

The emotional intelligence behind and beyond meat advertising

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Abstract

Promoting food products is a tough challenge in a competitive market. Promoting meat products is even more so in a society in which opinions are divided between those who support vegetarian or vegan diets and those who still believe in the nutritional benefits of meat. The present study is an attempt to find out how emotional intelligence strategies can be identified in the stylistics and semiotics of meat or meat alternative commercials from different countries and the emotional impact they may have on customers. Special attention has been therefore given to the frequency of words referring to emotions and to the emotionally laden imagery accompanying the commercials. Since each commercial is a subtle interplay of personal awareness and awareness of the others projected on the strongly emerging background of promoting sustainability, it may subsequently lead to changes in perspectives on meat products, food attitudes and food consumption practices.

Keywords: meat commercials, emotional intelligence strategies, advertising stylistics, advertising semiotics

Introduction

Promoting food products has become a sensitive issue especially when it comes to types of food whose production and consumption go against the efforts of promoting sustainability. Promoting meat products is therefore even more challenging since consumers are encouraged to opt for other healthier, more sustainable alternatives, such as plant-based animal product alternatives or white meat instead of red meat (Bryant, 2022; Nelson et al., 2016; Willett et al., 2019).

In the preface of the Greenpeace report *Dissected. The 7 Myths of Big Meat's Marketing*, Alex Bogusky contends that “As America’s factory farming system exported the philosophy and technology of maximum animal protein per square foot, the consumer was going to have to step up to the plate and eat more meat.” (Delliston, 2021, p. 4) However, this “new factory farm wasn’t as humane, healthy or safe as the traditional farming it was replacing” (Delliston, 2021, p. 4) and there is a surprising upsurge in meat consumption: “Overall meat consumption has continued to rise in the U.S., European Union, and developed world. Despite a shift toward higher poultry consumption, red

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meat still represents the largest proportion of meat consumed in the U.S (58%).” (Daniel *et al.*, 2011, p.1)

According to a report published on the site of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the consumption of meat is disproportionately concentrated in the developed countries – 88 kg compared with 25 kg in developing countries (World Agriculture). The increasing demand for meat is directly correlated to a dramatic increase in the level of pollution as well:

The world food economy is being increasingly driven by the shift of diets and food consumption patterns towards livestock products. [...] On the negative side, and in association with policy distortions or market failures, there are environmental implications associated with the expansion of livestock production. For example, through the expansion of land for livestock development, livestock sector growth has been a prime force in deforestation in some countries such as Brazil, and in overgrazing in other countries. Intensive livestock operations on an industrial scale, mostly in the industrial countries but increasingly in the developing ones, are a major source of environmental problems through the production of point-source pollution (effluents, etc.) (World Agriculture)

On this background, the efforts to balance meat consumption with the impact on the environment and the trends in various countries, alternatives such as Impossible Foods in the US have been put forward. The American commercial launched in May 2024 “speaks directly to America’s meat-eaters in a tongue-in-cheek style, opening with a ‘call-to-action’ for them to solve the ‘meat problem.’ It takes the environmental imperative for people to eat less meat and turns it on its head.” (Hamlett, 2024) On the other hand, there is a marked tendency to encourage people to embrace the practice of consuming locally produced meat. Thinking of all the factors contributing to the carbon footprint of meat production – from production and distribution of animal feed to distribution of meat cuts or meat based products – “animal based products are different because their production also represents a well-documented existential threat to humanity itself thanks to a runaway carbon footprint that already represents 19% of all greenhouse gas emissions” (Delliston, 2021, p. 5). It seems like the ideal enterprise would be to cover all the stages locally and thus really come under the umbrella of sustainability as the Greenpeace document authors stipulate “Factory meat’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and global warming are a scientific fact and watching any industry delay and derail our progress is unacceptable.” (Delliston, 2021, p. 5) At European level there are also great

concerns regarding the production of meat products and the impact of the entire chain of production on animals' health and consequently on consumers' health:

The livestock sector, like much of agriculture, plays a complex economic, social and environmental role. Society expects the sector to continue to meet rising world demand for animal products cheaply, quickly and safely. It must do so in an environmentally sustainable way, while managing the incidence and consequences of animal diseases and providing opportunities for rural development, poverty reduction and food security. (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2009, p. 6)

The present study has therefore been pursued on the background of pervasively emerging policies meant to promote sustainability and has taken into consideration the special focus on encouraging local communities towards sustainable practices of meat production and consumption. It is an attempt to find out how emotional intelligence strategies can be identified in the stylistics and semiotics of meat or meat alternative commercials from Romania, Great Britain and the US and if the discourse aligns with the intention of consolidating the sustainable consumption practices. The commercials were taken from these three different geographical areas since they all entail references to the local, social and cultural context and may shed light on how the consumption of meat or meat substitutes is reflected in social attitudes: Romania as part of the EU and a significant producer of meat products, Britain as a former EU country with a renewed perspective on local production but with an extensively cosmopolitan population, and the US with the most diverse population and acting as a global influencer in the field of heavy meat consumption practices. The aim was to observe how different countries encourage meat consumption while assuring the audience that the meat is produced with the utmost care and sourced locally. On the other hand, the US commercial was chosen to reflect how the reality of consuming too much meat has determined companies to produce plant-based meat, and to highlight the strategies of advertising these products in such a way as to raise the awareness of consumers to the urgent necessity of taking action. Special attention has been given to the frequency of words referring to emotions and to the emotionally laden imagery since the impact is stronger due to all the elements involved: characters and their gestures or facial expressions, and the music that may also contain lyrics that trigger various emotions or emotional memories. The conclusions are meant to raise the awareness of the self of each consumer in the reception process of this type of commercials as well as of the messages delivered to possible consumers on the background of promoting healthy and sustainable eating habits.

