

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS: A CASE STUDY (ICE CREAM ADS)

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Abstract. This paper analyses the content of media communications (in this case, ice cream advertisements). Content analysis is not very popular among Romanian researchers, despite its wide range of uses: age issues, climate change, communication, cognitive science, cultural studies, economic studies, education, ethnography, gender issues, health, information and communication technologies, literature, marketing studies, media studies, political science, psychology, rhetoric, sociology, etc. In this paper, the author makes an analysis of ice cream ads to show researchers in marketing studies how important content analysis (conceptual analysis + relational analysis) can be in the promotion of products and/or services. Eighty-nine ice cream ads for 46 American ice cream brands were targeted for the content analysis presented below. Content analysis relied on two basic methods – conceptual analysis and relational analysis. Conceptual analysis (which establishes the existence and frequency of concepts represented by words or phrases in a text) shows that there are four groups of explicit terms referring to ice cream in the targeted corpus: explicit terms (ice cream types, ice cream ingredients, ice cream features, and ice cream shapes) and four categories of implicit terms (terms that are related to humans, terms related to human feelings and emotions, terms related to location, and other terms that could not be grouped into distinct groups). Relational analysis (which goes one step further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text) identified what other words related to ice cream appear in the corpus and the different meanings these words bear (terms related to humans and location. Three conclusions could be drawn from the study: despite the wide range of fields in which content analysis can be used as a research method, we found that the most frequently analyzed were health and media studies (in most cases, they go hand in hand); ice cream ads make up the proper corpus for content analysis and the number of implicit terms related to "ice cream" is twice as big as explicit ones because both manufacturers (who agree with the ads they pay for) and advertisers focus on suggestion rather than on reality. Content analysis of ads is twofold beneficial: first, because it can help companies understand the vision of their competitors, and second, because it can help companies better advertise their own products and services.

Keywords: content analysis, media communications, theoretical aspects, methodological aspects

INTRODUCTION

Content analysis is a research tool, "a systematic procedure for the quantification and objective examination of qualitative data, such as written or oral messages (texts or sets of texts), by the classification and evaluation of terms, themes, or ideas; for example, the measurement of frequency, order, meanings, relationships or intensity of occurrence of the words, phrases, or sentences in a communication in order to determine their meaning or effect (inferences about the audience, the culture to which they belong, the messages within the texts, the time to which they belong the writer/writers)" (ACA, 2019; T.F.D., 2019).

Content analysis is used to (ACA, 2019):

- Describe attitudinal and behavioural responses to communications;
- Detect the existence of propaganda;
- Determine the psychological or emotional state of persons or groups;
- Identify the intentions, focus or communication trends of an individual, group or institution;
- Reveal international differences in communication content.

The paper draws on Content-based instruction, as well as conceptual analysis with a view to highlighting educational goals which go beyond technical language use and communication (DRAGOESCU URLICA & STEFANOVIĆ, 2018; DRAGOESCU URLICA, COROAMADORNEANU, KAMBERI, MALENKO, 2019).

Content analysis is used in a wide range of fields, such as *age issues, climate change* (SCHÄFER, 2016), *communication* (PAUNCHICI & POPESCU, 2006; SLATER, 2013), *cognitive science, cultural studies, economic studies* (REICHENBACH, 2014), *education* (CORFIELD, 2017; GREEN SARAISKY, 2013), *ethnography, gender issues, health* (GUPTA & SINHA, 2010; JONES & AL., 2016; LAAR, 2010; MEADOWS & MEADOWS, 2017; ZHANG, 2016), *information and communication technologies* (LEWIS, 2013), *literature, marketing studies* (PAUNCHICI & POPESCU, 2006), *media studies* (CORFIELD, 2017; FREYENBERGER, 2013; GREEN SARAISKY, 2015; GUPTA & SINHA, 2010, IHLE, 2012; JONES, 2016; LAAR, 2010; LANSDALL-WELFARE, 2017; LEWIS, 2013; MEADOWS & MEADOWS, 2017; REICHENBACH, 2014; SLATER, 2013; etc.), *political science* (EUCABETH, 2012; MUN & LI, 2011), *psychology, rhetoric, sociology*, etc.

