

IMAGINED FEMALE IDENTITY IN FOOD ADVERTISING

NESTVARNI ŽENSKI IDENTITET U REKLAMAMA HRANE

ANICA PERKOVIC*, GEORGETA RAȚĂ**, CORNELIA PETROMAN**

*J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia

**Agricultural and Veterinary University of the Banat, Timișoara, Romania

Abstract: Women today appear to face the almost impossible task of achieving both a healthy weight and body satisfaction. The ultra skinny female ideal portrayed in the media (the 'imagined female community') is unrealistic for most of them (the 'imagined female identity'). Our paper presents the results of an analysis of a corpus of 52 issues of a Romanian TV Guide Magazine (*ProTV Magazin*/2003). The corpus of 64 food advertisements is analysed from the point of view of the lexical domains their key-words are circumscribed to, in an attempt to see if there is any overlapping at all between the image promoted by the media and what women would look like if they ate the food advertised for.

Sažetak: Žene se danas susreću s gotovo nemogućim zadatkom postizanja odgovarajuće zdrave težine i zadovoljstva svojim tijelom. Ideal veoma mršave žene koji se prikazuje u medijima ("nestvarna ženska zajednica") nije stvarna za većinu žena ("nestvarni ženski identitet"). U radu su predstavljene rezultati analize korpusa od 52 izdanja rumunjskog TV magazina (*ProTV Magazin*/2003). Korpus od 64 reklame za hranu se analizira sa stanovišta leksičkih domena kako bi se vidjelo da li postoje neka preklapanja između slike koju promoviraju mediji i one kakve bi žene zaista željele biti da jedu hranu koja se reklamira.

Key words: *imagined community, imagined identity, food, and advertising*
Ključne riječi: *nestvarna zajednica, nestvarni identitet, hrana i reklama*

Women today appear to face the almost impossible task of achieving both healthy weight and body satisfaction. The ultra skinny female ideal portrayed in the media (the 'imagined female community') is unrealistic for most of them (the 'imagined female identity'). Achieving a figure resembling that in the media supposes resorting to drastic dieting behaviours contrasting with the 'calorie'-flooded environment, advertised in women's magazines.

The purpose of this study was to see whether the weight-related messages and themes from food advertisements in TV guides reinforce or contradict the messages and themes communicated in food advertisements focusing on weight control within the same TV guides.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

We analysed 52 issues of the 1st popular Romanian TV guide (*ProTV Magazin*) in 2003 and 64 occurrences of food related advertisements, grouped in the following advertisement food categories: **fruits and vegetables** (fresh, dried fruit, juices, canned, tomato sauce, frozen, other); **fats, oils, sweets** (cookies, dessert/cake mixes, candy, pudding, margarine, shortening, butter, baking chips, cream cheese, ice cream/popsicles, olives, oil, mayonnaise, sugared drinks, nuts, other); **milk/dairy** (cottage cheese, yogurt, milk, cheese, other); **condiments** (seasonings, broth, sauces, salad dressings, other); **grains** (baking mixes, sugar-sweetened cereal, whole grain cereal, white bread, whole grain bread, granola/snack bars, crackers, chips, pasta/rice, other); **protein** (nuts, meat, poultry, fish, beans, soy, eggs/egg substitutes); **combinations** (instant soups – canned, dehydrated, frozen meals, packaged dinners – mac & cheese, etc.), **health foods** (sugar substitutes, meal replacements, energy bars,

supplements), and *miscellaneous* (other); *beverages (other than milk, juice and sugared)* (bottled water, coffee and tea, alcohol, diet drinks, other) (Jacobson, p. 64).

All food related advertisements (n = 38) were analysed, along with all nutrition related advertisements (n = 5). Advertisements were identified as being either weight-related (n = 3) or non weight-related (n = 35). Type of key-words and lexical domains (or semantic fields) were documented for all advertisements (n = 38) and for all weight-related advertisements (n = 3).

Finally, we analysed the **lexical** (or **semantic**) **domains** (or **fields**) the different terms applied to food in the advertisements of our corpus are circumscribed to, bearing in mind that such a **domain** (or **field**) refers to 'a range or system of referents that have some aspect of meaning in common' (in other words, the meaning of a word depends partly on the other words it is related to in meaning). [CHALKER & WEINER, 1994]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We have inventoried a number of 38 food advertisements with 64 occurrences, grouped in the following **advertisement food categories**:

- **fruits and vegetables** (n = 5): the "Cappy" orange juice ad (n° 6, 7, 9) says it is "100% intense sensations"; the "Prigat" orange juice ad (n° 26, 29) says "Nature is full of miracles. Enjoy them. Prigat is the natural choice".