1. Emotional intelligence and advertising

Since the launching of the term Emotional Intelligence in the 1990s (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995, 1998), many fields – especially those of psychology, pedagogy, leadership and marketing – have focused on the centrality of emotions in people’s behaviour and interactions. In their groundbreaking article *Emotional Intelligence* Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer define emotions as:

... organized responses, crossing the boundaries of many psychological subsystems, including the physiological, cognitive, motivational and experiential systems. Emotions typically arise in response to an event, either internal or external, that has a positively or negatively valenced meaning for the individual. Emotions can be distinguished from the closely related concept of mood in that emotions are shorter and generally more intense. (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 186)

The Four-Branch Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence proposed by John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey in the chapter *What is Emotional Intelligence?* (1997) offers a ranking of abilities from those perceived by the authors as “simple” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10) to those that involve higher mental processes. This ability model has been selected as a benchmark in view of its inner complexity since it covers all the areas that have to do with an appropriate grasp of the emotion meaning and meaningfulness in various life contexts. The most basic branch comprising abilities such as Perception, Appraisal, and Expression of Emotion has two very important components, among the four ones suggested by the authors, which can be directly linked to the field of advertising: the “ability to identify emotions in designs, artwork etc.” – commercials could easily be included here as a form of art relying on a type of creative, persuasive discourse – through “language, sound, appearance, and behavior” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 11). Aside from this, there is also the core ability in this model referring to the ability “to discriminate between accurate and inaccurate, or honest versus dishonest expressions of feeling” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 11). Commercials are such compounds relying on all the elements that wrap the persuasive message in a more complex construct by resorting to everything that appeals to viewers’ senses: carefully selected words making up a concise message that can be perceived and processed by the possible consumers in a very short span of time, attentively selected sounds or soundtracks - which may be familiar to a certain targeted group age, and people (characters playing in the commercial) chosen based on certain appearance characteristics and prepared to display the intended behaviour in order to convince the audience.

The second branch of the framework is entitled Emotional Facilitation of Thinking and similarly includes areas that can be easily connected to the world of advertising. Thus, the statement: “Emotions prioritize thinking by directing attention to important information.” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 11) can be taken as a valid strategy behind the design and the making of commercials, the intention being the appeal to emotions in viewers in order to steer their thinking abilities and future decisions in the direction of purchasing the advertised goods. Food commercials – and in this case meat or meat alternative commercials – rely heavily on basic feelings erupting from the need to feed the bodies with aliments that satisfy the necessary protein intake as well as even the most pretentious of tastes. This generating of emotions “on demand” as the authors suggest (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 12) may be perceived from a triple point of view: of the business that aims a certain emotional response in the viewer, the mediation of emotions by means of a certain emotional manifestation in the character playing in the commercial, and the emotions experienced by the viewers while watching the commercial – emotions that may steer their attention to things or aspects that spark their personal interest.

The third branch Understanding and Analyzing Emotions - Employing Emotional Knowledge takes us to an even finer understanding of the mechanisms involved in comprehending the meaning of emotions due to the context in which they appear, the connections between the words used, and the connotations they carry. Moreover, an emotionally literate viewer and consumer will be able to detect nuances of meaning, link facial expressions presented in the commercial to the feelings the protagonists experience and want to express, as well as label those particular feelings accurately. The skill of commercial producers is at its best if they can manage to use emotions in the right context, with the right intensity and appropriate transitions, in order to be convincing enough so that viewers will turn into customers. A very subtle transition named by the authors here is the one from “anger to satisfaction” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 11) which is clearly the focus of the American commercial analysed in this paper, a commercial that likewise summons the audience to an accurate interpretation of the emotions going counter to the message delivered. According to the authors, the adult or the growing person is able to “recognize the existence of complex, contradictory emotions in certain circumstances” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 13) which is therefore a skill expected to be displayed effectively especially in circumstances related to contexts or information that will later impact their behaviour as consumers.

The last branch in this spectrum of Emotional Intelligence – Reflective Regulation of Emotions to Promote Emotional and Intellectual Growth – is the one related to more refined abilities, two of which are of particular significance when it comes to the world of perceiving and comprehending

commercials: “Ability to reflectively engage or detach from an emotion depending upon its judged informativeness or utility.” and “Ability to manage emotion in oneself and others by [...] enhancing pleasant ones (*i.e.* emotions) without [...] exaggerating information they may convey.” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 11) While the first one may refer chiefly to the consumer who has to discriminate between the truthfulness of the message, the emotions meant to be triggered and the behavioural intention intended to materialise after watching a commercial, the second one is especially true with respect to the creators of commercials who intend to trigger only pleasant emotions in viewers with the aim of attracting them and winning them as possible consumers and customers. While this may be the case for most commercials and consequently for the Romanian and the British ones in this study, the reverse is also possible as will be seen in the American commercial which may be a reliable testimony to the impact of reversed psychology.

In his book *Emotional Intelligence. Why it can matter more than IQ*, Daniel Goleman, who popularised the concept of Emotional Intelligence, identifies the following positive emotions, each of which can assume various shades of manifestation: love, enjoyment, surprise, hope, and empathy (Goleman, 1995, p. 331–332). These positive emotions may be accompanied or overshadowed by some rather negative ones: anger, fear, sadness, disgust and shame.

The psychologist Paul Ekman also testifies to the universality of several emotions in his book *Emotions Revealed. Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life* and states that “seven emotions each have a distinct, universal, facial expression: sadness, anger, surprise, fear, disgust, contempt, and happiness” (Ekman, 2003, p. 43) which means that these emotions can be easily decoded by anyone: “Each of these emotion terms—sadness, anger, surprise, fear, disgust, contempt, and happiness—stands for a family of related emotions.” (Ekman, 2003, p. 75) The author then adds that: “The variations in intensity within each emotion family are clearly marked on the face” (Ekman, 2003, p. 75). What is problematic however, is the specificity of each emotional episode since positive emotions (happiness for example) may have a negative impact on the viewer (happiness perceived as spite, mockery etc.) and negative emotions may elicit positive feelings in the viewers (sadness may give rise to empathy). Probably more relevant for the area of advertising is that “The different types of happiness may be revealed in the timing of this facial expression, but the primary signal system for happy emotions is the voice, not the face” (Ekman, 2003, p. 76). Therefore, the viewer must be aware of how genuine the feeling of happiness manifested by the characters performing in commercials is and if the tone of voice matches the facial expression and thus turns the message into a more convincing one. Furthermore, since “the face more often than the voice gives false emotional messages” (Ekman, 2003, p. 77), it takes the skill of an emotionally

literate person to read the true intentions beyond the faces of people acting in commercials. The speed with which emotions are expressed impacts the decoding time significantly. In the commercials with an external voice, the people in the video material are meant to keep a positive facial expression for the length of the material, as can be seen in the Romanian and the British commercials analysed in this study, whereas in the commercials where the people as such directly address the audience – as will be the case of the American commercial – the viewer has to infer whether there is sincere correspondence between the facial expression and the message conveyed verbally. “Emotion signals emerge almost instantly when an emotion begins. [...] As long as an emotion is on, it will color the voice” (Ekman, 2003, p. 73) which is exactly what happens when the message in a commercial is verbalised by the person performing in it. The American commercial sticks to a sort of cultural tradition of acting out, of being there and having one’s voice heard while conveying the message with complete emotional involvement, even if the correspondence between what is said and what is meant seems to be a tricky one.

