced with potentially stressful experiences. If it is not merely an outer form of intrapersonal communication [21], it can be a form of

communication with a different receiver as well. The message to remember doing something may address another individual than the writer of the post-it, in which the element of the ludic acquires new playful aspects. On the one hand, the action of leaving a message like this connotes a previously-established and existing collaboration, partnership and intimacy or mutual reliability between the sender and the receiver, thus representing and indicating (the existence of) the relationship itself, being reassuring from this point of view as well. It metonymically is the relationship, i.e. proof of not being alone in the world. Furthermore, the post-it usually includes humorous elements and elements of surprise, such as emoticons, funny lines etc. The fact that it is frequently placed on the fridge does not only have something to do with visibility. The refrigerator is the space where food supplies are kept, and therefore connotes not only the assurance of survival, the satisfaction of a basic need, the pleasure of palatability, or the togetherness involved in preparing meals with someone else, but also the domestic sphere and *shelter* from anything that has the potential of bringing about anxiety. By associating a “to-do” item, i.e. a potentially worrying element, with the sphere that connotes physical and psychological shelter, i.e. one’s home, the potency of the disquieting aspect is reduced, and gets contained and associated with a space of individual empowerment, being given a more “digestible” or “palatable” form, which is the sender’s choice, and within his/her control – namely, the post-it. The post-it becomes an object connoting playfulness, fun, reassurance (in a number of ways), and a communication enhancer.

While playing Sudoku on paper, the person uses, besides the paper magazine, a pencil and an eraser, in case they recalculate, change their mind and need to make corrections. The tactile and dynamic experience is more complex and superior to just making these adjustments by tapping a screen and buttons. The same happens while printing information on paper and while reading a book, the pages of which need to be turned, and the feel of which while holding is always specific to the format of that respective book, not to mention the smell or color, or cover and page textures which diversify the experience in comparison with the use of a tablet for it. As far as reading is concerned, the experience on paper has been demonstrated to yield better reading comprehension and retention, as the “fixity” of the text supports the quicker and more thorough mental reconstruction of information by resort to the spatial representation of details and immediate access to the entire text, not to mention the help provided by the “*visual ergonomics*” [22].

We need to see, however, if there is any other aspect (besides the ones that we have already mentioned) that makes the use of a variety of objects instead of just one – the tablet – a superior experience in all the cases above. In other words, what else is there to be gained by performing those activities traditionally? If we think about the materials that the person has contact with while handling the old-fashioned objects (the magazine, pencils, books), these come down to (mostly): paper (of a variety of textures, forms and colors), wood, rubber, graphite and clay (for the pencil lead). Out of these, the prominence is held by paper and, ultimately, wood. These materials are all natural – in opposition to, and in comparison with plastic or metal, out of which the tablet is made. Hence, we could say that, by being natural, the materials used for the outdated objects, along with the objects themselves evoke the notion of vintage, as well as those of authenticity and originality. These three concepts go together, as they all point to one another, also having as connotation the idea of something being old and, because of that,

more valuable, as time and endurance in time add value. Baudrillard has pointed out this relation, between antiques and the various features that we have just mentioned, in a more complex argumentation in *The System of Objects* [23]. In terms of feelings, all three notions are linked with nostalgia, and, somewhat implicitly, loss – so, presence and absence of something valued and dear. By entailing the classical, vintage also brings along the connotation of refinement. All these aspects are positive and deemed as sending to “plus value”, which the potential consumer may be interested in getting associated with, in building his/her image of self or in representing oneself to others. By possessing (and using) objects with authenticity, originality, refinement and value inherent in them, the consumer acquires these features himself/herself, as a transferable halo. We can say that these are some of the buttons that also get pushed in the viewer of the “Emma!...” commercial.

#### **4. PARALANGUAGE AND NON-VERBAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In this section we will focus on two aspects. Firstly, we will have a look at the paralinguage used by the husband in his six pronunciations of his wife’s name, analyzing the meanings behind them, i.e. providing an actual sentence or phrase that the name essentially substitutes in the respective contexts. Thus, we will have a set of unpronounced – but conveyed and intended – utterances. Secondly, we will also analyze the non-verbal communication of the couple, which reveals their attitudes, thoughts and communication.

