

# Perspectives on media and advertising research

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**Abstract.** *The field of communication, with all its ramifications, is nowadays, one of the most dynamic and challenging research areas. The recent developments of communication technologies demand a permanent reconfiguration of the conceptual tools which can be used in the theoretical and empirical approach of the field. The recent developments within the sphere of the communicational technologies contribute at the augmentation of the impact of media communication, both on the individual, and on the society at large. In this framework, the necessity of the investigation from multiple perspectives of media communication becomes obvious. One of the scholars whose researches offer such a perspective is Delia Balaban, PhD.*

**Keywords:** *communication, media, media communication, advertising, public relations, new media.*

Because “the physical reality becomes more and more a footnote of the communicational reality,” and we witness a “change in the ontological order of the representation of the world” (Codoban, 2011, 49), media represent a major source of the material used in the process of the construction of communicational reality. The multiple facets of media communication, as well as the dynamics that characterizes the sphere of communication, render impossible the identification

of a definitive methodology which could be used for the theoretical approach of the field and demands an inter- and trans disciplinary perspective. "Characterized by banality, universality, relationality, communication is inevitable, thus its quantification becomes difficult." (Balaban, 2009, 15).

One of the most prolific Romanian scholars in the area of media studies is Delia Balaban. Up to this point of her career, she had an impressive academic activity, approaching a large variety of topics in the domain of media and advertising research. The volume *Perspectives on media and advertising research*, published by Delia Balaban at the Accent Publishing House, in 2014 synthesizes her scientific activity conducted after 2003, when she obtained her PhD title. A first important aspect that has to be mentioned regarding Delia Balaban's perspective on media is the multidisciplinary background which forms the base of her academic activity. Delia Balaban studied philosophy at BA level, has a MA in European studies and a PhD in sociology. Also, her implication in the coordination of the educational programs at the department of communication at Babeş-Bolyai University is remarkable.

But, beside the didactical and administrative activities of Delia Balaban, her research activities are notable. Two key areas stand out in Delia Balaban's research interests: media and advertising. The author proposes a complex undertaking in the field of media studies, adopting both empirical and theoretical approaches of the research topics. Moreover, the reading key of the media phenomenon she proposes offers us comparative analysis which situates the Romanian media within the European context.

Thus, we can identify several main points in the research work of Delia Balaban, marked by the publication of volumes and scientific articles. In this respect, we must underline the relevance and actuality of both the topics and the approaches proposed by her. A large number of volumes and article she published outline a theoretical background in which the author critically addresses some of the most the relevant paradigms and theories operating within the field of media studies. A major point of interest for Delia Balaban, supporting once more the idea of the multidisciplinary background that underlie her scientific activity, is the framing theory, which represents the starting point she adopts in many of the analysis she proposes.

We notice her early interest in the relation between public opinion and television within the Romanian context of the '90. Delia Balaban addresses the subject both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective. The interest towards media communication is further developed in the volume *Comunicare mediatică* (2009) where she proposes a conceptual analysis of the key paradigms and concepts structuring the research field of media communication, emphasizing the density and the multidisciplinary character of the media studies, as well as the

idea that media is an essential factor in the evolution of today's society, acting both as a shaper and as a mirror of the communicational society.

The large variety of theories and approaches which, in fact, constitute the field of communication studies is analyzed by Delia Balaban in the aforementioned volume. The investigation she proposes draws the attention on the legitimacy of the question concerning the place and the role of communication within the framework of social and humanistic sciences. At the same time, the large variety of perspectives approached highlights the uncertain borders of the field of communication studies, which permanently demands reconsideration, especially within the context of a communication society.

An important part of the overall image of the Romanian media outlined by Delia Balaban in her works is presented in the papers where, starting from the premise of the framing theory, she proposes some very intriguing content analysis in order to present the Romanian media coverage of some actual subjects, such the presence of religious elements in the political communication. (Balaban, Iancu, 2009)

But, not only the content transmitted by media communication is addressed by her. In several articles published in important journals, she focuses on the main actors involved in the communication process and she investigates, from a comparative perspective, the perception on the role of journalists in Romania, but also in different countries from Western and Eastern Europe.

The research activity conducted by Delia Balaban focuses also on the post-communicative phase of the mediated communication process. In this respect, the author directs her attention to the challenges raised by media use. Starting from the basis provided by the uses and gratification theory, through the studies she conducted together with her colleagues, she offers illustrative perspectives on media usage among children, teenagers and students.

Furthermore, Delia Balaban's interest in the field of communication studies covers the topic of public relations and advertising, in addition to their transformation within the context of Romanian markets. She proposes theoretical analysis of the evolution of the PR domain in the Romanian context, as well as empirical researches with reference to the professionalization process of public relations domain, its role and image in Romania as well as the PR evolution, given the recent development of new media.

One of the most changing and challenging area of media communication is advertising. Advertising has become an integral part of everyday life, but it is also one of the most contested domains, from various perspectives. The cultural force of advertising is the result of the convergence of several factors, such as the symbolic dimension of advertising, which, within the framework of consumer society, becomes, according to some voices, the equivalent of the myth of traditional

society. The ubiquity of advertising also contributes to the increase of its force, transforming it into a global phenomenon with multiple implications, both in the life of the individual and of society as a whole.