In the commercials in which the message is being transmitted by an impersonal voice – like that of an external narrator – the viewer has to decode the visual input and attach meaning to the facial expressions of people in the commercial. Due to this fact, the facial expression may be perceived as unnatural but perfect for the message it wants to convey – that of the perfect experience the consumers may experience if they purchase or try the specific product being advertised. One way of establishing the truthfulness of the feeling of happiness expressed in all earnestness is by recognizing the Duchenne smile whose genuineness consists in the appearance of the eye wrinkles and the raised cheeks. As Ekman points out: “Our research confirmed Duchenne's assertion that no one can voluntarily contract the orbicularis oculi muscle (it ‘does not obey the will’), although it is only part of that muscle that is hard to contract voluntarily.” (Ekman, 2003, p. 223) which means that it either takes a very good actor to really express this emotion in relation to what is being advertised or a person who is truly convinced of the quality of the product he or she is advertising and becomes thus a truthful messenger for the specific company or enterprise.

What needs to be added here are the two dimensions identified by Daniel Goleman in his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998): the Personal Competence which is revealed in abilities such as self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation (commitment and initiative) and the Social Competence which impacts the way we handle relationships. The Personal Competence abilities in discussing the impact of commercials refer mainly to those possessed by the viewers that need this stable knowledge of their preferences and their reaction to something which is being promoted.

Furthermore, knowing what is good for oneself will not only regulate the attitude towards the commercial and its message but also towards the buying impulse that is being targeted.

The Social Competence relies on two broad competencies, one of which is empathy which may be manifested in service orientation and leveraging diversity. From the perspective of advertising, “service orientation: anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers’ needs” and “leveraging diversity: cultivating opportunities through different kinds of people” (Goleman, 1998, p. 33) are the engine beyond any good commercial that strives to have the desired impact on the prospective customers. Having the first step taken by means of advertising the product, further emotionally intelligent interactions with the customers will result in “customers’ positive attitudes and behaviours such as satisfaction, product purchase, referral, and loyalty.” (Prentice, 2019, p. 6) Prentice sees emotions as the key to “marketing efficiency and financial performance” (Prentice, 2019, p. 8) since advertising relying on emotions “can nurture a strong and lasting attitude and behavioural change in the exposed audience.” (Yaseen et al., 2022, p. 273). Seen as a persuasive factor which enhances the effectiveness of advertising (Poels & Dewitte, 2019) emotions may facilitate the rapid recollection of messages as well as the impact these messages will have.

2. Semiotics and stylistics in meat advertising

Semiotics as the study of signs and symbols, in particular of the way meaning is constructed and shared between people through codes, is of particular relevance for the field of advertising. Having an individual as well as a social side, speech can only be conceived in this “bilateral mediation of information” (Saussure, 2011, p. 8). The linguistic unit is a double entity formed by associating two terms which are “psychological and united in the brain by an associative bond” (Saussure, 2011, p. 65-66). The linguistic sign unites a concept and a sound image, therefore the impression it makes on our senses is dependent on the concept both the advertiser and the receiver of the commercial have as well as on the force of the sound modulation based on the intention behind the message. The idea of arbitrariness does not refer only to the relation between the signifier and the signified, but also to the impact of the message comprising the signifiers since the personal experience of people may determine the actual meaning of the message.

In the field of advertising semiotics is closely intertwined with rhetoric even if they “offer a very different approach to consumption phenomena, in focusing their differentiation efforts away from the consumer, and on to the sign systems of ads that the consumer confronts” (McQuarrie & Mick, 2003, p. 193) From the point of view of semiotics, messages are made of signs and delivered

through codes which are sign systems understood by all members of a certain community (Saussure, 2011). In rhetoric, meanings tend to acquire a certain degree of flexibility depending on the communicator, the values it represents and the intention ascribed to the message, as well as on the audience and the level of responsiveness to the message delivered. As Keith Kenney and Linda M. Scott observe:

...in late 20th-century terms, rhetoric is more clearly aligned with reader response theory and poststructuralism rather than with New Criticism or structuralism or any other essentialist (or formalist) view.

What this “antifoundationalist” theory of communication means for consumer response is extremely important. First, the provisional view of signs (or text) means that no one word or image will be consistently more “effective” than any other—it would depend entirely on the audience and the situation. (2003, p. 22)

Commercials – and in this case meat commercials – as concrete representations of emotional experiences will likely depend on the foreknowledge and previous experience of consumers and rely on their preferences and proneness to respond in a certain individual way. Relying on “elaborated imagery and discursive (verbal) processing” which are “dynamic tools of thought” (Goossens, 2003, p. 134), commercials target a high involvement state with the presented object on the part of the audience. If the represented emotional experience triggers a positive association in someone’s mind, then the whole message of the commercial may be welcomed.

The cultural embedding of the commercials plays a significant role as well. The commercials shed light on the trends in a specific society and rely on the communal understanding of certain symbols due to their presence in the daily lives of consumers. Moreover, focusing on the way colours are used in meat advertising, these can be linked with the type of emotions they trigger in the prospective consumers: red and pink trigger positive reactions such as happiness and excitement, red and orange used by certain brands create more excitement, while red affects the metabolism and increases appetite (Khattak, 2021).