A definition of paralinguage would be the manner in which the message is transmitted, i.e. the momentary characteristics of one’s voice, including its speed, tone, pitch, volume, the use of breaks, interjections etc. [24]. The first time the man calls her name the intonation is descending, and the word is prolonged, which suggest disappointment and perhaps a bit of sadness, also implied by his serious face and a tilt of the head that points to him being reproachful. After he takes the paper away from the child, he shows them the tablet and, while drawing with his finger on it, he supports this activity with a smile and a movement of the hand laterally, palm upwards, as if saying: “See how easy it is?”. His overall attitude is one of didacticism, as he is in a teaching mode. His tone sends to a self-imposed patience, the type that a teacher would have with pupils (perhaps even pupils who are not the quickest in grasping the notions that they are being taught), or that a parent would adopt upon having to do with stubborn children. The tone and the gestures also make us think that it is definitely not the first time that the couple have approached the subject of using a tablet more in their activities, as a certain controlled restlessness detaches itself from the man’s overall attitude.

In the second sequence, as he makes for the fridge, the tone on which he articulates his wife’s name is changed: it is deeper, harsher, the pronunciation is shorter, which show annoyance and coldness. His mimicry sends the same signals, as he turns his head to us (to the right, for him), looking at his wife askance and critically, his lips pursed in irritation. His hand initially points to the fridge, palm up and fingers stretched, as if saying “What’s this?!”, then points with one finger to the tablet that he raises with the other hand, a gesture also accompanied, to give it more force, by a nod of the head while additionally raising the eyebrows, the message clearly being: “This is what you need, ok?!”.

In the third interaction, when he slips the tablet with a Sudoku game under Emma's nose while she is seated on the couch, his tone is more musical, as if he sings her name instead of merely uttering it, also clearly marking a break between the two syllables, the "e" being longer and more stressed, while the final "a" is exaggeratedly prolonged in an ascending intonation. This manner of saying Emma's name is playful, but at the same time the border between this playfulness and mockery is blurred, the overall perception of the pronunciation being that he is ridiculing her a little (or, rather, a little more).

When he enters the room where she is seated at the computer, a page is just coming out of the printer, and, as he is witnessing this, he calls her name on a clearly disappointed tone, again tilting his head, frowning a bit, his lips parted as if saying "Not again!?!". His facial expression has no element of aggressiveness this time, being the least imposing from all hypostases. It is the one time when he is completely non-belligerent and unprovocative, just sad, not seeming to understand why she keeps insisting on using paper. The last scene of them together shows the couple reading in bed, using – Emma, a book and him, the tablet. As she turns the page, the husband looks at Emma's gesture, but not at her – which shows that he has given up trying to communicate with her and determine her to change her ways. While he is looking, he has a superior smile on his face, conveying the "It can't be helped" message, while his tone seems to be saying "She's something else!".

While in the restroom on the toilet stool, as he realizes that he is out of hygienic paper, the ascending intonation on which he calls out to his wife, rather shortly, and with the final "a" stretched out on two notes, the second higher than the first, shows uncomfortableness, the desire to hurry and quickly resolve the situation that he is being faced with, and a little panic and distress. The pairing sentence could be "Come quickly, please!", but said on a tone that is rather authoritative than suppliant or pleading. It is as if he expects her to immediately solve the problem for him. We also notice less embarrassment than we might presume natural, or one that is masked by urgency and practicality or matter-of-factness.