- **fats, oils, sweets** (n = 17): the "Wiesana Experta" margarine ad (n° 15, 15, 17, 17) says "It is as expert in sandwiches / mashed potatoes / pasta as in mashed potatoes / roasts, sauces, pasta and in baked apples or pears. It's true! For Wiesana Experta diversity is so... simple! With Wiesana Experta you are at home"; the "Ulvex" vegetal oil ad (n° 22, 23) says "Home-made food is the tastiest! Who cooks with it knows it. He/She knows that Ulvex is high-quality vegetal oil that will help you, drop by drop, cook wonderful food. Tasty meals that always bring all the family round the table. With Ulvex, you can cook a lot and well!"; the "Heidi" chocolate range ad (bonbons, bars, and figurines), whose slogan is "Passion for Chocolate", says about Pralinetti bonbons (n° 10) that "Chocolate jewels have something of the eternal love stories", of the bar chocolate (n° 13) that "After the first bite you feel like slowing down you heart beats", and about the Easter bunnies (n° 17, 18) that "It is in spring that Heidi bunnies bloom. And crave for you" and about Santa Clauses (n° 49, 50, 51) that they represent "The Passion for Winter Celebrations"; the "Mars" chocolate bar ad (n° 12) says "I have got the remote control. Mars is pleasure you can't measure"; the "Tic Tac Spearmint" ad (n° 40) says "Tic Tac Spearmint Sets the fashion of freshness! ...with only 2 calories!"; the "Pepsi Twist" soda ad (n° 18, 20) advises you to "Ask for more".

- **milk/dairy** (n = 6): the "Hochland" Swiss cheese ad (n° 20, 21) says "It naturally pleases you. Produced after a traditional recipe, of the best milk, Hochland cheese naturally pleases you. In addition, as it is sliced in even slices hygienically wrapped, it is ready to make a sandwich. Making sandwiches is a pleasure, eating them, a delight! Do taste the new Hochland cheese, in two variants: classical and smoked. Hochland. The joy of taste!"; the "Vitalinea" yoghurt from Danone (with strawberries, cereal, and blueberries) ad (n° 31) says "It is so easy to keep your shape fit! With 0% fat and rich in vitamins, the new Vitalinea has now an incredible good taste. Try it to keep your shape fit! Vitalinea. For a fit shape!"; the "Milli" milk shake (with chocolate, honey, and strawberries) ad (n° 17, 18, 19) says "Shake. Milk tasting like chocolate, honey, and strawberry. If you like milk, drink Milli Shake. It's mmmm! It's yummy! It's yupee! It's mega! It's Milli Shake! Stir it well before (drinking) and have another one after (having drunk it)! Milli Shake. You'll love it madly!"

- **condiments** (n = 3): the "Fuchs" condiments for potato, rice, and beans ad (n° 15, 17) says "Absolving from fasting and allowing tasting. If fasting food is so good, then try and imagine how tasty Easter food is going to be if you use special condiments for eggs or lamb,

plus dill and officinal rosemary. Fuchs. High-class condiments”; the “Kotànyi” condiments for grill ad (n° 28) says “Enjoy your food! Be it fish or meat, the special Kotànyi condiment mix for barbecue gives your food a special taste and barbecuing becomes a pleasure! Kotànyi. What would I do without it!”

- **grains** (n = 0);

- **protein** (n = 2): the “Forzoso” Prager (sausages) for children ad says “Who else in this solar system provides little earthlings fuel with minimum 70% meat and maximum 15% fat? Have a bite and get into adventure [???” (n° 42) and “Since we want to avoid preservatives, I put the sausages in atmosphere controlled tubs! Have a bite and get into adventure [???” (n° 44).

- **combinations, health foods, miscellaneous** (n = 0);