Semiotic analysis looks for cultural ‘codes’ that are present in a shared understanding of a sector, idea, object, identity or brand. It starts from a principle that everything (colour, music, shape, form, casting, tone-of-voice, etc.) carries meaning – meaning so deeply embedded and culturally accepted that it is often invisible to us unless pointed out. One of the more recognised

models of applied semiotics is the classification of codes into ‘residual, dominant and emergent codes’: with dominant codes being the primary point of reference for the subject area – a tacitly agreed ‘norm’. ‘Red meat = masculinity’ would be an example of a dominant semiotic code that is culturally reinforced by brands in the meat industry. It is not a fact, it is a cultural idea. (Delliston, 2021, p. 10)

While in semiotics the sign stands for something limited by the delineation traced by the signified (concept), in stylistics a sign can stand for something else and the receiver needs to decode and co-create the meaning. The stylistic devices also called rhetorical devices are often part and parcel of advertising due to the imagery they deliver and the emotional content they carry. The most frequently occurring stylistic devices in ads and commercials are the metaphors and antithesis (Mihalache & Velescu, 2023, p. 92) as well as rhyme, puns, irony, alliteration, and metonymy. The intention beyond the use of such devices is that of indirectly steering viewers’ thoughts in the direction intended by the advertiser as well as finding the links between or bridging the experience of the viewer to the imagined reality presented in the commercial. The expected effects of the use of such devices are those of stirring pleasure, persuading, or reinforcing certain consumer convictions. Along with these cognitive stimulants, the vivid imagery in commercials “relies heavily on nonverbal cues to represent the sensory pleasure, cognitive stimulation, and emotional payoffs derived from consuming the product.” (Mulvey & Medina, 2003, p. 225)

The whole construct of a successful commercial relies on the characters’ artfulness of persuading through speech, tonality, facial expressions, and gestures. The omnipresent drama in the mass media revealed in commercials (Esslin, 1979) plays a crucial role in the reception of the commercial if it has a convincing plot, characters and a message that triggers emotions in the audience. As will be seen, the Romanian and the British commercials follow a certain story line around some characters that seem to share in a certain experience or life-style, whereas the American one seems to transcend the boundaries of the circles of friends and family and make the advertised attitude towards the advertised product a matter of national interest. The gradual intensification of emotions from the exposition to the rising action and then the denouement which culminates in full satisfaction with the meat or meat substitute product is meant to exercise a convincing force on the viewer. The emotions that can be seen or inferred fall largely in the category of the basic emotions, usually gravitating either around happiness or sadness turned into happiness due to the product, or surprise or anger at something quasi-imposed by the current trends in meat production and consumption. Not to forget the moral lesson or the moralizing principle that can be drawn, especially

from the commercials that display a certain militant attitude, in this case the one pleading for the consumption of meat substitute products.

The setting – as a significant part of the storyline – acts as emotional trigger since it displays the familiar or the otherness that may become part of the knowledgeable context of the viewers. Some furnishings should be there, like the normal things in a kitchen or at a barbeque, supporting the feeling of expectancy, while others emerge as symbols that need decoding such as the insertion of some cultural or social symbols that carry a particular meaning for the present generation: family life, career, community events or involvement etc. The characters' appearance comprising all the elements from clothing to grooming, their gestures – either minimalistic or exaggeratingly obvious, together with the setting of the action and the visual and sound cues “contribute to the characterization to produce a persuasive communication designed to elicit a particular response from an audience” (Mulvey & Medina, 2003, p. 223).

Last but not least, the messages that accompany the visuals and the characters' acting are the core element that challenges the viewer both cognitively and emotionally. The reliance on puns and rhyming lines makes the commercial more memorable especially when the catchphrases refer to previously experienced feelings or states or a desired emotional fulfillment within a similar context as the depicted relationship.

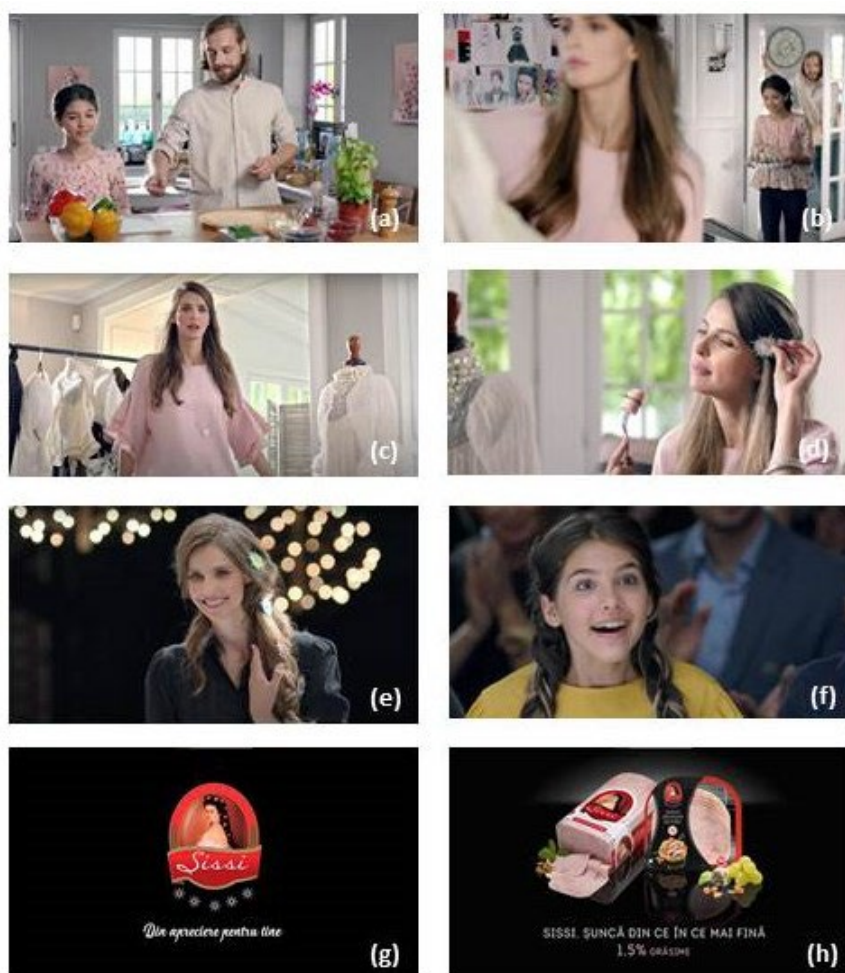
3. A comparative perspective on the emotional and semiotic elements in meat and meat substitute commercials

In order to highlight the correspondence between emotional and semiotic elements in advertising, five commercials, three from Romania, one from the UK and one from the US have been chosen for analysis. All five of them have as the central aim the advertising of meat or meat alternatives. The symbols occurring and the stylistic devices used have been analysed from the perspective of Emotional Intelligence. Special attention has been given to emotions revealed by the characters' facial expressions, the truthfulness in the rendering of emotions and the way facial expressions are consistent with the words used to advertise for the product. Images from the commercials have been elicited in order to supplant the hypotheses with proofs and raise awareness regarding the subtleties involved.