The texts can be advertising, book chapters, books, conversations, discussions, essays, historical documents, informal conversation, interviews, newspaper articles, newspaper headlines, speeches, theatre, etc. In this paper, the focus will be on texts representative for **media communications** such as advertising, books, interviews, newspaper articles, and newspaper headlines.

In order to conduct a content analysis on such texts, the text must be coded, or broken down, into manageable categories on a variety of levels – word, word sense, phrase, sentence, or theme – and then examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: *conceptual analysis* or *relational analysis*.

Conceptual analysis establishes the existence and frequency of concepts (represented by words or phrases) in a text: for example, how many times the words “election” and “president” occur in a newspaper.

Relational analysis goes one step further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text: for example, the occurrence of such words as “corruption” or “corrupted”, which appear next to the words “election” and “president”, and then determine what different meanings emerge as a result of these associations.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To carry out this study, we analysed references in the field of content analysis from the last decade (2010-2019). The material of the study consisted in 89 ice cream ads for 46 American ice cream brands (The Slogans, 2019), a corpus we consider fit for illustrating how content analysis (our research method in this study) works. We used both conceptual analysis and relational analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Conceptual Analysis

We used conceptual analysis to determine how many times words referring to ice cream appear in the studied corpus. We identified both explicit and implicit terms in the analysed corpus of ice cream ads.

1.1. Explicit Terms

There are four groups of explicit terms – ice cream types, ice cream ingredients, ice cream features, and ice cream shapes.

- 7 terms (32 occurrences) refer directly to ICE CREAM TYPES: ice cream “a soft, sweet frozen food made with milk and cream and typically flavoured with vanilla, fruit, or

other ingredients” (LEXICO, 2019) (24): “A protein shake in ice cream form.” (Arctic Zero – Low Calorie Ice Cream), “Crazy Good Ice Cream.” (The Comfy Cow), “Finest Ice Creams and Sorbets.” (Ciao Bella), “Forget Diamonds. Ice Cream is a girl’s best friend.” (Huckleberry’s), “Fortunately, Ice Cream Makes Is All Better.” (Creamies), “Handcrafted ice cream” (Graeter’s), “It’s not just ice cream. It’s Dreyer’s.” (Dreyer’s), “It’s way beyond ice cream.” (Breyers), “Marvellous Ice Creams.” (Cadbury Dairy Milk Ice Cream), “New England’s Ice Cream for More than 100 years.” (Hood), “Premium Ice Cream” (London Dairy), “Real Hand Churned Ice Cream.” (Big Moo), “Real Ice Cream” (Stone Ridge Ice Cream), “Real ingredients. Real ice cream. Real smiles.” (Hershey’s Ice Cream), “Real milk. Real ice cream.” (Amul), “Super Premium Handcrafted Ice Cream and Desserts.” (The Comfy Cow), “Super Premium Ice Cream.” (Straus Family Creamery), “The art of Swiss Ice Cream.” (Movenpick), “The best ice cream bar ever conceived.” (Klondike), “The best ice cream in the country.” (Blue Bell Ice Cream), “The essential ice cream experience.” (Cadbury Dairy Milk Ice Cream), “The Freshest Ice Cream on Earth.” (Marble Slab Creamery), “The ice cream experts.” (Vadilal), and “Think chocolate, think chilled, think Galaxy ice cream.” (Galaxy Ice Cream); confection “an elaborate sweet dish or delicacy” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Handcrafted confections since way back!” (Graeter’s); dessert “the sweet course eaten at the end of a meal” (LEXICO, 2019) (3): “Fit Frozen Dessert.” (Arctic Zero – Low Calorie Ice Cream), “Once you’ve got Carte D’Or, you’ve got dessert.” (Carte D’Or), “Super Premium Handcrafted Ice Cream and Desserts.” (The Comfy Cow); ice pop “US a frozen refreshment consisting of a piece of flavoured ice on a stick or in a plastic wrapper” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “If it isn’t Popsicle, it’s just an ice pop.” (Popsicle); shake “short for milkshake [a cold drink made of milk, a sweet flavouring such as fruit or chocolate, and typically ice cream, whisked until it is frothy]” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “A protein shake in ice cream form.” (Arctic Zero – Low Calorie Ice Cream); sherbet “North American water ice; sorbet” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Real Fruit Sherbet.” (Life Savers); sorbet “a water ice” (Lexico, 2019) (1): “Finest Ice Creams and Sorbets.” (Ciao Bella);