It is worth considering now Emma's non-verbal messages, taking into account her facial expressions and body movements, as these speak volumes. Despite the fact that she does not make a sound throughout the whole commercial, we can talk about a clear progression of her feelings and clear-cut attitudes coming out of the woman's obvious acting skills and expressivity. At the drawing table, at the beginning, she looks up at her husband in surprise, and this is more or less everything that she communicates at this point. During the fridge scene, when he is much more abrasive, she looks at him with squinty eyes, obviously upset by his attitude, then down, blinking a few times rapidly, which points to an indecisiveness whether to address him or not, and we see her decide to let the matter slide – this time. As he shows his wife the tablet Sudoku, we only see the upper half of her face, as the rest is covered by the device, and the signals that we can interpret come solely from her eyes, which is, nevertheless enough, as we see her lowering her eyelids in a meaningful way which points to the fact that her patience may be coming to an end, and that she is trying to refrain herself from bursting out in anger. This contained anger is nevertheless more visible in the printer scene, when she ostentatiously takes the sheet of paper out of the machine, pulling it instead of just lifting it, while she is fixing her husband with her eyes, as if in a warning to let her be, as she is ready for confrontation and will not back away from it this time if he does not leave her alone. In the bedroom scene, her mimicry tells us that she has reached a point where she takes responsibility for

the fact that she is intentionally not using the tablet (nor will she in the future), and that she is now not afraid to admit to it openly. If we have a look at the progress of her affect, we realize that she has passed from a hesitant attitude to owning her choices, in the end becoming combative and mocking, like her husband has been towards her. The potpourri of her emotions has included surprise, a bit of embarrassment, hurt, tentativeness, irritation, anger, arrogance, and mockery.

If we resort to theory on non-verbal communication, and to the functions of this silent communication stipulated by theoreticians such as Hybels, Weaver and DeVito, we could say that, in the case of the male character, it mainly *emphasizes* and *completes* his paralinguistic messages, whereas, in Emma's case, it *substitutes* or *replaces* the verbal communication that is non-existent with her [25]. Regarding the substitution that we are referring to in the case of the female character, we notice that the silent cues are more than enough to compensate for the absence of the verbal elements and to convey a clear message, demonstrating and justifying once more the high percentage and prominence taken by the non-verbal in the act of communication in Albert Mehrabian's equation – 93% [26]. The husband uses primarily “illustrators”, which emphasize his paralinguistic, and “regulators”, which involve the whole body and send more complex messages [27], whereas with Emma facial expressions (especially eye language) are important.

## 5. ADVANCING STEREOTYPES

In the first part of the commercial, what we appear to be offered as the topic of the video – the necessity and advantages of befriending technology – plays upon certain stereotypical polarities embodied by the two characters. Referring to representations of otherness, or “social representations”, Georgiu differentiates between “prejudices, stereotypes, clichés and simplified categorizations” (my translations) [28]. The features that we are about to discuss in connection with the two characters in the commercial can be considered to represent, simultaneously, prejudices – i.e. evaluations made previous to the “communication experience” [29] – clichés or commonplaces, and stereotypes. Firstly, starting from the assumption that the rationale of technological advancement is, besides making life easier, mainly to improve communication, the man could be considered to embody the epitome of the technology-synchronized individual, enjoying thus all the communication opportunities one can think of in modern age and which derive from this *technological literacy*. He opposes the technologically illiterate (or insufficiently literate) person, one who suffers from the lack thereof. The second stereotype derives from the characters' genders, which are, of course, far from being accidental in what regards the categories that they are made to represent. Emma's husband mirrors the stereotype of the rational, *active, inventive, future-oriented* man, opposed to his wife's stereotype, i.e. the sentimental, passive, nostalgic woman. In connection with this second, old-as-time stereotype, we can add at least two other, related ones, whose most prominent component for achieving difference is still gender opposition. Hence, thirdly, we have the stereotypical pair of the technologically *adroit man, who is good with his hands*, versus the technologically inconvenienced or challenged, clumsy woman. Last but not least, unfortunately, we have the underlying assumption (also functioning as yet another stereotypical content) of the *intelligent, smart man* (almost as smart as the smart device that he is successfully handling) versus the less intelligent woman. If, initially, sense and

*sensibility* seem to pertain to the man, and lack of depth, and emotionality, to the woman, the end of the ad circumvents all these stereotypes.

The second part of the video reveals Emma as a subtle, playful, ironic (even sarcastic) and now technologically adapted and integrated individual, who proves to her husband that she has finally taken in his pestering advice, and “weaponized” it (metaphorically speaking) against him. This turn against the husband using his own assumptions and world view does not only prove her adaptability and cleverness, but also helps her make a few valuable points of her own.