Alongside the fact that advertising penetrates the whole sphere of media communication – the territory of entertainment, literature or special programs, (Balaban, 2008, 20) we remark that the persuasive message specific for advertising penetrates the entire social area, including fields which were “safe” from the logic of advertising. Whether we refer to areas such as the political communication or the professional life, the model of advertising communication has become a trend and the necessity of acquiring “advertising skills” is more and more evident. Within the framework of the insinuation of persuasive communication characteristic for advertising into the main areas of the social life, the contemporary culture becomes a “promotional culture.” (Wernick, 1992)

The investigation of a complex phenomenon such as advertising communication, demands a plural approach, and, accordingly, the usage of different methodologies; “the import of research paradigms from other domains,” (Balaban, 2009, 24), represents a characteristic both of media communication in general, and of advertising communication in particular. We mention the fact that the approach proposed by Delia Balaban in her texts comes rather from the sphere of the communicator, even though there are plenty of references at the critical theories vis-à-vis the impact and the effects of media culture. This perspective is obviously a legitimate one, especially in the context of the accelerate professionalization of communication. Thus, Delia Balaban invests great deal of effort and resources in the investigation of this field, shaping a complex picture of the advertising, which is conceived both in terms of strategy, as well as of its social and cultural implications. On the one hand, in her endeavor, she proposes a review and a critical approach of the current state of the art in the field of advertising in order to grasp the mechanism of the effective advertising strategy. Therefore, the perspectives presented in the volumes *Comunicarea publicitară* (2005) and *Publicitatea. De la planificare strategică la implementarea media* (2009) become a valuable instrument both for the use of researchers, and of communication students. On the other hand, through the studies she conducted, she brings into attention the major impact of advertising as a cultural and social force in contemporary society. Likewise, the author presents in some of her articles historical approaches and outlines an accurate picture of the Romanian advertising during the communist period.

At the same time, Delia Balaban draws attention on the major changes brought in the sphere of advertising by the recent development of communication technology and the occurrence of new media. The major impact of new media on contemporary society, as well as its fluidity requests the permanent rethinking of

the conceptual tools used in order to grasp its significance in nowadays society. The latest advances in this area represent both a challenge for the communication studies, as well as an opportunity for the communication professionals. The debate surrounding the challenges raised by online advertising are diverse and they concern issues that vary from the problem of the enjoyment of the fundamental rights of the consumer to what Joseph Turow describes as the capacity of new media to determine not only the activity of media firms, but mainly the way we see ourselves and the way we see the others. "Over the next few decades the business logic that drives these tailored activities will transform the ways we see ourselves, those around us and the world at large." (Turow, 2013, 3) Thus, Turow remarks that the advertisements and the promotions can be read as signals that alert the consumers on their own social status. Moreover, the market value of the consumer, established through his online activity contributes to the creation of his digital profile, which has a direct impact on the media content delivered to him and, consequently, on the identification of the consumer as a target or a waste.

Delia Balaban investigates the interaction between advertising and new media from the perspective of the advertiser which integrates with great dexterity in his communicational strategies the instruments offered by the development of new media. Yet, the authors underlie the fact that "the new technologies allow people to continue nowadays the activities specific in the past: to form a group despite the distance that separates them, to organize themselves in the absence of a specific authority, to be capable to make together intelligent decisions and to act." (Balaban, Abrudan, 2009, p. 326) Thus, the internet is both a "mirror and a shadow of the offline world." (Dawson, Cowan, 2004, 6). And this feature is very relevant for the approach of the relation between advertising communication and new media. In this respect, the relation between the development of new media and the instruments it offers and the sphere of traditional media is an important topic of interest for Delia Balaban. In the examination of the swarm marketing, for instance, she draws the attention on the fact that this new instrument reflects in the online sphere a tendency manifested in the offline world as well – the herd instinct. But, the new medium has a major effect on this instrument, as suggested by the usage of the term *swarm*. As she further remarks, "the swarms are fast and powerful, their ability to react is very rapid, and their effect on the crystallization of collective opinions, which can be translatable in shared behaviors, is very strong." (Balaban, Abrudan, 2009, 327). Therefore, even if the technique in itself is not new in the area of marketing, the features of the online sphere profoundly transform it and, thus, it becomes a complex and indispensable marketing instrument, which represents a great opportunity for professional communicators, but which, at the same time, addresses important challenges in terms of ethics and regularization.

The last volume published by Delia Balaban, *Perspectives on media and advertising research*, resumes the results of her scientific activity and presents in a more detailed way some of the most relevant ones. This synthetic volume, together with the above-mentioned papers signed by her outline the picture of media communication understood as a complex phenomenon which fundamentally marks the contemporary society and, at the same time, prove beyond any doubt that Delia Balaban's writings constitute a valuable source which shouldn't be overlooked in the investigation of media communication.

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