- **beverages (other than milk, juice and sugared)** (n = 31): the “Dorna” mineral water ad (n° 25, 27, 35) says “I’m torrential/I’m melting. You are 70% water. You are what you drink. You are a torrent of pleasure. You are a torrent of feelings. You are a rainfall of emotions. You are 70% water. And you crave for 100% purity. You need Dorna. Transparent, natural and clear, it is your source of vitality and freshness directly from Vatra Dornei, an area ecologically protected. So that you can evaporate when you fall in love. So that you can be alive!”; the “Bucovina” flat mineral water from the Bucovina Enterprises S.R.L. ad (n° 1) says “For a balanced life, drink Bucovina flat mineral water. It has a perfectly balanced mineral content. There are no side-effects, you won’t turn into heroes or have to see a doctor. This is the Bucovina flat mineral water – water whose minerals are in perfect balance that brings the craving for life and body harmony to those who drink it. It quenches your thirst at table, in the office, or even at the bar and is essential in preparing food for both children and adults. Bucovina flat mineral water is the best solution for the hydrating of those who make efforts, practice sports, or are on a diet. Are you a balanced person? You know what to do day after day...”; the “Brasero” Nescafe ad (n° 41, 43, 45, 47) says “If everything is dizzy when you wake up in the morning... start it with a good coffee. Tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac... Boom! The clock has rung. You can barely open your eyes. Wake up with Brasero NESCAFE. The essence of coffee from well-roasted coffee beans for a strong coffee. Brasero NESCAFE is exactly what you need to chase away fatigue and see the day to come with good eyes”; the “Rai de Murfatlar” wine ad (n° 18, 20, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30) says “Is life hard? Sweeten it with RAI de Murfatlar”; the “Prahova Valley” wines ad (n° 1) says “Prahova Valley. Love at first taste. The Prahova Valley wines, carefully matured, are, with their specific finesse, a delight for refined tastes. They have the unique gift of turning any moment into a truly memorable one. All you need is a drop of Prahova Valley to rediscover passion. A drop of passion”; the “Tuborg” beer range ad, strongly anchored in the pre-Christmas atmosphere, says about the “Tuborg Christmas Brew” (n° 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51) that “It has the special winter celebrations taste”, and that the “Tubycap” (n° 18, 20, 20) is “For open-minded people only/Nothing can open a party better than Tubycap/Tuborg makes it, Tubycap opens it. Whoever lives his/her life lives Tuborg. You and Tuborg”

Table 1 shows the share of food advertisements in the most read TV guide in Romania (*ProTV Magazin*) in 2003, in number of occurrences and percentage shares of the different food advertising categories.

1. As one would expect, but not also hoped for, **beverages** (among which alcoholic drinks) share almost 1/2 (48%) of the food advertisements published in the *ProTV Magazin* over the year 2003, followed by **fats, oils, and sweets** (27%), while there are no advertisements for **grains** or **combinations, health foods, and miscellaneous**. Analysing the healthy food consumption pyramid, we can notice the following:

- *bread, cereal, rice, and pasta* share nothing of the total food advertisements;

- *vegetables and fruits* share only 8% of the advertisements;
- *milk, yogurt, and cheese* (9%), on one hand, and *meat, fish, poultry, and eggs* (3%) share only a total of 12% of the advertisements;
- *fat and sugar* share a total of 27% of the advertisements.

Table 1

Share of Food Advertising Categories in advertisements in 2003 (*ProTV Magazin*)

Food Advertising Categories	Advertisements	
	Number of occurrences	%
Fruits and vegetables	5	8
Fats, oils, sweets	17	27
Milk/Dairy	6	9
Condiments	3	5
Grains	0	0
Protein	2	3
Combinations, health foods, miscellaneous	0	0
Beverages (other than milk, juice and sugared)	31	48
Total	64	

2. Over the 38 food-related advertisements (n = 38) we have analysed, 5 are **nutrition-related** (13%):

- the “Tic Tac Spearmint” (n° 40) emphasises low calorie content: *‘Tic Tac Spearmint. Sets the fashion of freshness! ...with only 2 calories!’*;
- the “Hochland” Swiss cheese (n° 20, 21) praises the advantages of the product: *‘traditional recipe, made of the best milk, even slices in a safe wrapping’*;
- the “Vitalinea” yoghurt from Danone (with strawberries, cereal, and blueberries) (n° 31) emphasises the 0% fat and vitamin content: *‘For a harmonious shape!’*;
- the “Forzoso” Prager (sausages) for children praises the advantages of the product: *‘minimum 70% meat and maximum 15% fat’* (n° 42), and *‘atmosphere controlled tub’* (n° 44);
- the “Bucovina” flat mineral water from the Bucovina Enterprises S.R.L. (n° 1) relies on the mineral balanced content: *‘perfectly balanced minerals’, ‘body harmony’, ‘a balanced life’*;

3. There are only 3 **weight-related advertisements** (8%):

- the “Tic Tac Spearmint” (n° 40) emphasises low calorie content: *‘Tic Tac Spearmint. Sets the fashion of freshness! ...with only 2 calories!’*;
- the “Vitalinea” yoghurt from Danone (with strawberries, cereal, and blueberries) (n° 31) emphasises the 0% fat and vitamin content: *‘For a harmonious shape!’*;
- the “Forzoso” Prager (sausages) for children praises the advantages of the product: *‘minimum 70% meat and maximum 15% fat’* (n° 42), and *‘atmosphere controlled tub’* (n° 44).