- 7 terms (7 occurrences) refer directly to ICE CREAM INGREDIENTS: ingredient “any of the foods or substances that are combined to make a particular dish” (Lexico, 2019) (1): “Real ingredients. Real ice cream. Real smiles.” (Hershey’s Ice Cream); caramel “sugar or syrup heated until it turns brown, used as a flavouring or colouring for food or drink or combined with butter or cream to form a thick, sweet sauce” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum Caramel & Nuts. Got the balls for it?” (Magnum); chocolate “a food in the form of a paste or solid block made from roasted and ground cacao seeds, typically sweetened and eaten as confectionery” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Think chocolate, think chilled, think Galaxy ice cream.” (Galaxy Ice Cream); fruit “the sweet and fleshy product of a tree or other plant that contains seed and can be eaten as food” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Real Fruit Sherbet.” (Life Savers); milk “an opaque white fluid rich in fat and protein, secreted by female mammals for the nourishment of their young” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Real milk. Real ice cream.” (Amul); nut “a fruit consisting of a hard or tough shell around an edible kernel” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum Caramel & Nuts. Got the balls for it?” (Magnum); protein “any of a class of nitrogenous organic compounds which have large molecules composed of one or more long chains of amino acids and are an essential part of all living organisms, especially as structural components of body tissues such as muscle, hair, etc., and as enzymes and antibodies” (Lexico, 2019) (1): “A protein shake in ice cream form.” (Arctic Zero – Low Calorie Ice Cream);

- 4 terms (10 occurrences) refer directly to ICE CREAM FEATURES: flavour “the distinctive taste of a food or drink” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “More flavour, more fun.” (Baskin Robins), “One City, A World of Flavours.” (5 Borough’s Ice Cream); goodness “the beneficial

or nourishing element of food” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Vadilal. Nothing but goodness.” (Vadilal); sweetness “the quality of being sweet” (Lexico, 2019) (1): “The sweetness of everyday life.” (Cold Stone Creamery); taste “the sensation of flavour perceived in the mouth and throat on contact with a substance” (LEXICO, 2019) (6): “A taste of heaven on earth.” (Blue Bell Ice Cream slogans), “A world of great taste.” (Igloo), “Connoisseur. The thrill of the taste.” (Connoisseur Gourmet), “Even the names taste good.” (Haagen Dazs), “For people with taste.” (Connoisseur Gourmet), “Richer, Creamier Taste.” (Hood);

- 5 terms (9 occurrences) refer directly to ICE CREAM SHAPES: balls “testicles; courage or nerve” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum Caramel & Nuts. Got the balls for it?” (Magnum); bar “an amount of food or another substance formed into a narrow block” (Lexico, 2019) (2): “The best ice cream bar ever conceived.” (Klondike), “What would you do for a Klondike bar?” (Klondike); cornetto “a branded frozen dessert cone” (WIK, 2019) (1): “Cornetto. Enjoy the ride, love the ending.” (Cornetto); form “the visible shape or configuration of something” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “A protein shake in ice cream form.” (Arctic Zero – Low Calorie Ice Cream); scoop “a quantity taken up by a scoop [a utensil resembling a spoon, with a short handle and a deep bowl, used for removing dry or semi-solid substances from a container]” (LEXICO, 2019) (4): “A smile in every scoop.” (Hershey’s Ice Cream), “Change the World, One Scoop at a time.” (Ben & Jerry’s), “Let’s take a ride in a world of scoops.” (Baskin Robins), “Share a scoop, share a smile.” (Edy’s).