She shows, for one, that respect for communication is not proven in abstract, in the absence of a real exchange, merely by being preoccupied with the means to promote it while in fact forgetting about the message itself and how to be inside, or *be actively involved* in the act and the encoding and decoding that it presupposes, minding the context, striving to be accurate, balancing elements to negotiate meanings etc. In the husband’s case, the “how” of communication takes precedence over the “what” of it, in the proverbial battle between form and essence, and illustrating the equally proverbial danger of the (preoccupation with the) former taking precedence over the latter.

Taking this idea into account, in the ad there is a play upon who is really open to and good at communication and who is not. Our bet is initially the husband, as the quality of being a good communicator gets associated with an interest in cutting-edge gadgets, because nowadays the spree for technological advancement is motivated in discourse with a desire to enhance communication worldwide, sometimes even abusively so, rather than recognizing that it is merely offered as a pretext to mask, for instance, financial interests (especially beyond a certain limit, where communication at its best is already ensured anyway). Consequently, the husband is presented as the one in tune with change and wanting to open his wife’s eyes on the world out there, of infinite possibilities when it comes to communicating, while her passivity and disinterest in the tablet can be mistaken for a disinterest in communication, and falsely be considered to point to poor communication skills. Manipulation here consists, therefore, in superposing or overlapping two interpretations, and abusively suggesting that one entails the other: being avoidant of gadgets, unwilling to use them, or/and incompetent in this respect is equated with want of skill in communication, or being reluctant to communicate. The overlap of the attributes mentioned above is an intention to present an inductive argument as a deductive one, i.e. to suggest that Emma’s incompetence when it comes to communication is a certainty because she refuses to use a tablet, instead of a mere probability/possibility. An inductive argument shows that a conclusion is likely, but not definite: “Inductive logic investigates the process of drawing *probable* (likely, plausible) *though fallible* conclusions from premises.” [30], as opposed to deductive arguments, in which the conclusion is a logical necessity [31].

The outcome of the situation described in the video, however, teaches the husband a lesson. One of the meanings contained in this lesson is the importance of context in communication. The most significant aspect added and highlighted by the theories of communication that have followed, chronologically, to the Shannon and Weaver linear or mathematical model, has been circularity, or feedback, or minding the variables of the context [32]. Onwards, the further development brought by the cybernetic model, structuralism, interpretative sociologies etc. relied heavily on this awareness during the

act [33]. The husband does not mind the elements that create a context in all the situations in which Emma appears: drawing with the child, the recreational activities that involve various objects, the use of post-its etc. By not minding the context, the husband limits (or would limit, if permitted) the experiences in question. Although the alignment with the modern requirement of being a competent user of technology seems to recommend the man as the best communicator in theory, he is found lacking in practice.

Emma appears to be a versatile semiotician, instead of an ignorant (which is the picture that her husband is painting her in), since she plays with the components of the sign, as announced by Saussure and then developed by others further. When she brings her husband the tablet with the image of toilet paper instead of the actual object, she in fact shows him how significant the difference between the signifier, or “sound-image”, the signified, or “concept”, and thirdly, the referent or item, or “thing”, can be [34]. Instead of extending the physical reality required for, she gives him an image of it as a substitute, in order to demonstrate to him why image and palpable object are not always interchangeable – a notion which he failed to grasp otherwise. She finds a context and a way to transmit this idea to her husband, being an educator in her turn, but a much more effective one than him.

The ending may be interpreted, first and foremost, as a critique of excessive use (and thus, perhaps, abuse) of technology in general. It begs the question if this modern technologization does not come with its downsides. One of these may be that the loss of face-to-face encounters, when mediated ones are possible through the intermediary of a screen, causes people to lose depth and subtlety while communicating, and brings about a reduced capacity to pick up hints and interpret details from the context. This ability may be impaired by the impersonality of long-distance exchanges.

