

Social Campaigns in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic as Universal Persuasive Messages in the Global World

Krzysztof Stępniak

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

k.stepniak@uksw.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0001-9716-8835

ABSTRACT

The article is an excerpt from a wider research project carried out by the author in October, November, and December 2020, on advertising materials used by the WHO and selected countries (Poland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa) in social campaigns related to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. This paper presents one case study—a campaign conducted in New Zealand, comparing its messages with the WHO advertising material. **The main thesis** is that the pandemic showed that in the face of a global threat, all people are inhabitants of One World. **Research methods:** triangulation such as case study and compositional interpretation by Gillian Rose. In order to examine the verbal layer of the messages, Roman Jakobson's communication model was used. When analyzing the linguistic layer of the messages, their considerable persuasiveness was assumed. Whereas in examining the visual layer of the messages, due to the simplicity of their form, the compositional modality was limited, with particular emphasis on colors and iconic signs. **The results and conclusions** confirm the main thesis adopted in the study. The pandemic material developed by the WHO and the governments selected to study the countries at different latitudes are very similar. National materials are sometimes even a carbon copy of WHO advertising campaigns. Both the WHO and the national materials are dominated by the informative and impressionistic functions of the language of communication. In the verbal layer, senders focus on communicating the necessary information about the pandemic; their messages, concerning both prevention and combating the pandemic, are at the same time highly persuasive. In the visual layer, however, there are differences in colors and iconic signs, which was demonstrated in particular by the comparison of campaigns conducted by the WHO and the New Zealand government. **Cognitive value:** The text shows the importance of social advertising campaigns in communication, especially in times of a pandemic. Paradoxically, the pandemic,

which poses a threat to humanity, may contribute to the development of comparative research on the effectiveness of mass communication means that have been used in some countries and that can be successfully used in others.

KEYWORDS

case study, COVID-19, New Zealand, social advertising, World Health Organization