4. We have inventoried a number of **59 key-words** in the food advertisements in our corpus: *‘adventure’* (the “Forzoso” Prager ad), *‘balanced’* (the “Bucovina” flat mineral water ad), *‘celebration’* (the “Tuborg” beer range ad), *‘delight’* (the “Hochland” Swiss cheese and the “Prahova Valley” wines ads), *‘diet’* (the “Bucovina” flat mineral water ad), *‘diversity’* (the “Wiesana Experta” margarine ad), *‘emotion’* (the “Dorna” mineral water ad), *‘essence’* (the “Brasero” Nescafe ad), *‘eternal’* (the “Heidi” chocolate range ad), *‘expert’* (the “Wiesana Experta” margarine ad), *‘feeling’* (the “Dorna” mineral water ad), *‘finesse’* (the “Prahova Valley” wines ad), *‘fit’* (the “Vitalinea” yoghurt ad), *‘freshness’* (the “Tic Tac Spearmint” and the “Dorna” mineral water ads), *‘gift’* (the “Prahova Valley” wines ad), *‘good’* (the “Hochland” Swiss cheese, the “Bucovina” flat mineral water, and the “Brasero” Nescafe ads),

'*hard*' (the "Rai de Murfatlar" wine ad), '*harmony*' (the "Bucovina" flat mineral water ad), '*heart*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range ad), '*home*' (the "Ulvex" vegetal oil ad), '*hygienically*' (the "Hochland" Swiss cheese ad), '*incredible*' (the "Vitalinea" yoghurt ad), '*jewel*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range ad), '*joy*' (the "Hochland" Swiss cheese ad), '*life*' (the "Bucovina" flat mineral water, the "Rai de Murfatlar" wine, and the "Tuborg" beer range ads), '*live*' (the "Dorna" mineral water and the "Tuborg" beer range ads), '*love*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range, the "Milli" milk shake, the "Dorna" mineral water, and the "Prahova Valley" wines ads), '*madly*' (the "Milli" milk shake ad), '*melt*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range ad), '*memorable*' (the "Prahova Valley" wines ad), '*miracle*' (the "Prigat" orange juice ad), '*nature*' (the "Prigat" orange juice ad), '*natural*' (the "Prigat" orange juice and the "Dorna" mineral water ads), '*naturally*' (the "Hochland" Swiss cheese ad), '*passion*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range and the "Prahova Valley" wines ads), '*perfect*' (the "Bucovina" flat mineral water ad), '*pleasure*' (the "Mars" chocolate bar, the "Hochland" Swiss cheese, the "Kotanyi" condiments, and the "Dorna" mineral water ads), '*please*' (the "Hochland" Swiss cheese ad), '*purity*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad), '*quality*' (the "Ulvex" vegetal oil ad), '*rainfall*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad), '*refined*' (the "Prahova Valley" wines ad), '*sensation*' (the "Cappy" orange juice ad), '*shape*' (the "Vitalinea" yoghurt ad), '*simple*' (the "Wiesana Experta" margarine ad), '*special*' (the "Fuchs" condiments, the "Kotanyi" condiments, and the "Tuborg" beer range ads), '*specific*' (the "Prahova Valley" wines ad), '*story*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range ad), '*sweeten*' (the "Rai de Murfatlar" wine ad), '*taste*' (the "Pepsi Twist" soda, the "Hochland" Swiss cheese, the "Vitalinea" yoghurt, the "Fuchs" condiments, the "Kotanyi" condiments, the "Prahova Valley" wines, and the "Tuborg" beer range ads), '*tasty*' (the "Ulvex" vegetal oil and the "Fuchs" condiments ads), '*torrent*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad), '*torrential*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad), '*traditional*' (the "Hochland" Swiss cheese ad), '*unique*' (the "Prahova Valley" wines ad), '*vitality*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad), '*vitamin*' (the "Vitalinea" yoghurt ad), '*water*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad), and '*wonderful*' (the "Ulvex" vegetal oil ad).