On a personal note, Emma’s reproach to her husband is his insensitivity to her individuality, needs and preferences, accompanied, obviously, even by a hint of superiority. If this superiority or arrogance is not misogyny from his part, it is definitely an embodiment of the Parent state in Eric Berne’s transactional analysis, i.e. a state that takes into account the parental mode and principles that the person has been exposed or used to, whose mannerisms the person has internalized, and which binds one to try and impose these on someone else as a persecutor and/or become (over)protective [35]. What is disturbing about the husband’s behavior is that he triggers a transactional stimulus of the Parent-Child type, presuming to teach his wife as if she were an ignorant kid, instead of the Adult-Adult, from equal groundings, as he should, in relation with her [36]. Since the wife probably naturally expects to be approached as an adult, she is offended by the patronizing tone, and this incongruence bars communication. As a countermeasure to this last manifest feature of her husband’s, the finale allows Emma to take her revenge for having been placed in the child state and role, instead of treated as an adult whose choices are respected and valued. In order to reestablish communication, though, one of them needs to change his or her state, in order to match the partner’s, so as to obtain a complementary transactional response [37]. Therefore, from within the child role, Emma interpellates her husband, fully assuming the part of a rebel child, prone to playing practical jokes and pranks, and slips the tablet to him instead of hygienic paper. Her revenge is more effective while acting from within the role system that he has set up for them, rather than protesting against it, because she shows him that she can beat him at his

own game, and because she has the element of surprise on her part, while rebelling would have been a predictable reaction.

The way her complex response and witticism is condensed in a synthetic, one-gesture, silent feedback makes it all the more effective and hilarious. If we take into account their gender and the stereotypical presumption of male rational superiority, her act can be a statement against this gender bias. We may therefore read it in a feminist key as well, among others. In her gesture, Emma transmits to her husband, without words, all the above-mentioned aspects, which makes her an excellent and intelligent communicator.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

We may consider “Emma!...” or “Paper has a great future” a successful ad, both in terms of being an effective marketing tool, for all the reasons we have seen above, and from the perspective of the pleasurableness derived by the potential consumer in watching it, as it is humorous, entertaining and, I dare say, detaches itself by being satisfyingly intelligent.

The paper was particularly interested in the psychology of the ad. It has thoroughly analyzed how the triggering of affective responses, consisting in both positive and negative emotions, increases attention, flexibility and memory of the product, ultimately leading to purchase and therefore constituting an efficient marketing tool. We have also tracked the ways in which manipulation is in place as well, as the commercial resorts to a buzz topic present in the mind of every global citizen of the modern times, in order to draw attention, then to an emotional rollercoaster, and, finally, to the bafflement of the viewer’s expectations through the recontextualization of the notion of paper by taking it to a new area of its conceptual field using humor (the presence of which is itself strategic). It was extremely interesting to follow the actual psychological dynamic of the viewer in order to see the reasons why (s)he rallies with the female character. Also, the paralinguage considerations, along with the non-verbal clues given by both characters have shown how these can speak more and louder than words. In the end, we started from the stereotypes proposed by the commercial initially, and studied how these are challenged and even reversed, making room for more subtle approaches.

We should not overlook, especially in conjunction with this revisitation of biased perceptions, the didactic stance of the advertisement. Its value is all the greater as this layer is not obvious or ostensible, but subtle and delicately hinted at, which makes it more effective and well received. We are taught that stereotypical thinking is not/should not be part of this century, that context is of paramount importance, that gadget literacy makes neither the best communication, nor the most versatile communicator, and that apparently-obsolete objects have their own worth. The situation also warns us against falling into a sort of autism of communication, in which we become so obsessed with perfecting our skills when it comes to the means that ensure the communicative act, that we run the risk of falling short of performing the actual communication. We also learn, if we pay enough attention, that the representation of an object, or person, and the object or person themselves are not interchangeable. As a corollary, there are certain aspects that make unmediated communication and interaction with objects and people invaluable and irreplaceable. This is a truth that we need to heed in an age in which face-to-face

communication is increasingly considered as outdated, a mentality which might one day make us, as human beings, along with our presence and reactions, unfashionable as well.

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