The first Romanian commercial analysed was Sissi – Gestul tau de apreciere (Sissi – Your gesture of appreciation)/ TV commercial (Caroli Foods Group, 2017). The commercial revolves around a young family in which the mother is a busy fashion designer preparing the clothes for a fashion show, while the

daughter is drawing and cutting some paper flowers for her. The daughter will later offer these flowers to her mother together with the sandwiches with ham – the product advertised – which the father is preparing for her. Such a life situation will normally trigger feelings ranging from stress experienced in the preparation of a big event, the joy of offering and receiving as well as the satisfaction one experiences when one's efforts are appreciated. There is an implied feeling of love and appreciation for the work and the needs of others and a coming to meet them in the most refined way. This intermingling of awareness of the Self and of the Other, this mirroring of tastes and the common ground on which complete harmony of taste is achieved is the epitome of an emotionally intelligent commercial.

**Figure 1. Images from the commercial Sissi – Gestul tau de apreciere
(Sissi – Your gesture of appreciation) / TV commercial**



Source: Caroli Foods Group, 2017

The characters in the commercial are silent actors expressing their emotions (joy, surprise, satisfaction) in a very balanced way, while the background song explains in a nutshell the feelings

the family members experience which are intended to convey another message, *i.e.* the one from the producers of the Sissi ham to the consumers, in an attempt to project them in a sort of similar, close relationship like the one of a family. There is – behind the imagery – a promotion of the notion of happy family, with all members looking great, feeling great and doing great things. Not to mention the fact that eating meat will not affect their perfectly slim figure in any way. The images selected from the commercial and included in Figure 1 aim to pinpoint the basic emotions discussed previously: happiness (a, b, e, f), surprise (c, f), satisfaction (d) - which are displayed by the acting people. The verbal messages concluding the commercial Figure 1 (g, h): ‘Out of appreciation for you’ and ‘An ever finer ham.’ provide short, memorable input that viewers will carry away and act upon if the entire commercial has managed to be persuasive enough.

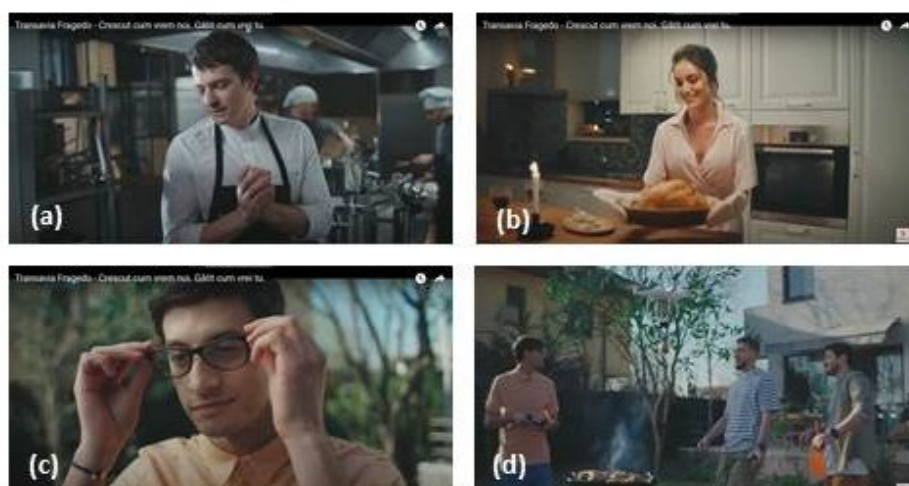
The text of the song sung as the background tune is imbued with words referring to emotions ranging from the deep interpersonal ones to the ones related to the bodily craving for food of superior quality. The love, care and appreciation in the family are also promised by the producers of this ham. Choosing the chanting rhymes will probably have a far lasting effect on the consumers, as they may remember parts of the chant and hum the melody. Everything in the ad aims to keep a kind of high standard of eating practice:

Nu ți-am spus îndeajuns cât	I haven't told you enough how much
te iubesc	I love you
Cât apreciez.	How I appreciate.
Ce e fin, prețuim.	What is fine, we value.
Ce-i sublim, iubim.	What's sublime, we love.
Când simți și crezi, apreciezi.	When you feel and believe, you appreciate.
Ce ți-e drag, mi-e drag.	What is dear to you is dear to me, too.
Mă atragi, te atrag.	You lure me, I lure you.
E real, nu visez, apreciez.	It's real, I'm not dreaming, I appreciate.
Sissi – șunca cu 1% grăsime.	Sissi – ham with 1% fat.
Sissi – din apreciere pentru tine.	Sissi – out of appreciation for you.
Șuncă din ce în ce mai fină.	An ever finer ham.

The fact that the image used on the product is that of the famous Empress of Austria – Elisabeth nicknamed Sisi or Sissi – is meant to trigger new cognitive additions in the viewers with a bit of history knowledge as well as an appeal to the tastes of the more sophisticated consumers. The semiotics is also supportive of the high-class context – a neat, elegant kitchen, a room where elegance

rules in all aspects, and manners that excel in the very preparation of the ham snacks and the gestures of the fashion designer whose taste in this respect is being completely satisfied.

Figure 2. Images from the commercial Transavia Fragedo - Crescut cum vrem noi. Gătit cum vrei tu (Raised as we wish. Cooked as you wish.)