Among them, 11 key-words words (19%) define **lexical domains** [Bucă et al., 1978]: '*diversity*' (the "Wiesana Experta" margarine ad), '*gift*' (the "Prahova Valley" wines ad), '*jewel*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range ad), '*joy*' (the "Hochland" Swiss cheese ad), '*love*' (the "Heidi" chocolate range, the "Milli" milk shake, the "Dorna" mineral water, and the "Prahova Valley" wines ads), '*madly*' (the "Milli" milk shake ad), '*pleasure*' (the "Mars" chocolate bar, the "Hochland" Swiss cheese, the "Kotanyi" condiments, and the "Dorna" mineral water ads), '*rainfall*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad), '*shape*' (the "Vitalinea" yoghurt ad), '*specific*' (the "Prahova Valley" wines ad), and '*water*' (the "Dorna" mineral water ad).

As for the rest of the words, they are circumscribed to the following **lexical domains** [BUCĂ et al., 1978]: '*love*' (6 times), '*astonishment*', '*beauty*', '*pleasure*', and '*temper*' (5 times each), '*fun*', '*health*', '*refinement*', '*superlatives*', and '*sympathy*' (4 times each), '*cleanness*', '*desire*', '*existence*', '*intelligibility*', '*sensitivity*', and '*tradition*' (3 times each), '*distinction*', '*enthusiasm*', '*friendship*', '*goodness*', '*happiness*', '*impossibility*', '*intelligence*', '*joy*', '*laughter*', '*originality*', '*peace*', '*perfection*', '*rest*', '*salvation*', '*sincerity*', '*skill*', and '*talent*' (2 times each), and '*admiration*', '*birth*', '*calmness*', '*consent*', '*cordiality*', '*courage*', '*decoration*', '*defence*', '*discipline*', '*diversity*', '*economy*', '*effort*', '*erudition*', '*expertise*', '*feast*', '*food*', '*freedom*', '*generosity*', '*grandeur*', '*hope*', '*imagination*', '*imprudence*', '*kindness*', '*luxury*', '*mania*', '*medicine*', '*memory*', '*moisture*', '*morality*', '*movement*', '*optimism*', '*ornament*', '*particular*', '*past*', '*permanence*', '*playfulness*', '*precious and semi-precious stones*', '*protection*', '*punishment*', '*rainfall*', '*reputation*', '*restoration*', '*richness*', '*sadness*', '*safety*', '*self-possession*', '*serenity*', '*seriousness*', '*smell*', '*sociableness*', '*specific*', '*specificity*',

'*success*', '*sweets*', '*tenderness*', '*time*', '*trial*', '*trust*', '*unrest*', '*vigour*', '*water*', '*work*', and '*youth*' (1 time each).

There are also **interjections** in the "Milli" milk shake ad that speak themselves about the subjectivity of the advertisement.

CONCLUSIONS

In **advertising food**, the healthy food consumption pyramid is, thus, completely turned upside down (*bread, cereal, rice, and pasta* – 0%, *vegetables and fruits* – 8%, *milk, yogurt, and cheese* and *meat, fish, poultry, and eggs* – 12%, *fat and sugar* – 27%), which shows bad culinary customs among Romanian (advertisers and) consumers.

There is a discrepancy in foods advertised for weight control and weight-related messages among food advertisements in popular TV guides.

Messages contained in food advertisements tend to promote undesirable weight control beliefs and practices.

LITERATURE

1. BUCĂ, M. et al., Dictionar analogic și de sinonime al limbii române, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, București, 1978
2. CHALKER, SYLVIA & EDMUND WEINER, The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar, BCA, London – New York – Sydney – Toronto, 1994
3. JACOBSON, JENNIFER C., Analysis of weight-related advertisements and nutrition articles in popular women's magazines, MSc Thesis, Brigham Young University, December 2003
4. RAȚĂ, GEORGETA, Advertising and Promoting Foodstuff in Romanian Media (A Linguistic Approach), in Proceedings of the Second International Scientific Conference 'Rural Development 2005: Globalisation and Integration. Challenges to Rural Development in Eastern and Central Europe', vol. I, 17-19 November, 2005, Lithuanian University of Agriculture, Kaunas, Lithuania, pp. 139-141
5. RAȚĂ, GEORGETA, On Misleading Labelling in Food Advertising (A Linguistic Approach), in Proceedings of the Second International Scientific Conference 'Rural Development 2005: Globalisation and Integration. Challenges to Rural Development in Eastern and Central Europe', vol. I, 17-19 November, 2005, Lithuanian University of Agriculture, Kaunas, Lithuania, pp. 148-150
6. RAȚĂ, GEORGETA, On the Impact of Advertising and Promoting Food in Romanian Media (The Slogan), in Proceedings of the International Congress on Information Technology in Agriculture, Food, and Environment, vol. II, October 12-14, 2005, Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey, pp. 820-822
7. ***ProTV Magazin, n^{os}. 1-52, 2003