

# IULIU-MARIUS MORARIU

## ADVERTISING AND REALITY IN AN ANTHROPOLOGIC CONTEXT

**Iuliu-Marius Morariu**

Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj, Romania.

**Email:** iuliumariusmorariu@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This is a book review of: Sandu Frunză, *Publicitatea construiește realitatea: eseu despre ființa umană, religie și publicitate în societatea de consum*, Bucharest: Eikon, 2023.

**Key words:** religion, anthropology, philosophy, consumerism, internet, social media.

Advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary perceptions of reality, constructing a mediated world in which consumer desires, identities, and even existential meanings are influenced by market-driven narratives. Within consumer society, human beings navigate a landscape where advertising not only reflects but actively constructs social and cultural values, often intersecting with religious motifs and ethical concerns. The commodification of symbols, rituals, and belief systems within advertising demonstrates how spiritual and material aspirations become closely connected, reinforcing consumerist ideologies while reshaping traditional understandings of self and community. This dynamic highlights the broader ways in which commercial discourse contributes to the ongoing reconfiguration of reality in modern society.

Sandu Frunză is a well-known name in the field of the philosophical research on communication and advertising, as well as in the one of philosophical counselling. His books (see, for example: Frunză 2020; Frunză 2010; Frunză 2013; Frunză 2013a; Frunză 2015; Frunză 2015a; Frunză 2016; Frunză 2016a; Frunză 2017; Frunză 2018; Frunză 2019a; Frunză 2020a; Frunză, Medveschi, Frunză, Grad, 2019, 3-17) were reviewed (Morariu 2022, 498-500; Morariu 2017, 754-757) and quoted both nationally and internationally. The book *Publicitatea construiește realitatea: eseu despre ființa umană, religie și publicitate în societatea de consum* (Frunză 2023), published by Eikon Publishing House in Bucharest, is the Romanian edition of a work originally released in English in 2014 (Frunză 2014). By making it available in Romanian, the author broadens access to readers unfamiliar with the English edition. The book offers an in-depth exploration of the relationship between religion, advertising, and consumer society, providing valuable insights into how commercial discourse shapes contemporary cultural and spiritual realities.

Topics like culture, publicity and digital culture and their relationship constitutes the reason for a complex analysis of the contemporary society. Among others, Sandu Frunză underlines the fact that: "The pursuit of pleasure taken to the extreme means that, although the ecstatic state offered by music is sufficient for his intense experience, the man of hedonistic society desires to push these experiences to the extreme. He wants to lose himself in a flow of experiences meant to reach a form of authenticity of communication with himself and of transcendence towards himself. Most likely, such a search for self is what urges the individual of total denials to affirm himself through experiences of going beyond the limits of his own life. These must be considered extreme situations." (Frunză 2023, 16-17).

The book also examines the role of social networks in shaping contemporary society and their influence on advertising discourse.

Described as prophetic in some respects (Frunză 2023, 22), the analysis highlights not whether the internet will transform society, but how this transformation will unfold. Concepts such as consumerism and fragmentation are explored to characterize the society shaped by digital tools.

Frunză delves deeper by defining the notion of 'consumerist culture' (Frunză 2023, 31), rooted in advertising. Drawing on the ideas of Mircea Eliade (Eliade 1995), he reinterprets them in a contemporary context, revealing the hidden mystical or religious dimensions within elements of modern life often regarded as purely secular. He further emphasizes the initiatory role of advertising (Frunză 2023, 23; Frunză 2019, 156-169), linking it to cultural and anthropological perspectives (Gavriliuță 2009, 192).

Additionally, the book explores how individuals are perceived in marketing discourse and examines the function of stereotypes in the sales process. Frunză realizes a complex analysis underlining the defining elements of the topic and pointing out the fact that: "According to the stereotype we cultivate regarding advertising, we usually affirm that the individual is viewed by advertising only as a consumer. Because we give it a negative connotation, we feel close to the idea of the philosopher and literary theorist Roland Barthes, according to whom "the stereotype is the repeated word, outside of any magic, any enthusiasm, as if it were natural, as if by miracle this word that returns were each time appropriate for different reasons, as if imitating could not be felt as an imitation" (Barthes 1994, 67). But beyond this negative valorization of "as if", we must accept that, from the perspective of creators in the field of advertising, "the role of stereotypes in advertising, as in other types of public communication, is to simplify and structure reality" (Frunză 2023, 56).

His ideas are confirmed by contemporary researchers (like: Balaban 2010, 246; Debord, 1998, 33), whose opinions are also analyzed in his book. Aware of the ubiquitous role materialism plays in contemporary society, he speaks about its multiple dimensions. At the same time, he addresses the complex relationship between publicity and communication in the process of marketing. He emphasizes that communication is the fundamental tool of advertising, which strategically incorporates key elements of communication in an engaging manner: "To make this appearance present, advertising borrows the tools already existing in communication. For example, advertisers borrow from television what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called "the evocation of the ordinary in such a way that people realize how unusual it is" (see: Boudreau 2007, 28). In this sense, advertising is part of a philosophical effort to reconstruct the everyday, it is a philosophy of the everyday, of the ordinary that becomes extraordinary in order to serve what is ordinary as part of our daily lives." (Frunză 2023, 65). This perspective highlights the deep interconnection between advertising, communication, and philosophy. By borrowing established communicative tools, advertising does more than merely sell

products—it reshapes perception, turning the mundane into something remarkable. Bourdieu's notion of evoking the ordinary in an unusual way aligns with advertising's ability to reconstruct everyday experiences, making them appear extraordinary while reinforcing their place in daily life. In this sense, advertising functions as a philosophy of the everyday, framing the familiar in new ways to generate desire, meaning, and cultural significance.

Dealing with a complex topic and trying to create bridges between anthropology, communication, philosophy and contemporary society, Sandu Frunză's book: *Publicitatea construiește realitatea: eseu despre ființa umană, religie și publicitate în societatea de consum* (Advertising constructs reality: essay on human beings, religion and advertising in the consumer society) published at Eikon Publishing House in 2023 manages to be not only a useful tool for scholars, but also a book available to a broader readership. It can be valuable for philosophers, specialists in communication, marketing, religion, history, sociology or anthropology and it can help them to deepen the connections with their field of research. For this reason, it is highly recommended for readers of all backgrounds and serves as a valuable tool in academic research

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