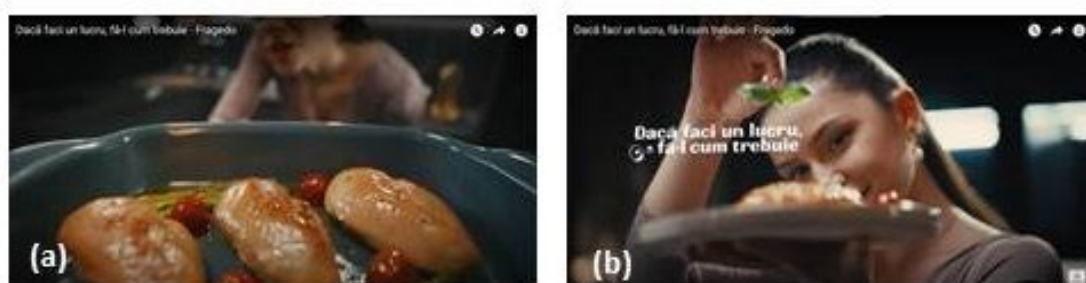
Source: Transavia Romania, 2021

The second Romanian commercial chosen for exemplification is Transavia Fragedo - Crescut cum vrem noi. Gătit cum vrei tu (Raised as we wish. Cooked as you wish.) (Transavia Romania, 2021). Bearing the motto ‘Raised as we wish. Cooked as you wish’ the commercial appeals to various segments of population in order to highlight the fact that even if the animals are raised and the meat presented as the producer pleases, the meat may be cooked in various ways by various people. Here the characters act as typologies for different categories (Figure 2) who are either very intent on preparing and presenting the best plate in a restaurant (a), indulge in preparing a romantic dinner (b), or enjoy barbeques and outings with very creative friends (c, d). The verbal message is short and offering the warranty of acquired expertise and quality in the field together with the promise that the chicken has been raised by respecting certain norms that comply with expected standards and align with the consumers’ previous knowledge and expectations: “For 30 years we have been making the chicken exactly as it should be so that you may do whatever you wish with it. Fragedo chicken - raised as we wish, cooked as you wish.”

The emotions on the faces of the characters can be easily discerned in Figure 2: pleasure (a), happiness (b, d), mild satisfaction (a, c) – all of them expressed in an honest way. Concentration can be seen on all faces in the process of cooking and a final feeling of satisfaction with the outcome. The freedom in choosing how to prepare the meat is obvious.

Another commercial from Romania: *Dacă faci un lucru, fă-l cum trebuie* (If you do one thing, do it right.) - Fragedo (Transavia Romania, 2021) makes use of a well-known tune, *i.e.* Figaro's Aria from *The Barber of Seville*, sung by a female soprano in which the brand name Fragedo has replaced the original Figaro. It culminates with the slogan: “If you do one thing, do it right.” which will resonate with those who know and frequently use the idiom ‘if a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing well’. The dominating emotion expressed is that of joy in singing, cooking and presenting the plate in a very appealing way (Figure 3 a, b).

Figure 3. Images from the commercial *Dacă faci un lucru, fă-l cum trebuie* (If you do one thing, do it right.) - Fragedo



Source: Transavia Romania, 2021

The British commercial *Feed your Family for Less with British Pork* (LovePorkUK, 2024), apart from pleading for the sustainable consumption of locally produced pork, masterfully anchors the practice of cooking in the present reality: use of gadgets and the promise of immersive virtual reality through various culinary cultures: Chinese or Caribbean. The message beyond it is that man's imagination can be richly triggered by all the ingredients which finally lead to a successful cooking experience.

The verbal input seems carefully chosen to stay with the potential customers. Unlike the accepted cliché, dad is doing the cooking, being projected on the background of a silent family in which the mother is helping the young son do the homework and the older, very neat looking earnest daughter is minding her own phone and homework or study. The monotony of a rather boring evening is pierced by the exotic cooking experience only dad is living, particularly due to his vivid imagination. The lines point to a kind of paternal pride or mastery of the situation, while the slightly changed rhyming reduplication: “easy peasy lime squeezy” supports the idea that this particular challenge is easy to be handled:

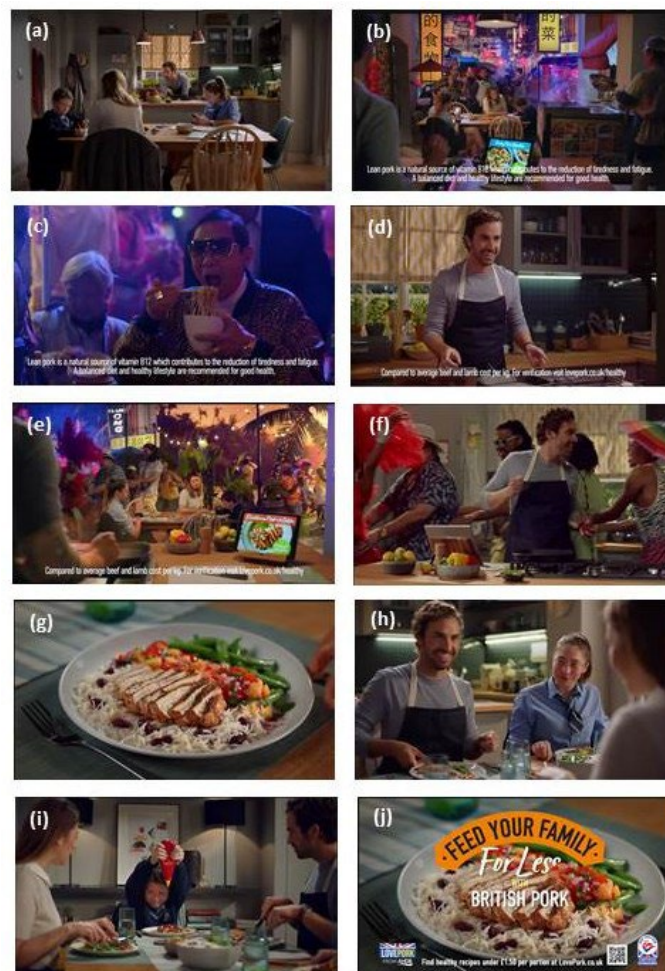
Pork medallions tonight and dad's trying something new.

Sticky Pork Noodles

Or maybe Caribbean Pork
 Now we're talking
 Easy peasy lime squeezezy
 Who's the Daddy?
 Feed your family for less with British pork!

The virtually mediated wishes pierce the cruel reality of the indifferent members of the family (Figure 4 a).

Figure 4. Images from the commercial Feed your Family for Less with British Pork



Source: LovePorkUK, 2024

What is particularly striking in this commercial is the lack of emotional expression on the faces of the family members at the beginning of the commercial. Only the father as the main protagonist seems to be inclined to capture all the feelings on his own face and experience emotional changes whenever the culinary imaginings take him to a different cultural space (Figure 4 b, c, d, e, f). In the end the daughter and the son seem to relish approaching the dish that dad has prepared (Figure 4 h, i, g).

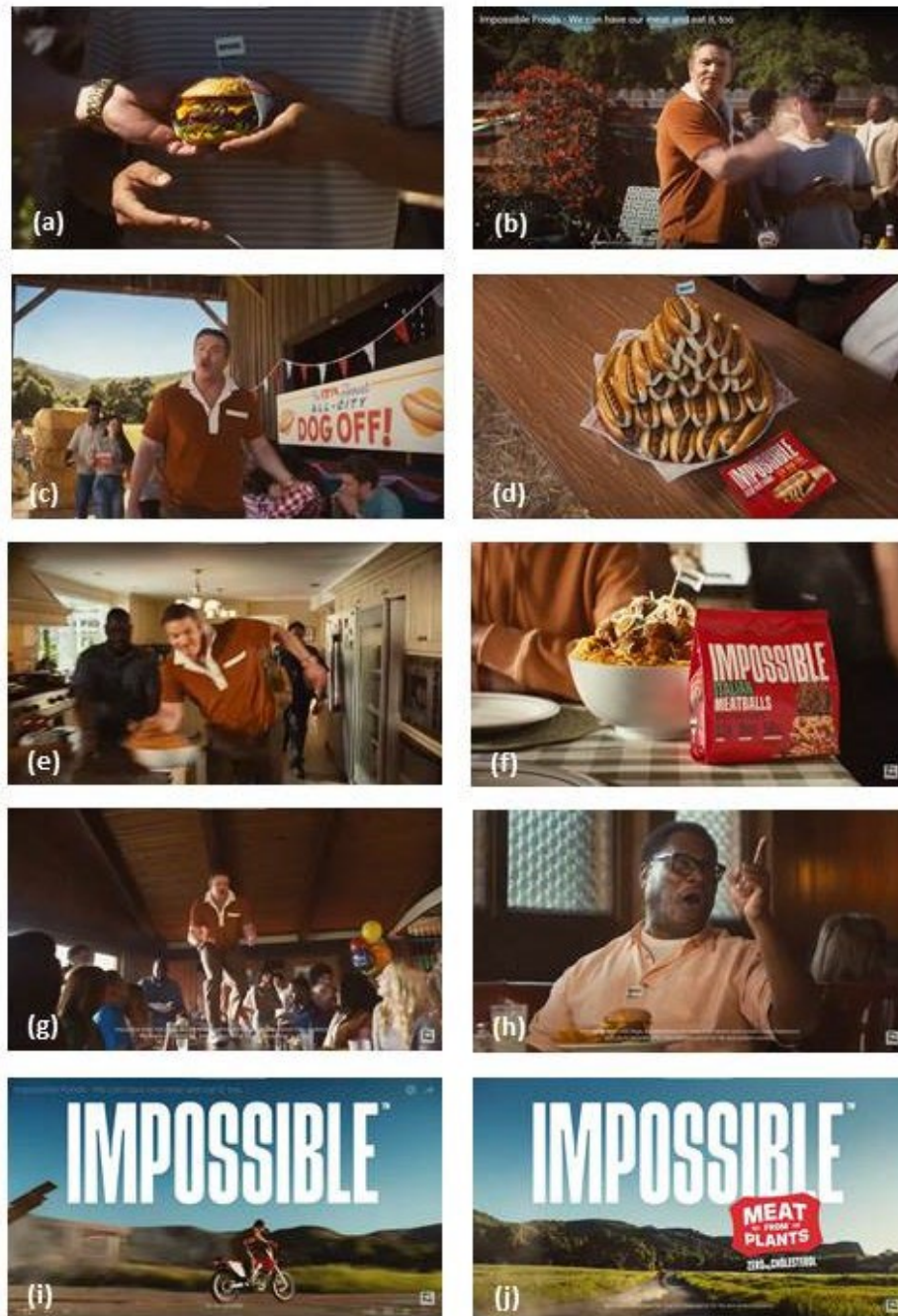
On the other hand, the two dives into the mediated realities bring into the clip people from those particular cultural contexts in an effervescence of moves and sounds, all displaying honest, real joy (Figure 4 f) or rather fake emotional states like the satisfaction of consuming that particular dish by an Asian rich person (Figure 4 c). What the consumers will discover in their own reality is that all the culturally mediated experiences of cooking are intangible and need to be virtually mediated. Besides, what is left when all the glamorous impressions vanish is masterfully rendered by the sound of the ketchup bottle handled by the happy, satisfied boy at the end of the commercial (Figure 4i).

The commercial is intensively appealing to the cognitive abilities of the viewers who will probably remember snippets from it: Who's the Daddy? –overused in the media with various connotations of dominance depending on the context, the phrase easy peasy lime squeezy or even the assonance 'feed your family for (less)' focusing on two essential elements: feed and family (Figure 4j). The written messages accompanying the images in the video are consistent and providing valuable nutritious information: "Lean pork is a natural source of vitamin B12 which contributes to the reduction of tiredness and fatigue. A balanced diet and healthy lifestyle are recommended for good health." and "Compared to average beef and lamb cost per kg. For verification visit lovepork.co.uk/healthy" (LovePorkUK, 2024). What may surprise is the juxtaposition of the two contrasting concepts: British Pork in Chinese or Caribbean dishes, a kind of national production of a product for the sake of sustainably supporting the local economy with an exotic, outside intrusion – although socially very present in the British context – for the sake of taste enhancement.

The American commercial Impossible Foods - We can have our meat and eat it, too (Talihita, 2024) creates a new kind of advertising story by completely reversing the eating practices deeply ingrained in the American culture. The text sounds like a national appeal to a general mobilization in order to find solutions for the problems meat is facing. It sounds like a hilarious turning of tables and although it is meant to steer the perspective towards more sustainable views, it may just have the effect of reversed psychology.

Listen up America! Meat has problems and it's going to take us meat eaters to solve them. So when the world says: 'Too much meat is bad and we should eat less of it!', we say: 'No, world! We should eat more because now we can turn plants into burgers and hot dogs, even meatballs. Now plants can be meat. Come on, people! Let's punch cholesterol in the face! We're solving the meat problem with more meat. Impossible! Meat from plants! (Talihita, 2024)

Figure 5. Images from the commercial Impossible Foods - We can have our meat and eat it, too



Source: Talihita, 2024

The pace is fast. There is a sort of mild aggressiveness and sarcasm in the verbally transmitted message and the gestures accompanying it (Figure 5 a, b, c, e, g, h). By appealing to the old idiom: ‘have your cake and eat it (too)’ and reversing it, the viewer may sense a general attempt to turn the tables upside down. The revolutionary way in which the character delivers the message is faithfully matched by the facial expressions (Figure 5 b, c, e, g, h), the emotional hues, and the emotional impact the pitch of the voice may have on the viewers. The personification of meat hints at what the meat

can stand for in the inferred metonymy: the animals are facing problems because of the intensive farming practices and consequently all living creatures suffer from them in the environmentally troubled context. The message is mainly woven around and may stir negative emotions such as: anger, annoyance and dissatisfaction or may be perceived as hilarious – despite its intended seriousness – and trigger unexpectedly mixed emotions: joy mixed with spite (Figure 5 d, f, i, j).

Bewildering are the messages that appear as written text accompanying the verbal input: “Impossible Beef, Hot Dogs and Meatballs are made from plants and contain 0mg cholesterol. Not low in saturated fat. See nutrition panel for fat and sodium content.” and “Do not attempt.” (Figure 5 g, h, j) The reliance on negatives may make the product seem more attractive, although ‘not low in saturated fat’ is not a promising incentive for health.

The mechanisms that lie at the core of commercials may ensure a lasting impact on the viewers. The memorable lyrics and images from the Romanian and the British commercials seem to be strongly counteracted by the novelty of the message which is exceptionally powerfully rendered in the American one. The foundation of successful advertising is built on the “six frequently repeated themes — salience, persuasion, likeability, symbolism, relationship, emotion. While none of these in isolation can fully explain how advertising works, collectively they do provide an understanding of the fundamental mechanisms of advertising.” (Advertising Mechanisms) From this perspective each commercial presented seems to combine these pillars with a particular preference for those that seem relevant for the geographic and social context it addresses. While the Romanian ones rely more on likeability, symbolism, relationship and emotion, the British one favours salience, relationship and subtle persuasion, and the American one is strongly intent on persuasion and the salient recognition that something needs to be changed in order to reduce meat consumption in an area that tops the statistics in this respect. All of them are thus representative for the global trends in healthy and sustainable consumption practices.

Conclusions

The promotion of food products in general and of meat or meat alternative products in particular is a challenging issue nowadays since advertising has a double role: that of appealing to consumers’ senses and emotions as well as to their cognitive abilities and that of aligning itself to the agricultural policies of supporting and promoting sustainability. As observed in the study, each commercial is a complex construct that aims to fulfill this double role by building a story around protagonists meant to act in a way that convinces the public to buy the product. The question that remains is whether

there is genuine correspondence between the intended message and its actual deliverance by the protagonist. The brevity of the commercial (30 to 50 seconds) means that the message has to be very concise and therefore have a stronger and more immediate emotional impact.

The analysis of the commercials presented revealed some of the emotional intelligence strategies employed in commercials. The emotions used have been carefully selected and usually pertain to the basic, easily recognizable ones, so that the audience may instantly feel emotionally and cognitively engaged. Furthermore, the audience may be ethically challenged depending on the type of emotions the creators of commercials choose their characters to display in relation to the things advertised and the life context in which they are placed. The process of engaging the audience starts with the focus on their needs and desires that act as triggers for further acting as consumers wishing to satisfy their own personal culinary desires and needs and those of others – be they the nuclear family (the Romanian and the British commercials) or the extended community (the American commercial in particular). These triggers appeal to senses such as taste since any satisfying gastronomic experience brings a certain feeling of happiness and relies on the interplay of awareness – of Self and Others – in the way food is approached. Being aware of one's needs makes eating a rewarding experience; consuming the right food in the right way with the right people enhances a community spirit of joyful sharing. The persuasive imagery coupled with the choice of words and songs (in the Romanian and the British commercials) and the tone of voice accompanied by direct eye contact (in the American commercial) are meant to appeal to viewers' former experience or projected ideals combined with their knowledge or even repressed emotions or attitudes. All commercials considered in this study inherently rely on mechanisms of motivating the audience to adopt healthy eating practices which either support the local economies or the global trends of sustainable consumption. The fine border between the personal and the social competence in viewing and perceiving a commercial may be obliterated by the force of the commercial to do away with all the personal convictions (regarding consumption, gender roles, cultural inputs etc.) and make the viewer adopt the make believe of the commercial. The suspension of discernment can only occur when the commercial aligns with all the expectations, the knowledge and the value system of the viewers. Regarding the semiotics in the analysed commercials, some occurring objects may summon up diverging associations (e.g. the jewelry of the Asian eater and the rainbow umbrella hat worn by the Caribbean partying lady in Figure 4).

Given the degree of artificiality of emotional display, the viewer has to master both the art of reading faces and making sense of the truthful intentions as well as the art of inferring the meaning behind the verbal message especially when this one relies on stylistic devices such as metaphor, irony,

and puns. According to Mihalache and Velescu “Both Romanian and British commercials are open and tight in the race for the customers’ attention.” (2023, p. 92) What is more, according to the same study, the British commercials are richer in stylistic devices compared to the Romanian ones, relying heavily on metaphors and antithesis (Mihalache & Velescu, 2023) a fact that has been observed in the present study as well.

Further studies regarding the perception of meat and meat alternative commercials by an audience consisting in students preparing to work in the field of food processing, food control and expertise, and students from the field of Animal Sciences will be performed in order to observe the impact of such commercials on them, their perception of the elements involved in the making of the commercial as well as the way in which they notice the visual, verbal and emotional subtleties. Moreover, for a diachronic perspective, commercials belonging to the same companies and various time frames will be studied in order to analyse the way in which emotions and emotional intelligence strategies are employed.

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