1.2. Implicit Terms

Implicit terms were more difficult to identify and involved a lot of subjectivity. However, we identified four categories of implicit terms in the targeted corpus of ice cream ads: terms related to humans, terms related to human feelings and emotions, terms related to location, and other terms that could not be grouped into distinct groups.

- 9 terms (9 occurrences) are related to HUMANS: connoisseur “an expert judge in matters of taste” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Connoisseur. The thrill of the taste.” (Connoisseur Gourmet); expert “a person who is very knowledgeable about or skilful in a particular area” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “The ice cream experts.” (Vadilal); family “a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Brings the family together.” (Breyers); farmer “a person who owns or manages a farm” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Farmer Owned.” (Hiland); friend “a person with whom one has a bond of mutual affection, typically one exclusive of sexual or family relations” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Forget Diamonds. Ice Cream is a girl’s best friend.” (Huckleberry’s); girl “a female child” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Forget Diamonds. Ice Cream is a girl’s best friend.” (Huckleberry’s); kid “Informal a child or young person” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Chapman’s. For the kid in all of us!” (Chapman’s Ice Cream); people “human beings in general or considered collectively” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “For people with taste.” (Connoisseur Gourmet); seeker “A person who is attempting to find or obtain something” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum. For pleasure seekers.” (Magnum);

- 14 terms (19 occurrences) are related to HUMAN EMOTIONS & FEELINGS: balls “testicles; courage or nerve” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum Caramel & Nuts. Got the balls for it?” (Magnum); dream “a thing perceived as wonderful or perfect” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “The ice cream dream.” (Mini Melts); emotion “a strong feeling deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Savour the emotions.” (Carte D’Or); excitement “a feeling of great enthusiasm and eagerness” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum After Dinner. Little shivers of excitement.” (Magnum); experience “an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “The essential ice cream experience.” (Cadbury Dairy Milk Ice Cream); fun “enjoyment, amusement, or light-hearted pleasure” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “More flavour, more fun.” (Baskin Robins); happiness “the state of being

happy” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “Find Happiness Within.” (Marble Slab Creamery), “Scooping Happiness to Life.” (Ben & Jerry’s); humour “a mood or state of mind” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Good Humour. Return to the classics.” (Good Humour); joy “a feeling of great pleasure and happiness” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “#FreezeTheJoy.” (Cadbury Dairy Milk Ice Cream), “Pleasure is a path to joy.” (Haagen Dazs); pleasure “a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “Magnum. For pleasure seekers.” (Magnum), “Pleasure is a path to joy.” (Haagen Dazs); shivers (of excitement) “a spell or an attack of trembling, typically as a result of fear or horror” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum After Dinner. Little shivers of excitement.” (Magnum); smile “a pleased, kind, or amused facial expression, typically with the corners of the mouth turned up and the front teeth exposed” (LEXICO, 2019) (3): “A smile in every scoop.” (Hershey’s Ice Cream), “Real ingredients. Real ice cream. Real smiles.” (Hershey’s Ice Cream), “Share a scoop, share a smile.” (Edy’s); surprise “a feeling of mild astonishment or shock caused by something unexpected” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Vadilal Flingo – A surprise in every bite.” (Vadilal); thrill “a sudden feeling of excitement and pleasure” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Connoisseur. The thrill of the taste.” (Connoisseur Gourmet);

- 11 terms (14 occurrences) are related to LOCATION: America “used as a name for the United States” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Awarded best in America.” (Double Rainbow); city “a large town” (Lexico, 2019) (1): “One City, A World of Flavours.” (5 Borough’s Ice Cream); country “a nation with its own government, occupying a particular territory” (Lexico, 2019) (2): “Have yourself a Blue Bell country day.” (Blue Bell Ice Cream slogans), “The best ice cream in the country.” (Blue Bell Ice Cream slogans); doorway “an entrance to a room or building through a door” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Doorway to Heaven.” (Glace Artisan Ice Cream); earth “the planet on which we live; the world” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “A taste of heaven on earth.” (Blue Bell Ice Cream slogans), “The Freshest Ice Cream on Earth.” (Marble Slab Creamery); heaven “a place regarded in various religions as the abode of God (or the gods) and the angels, and of the good after death, often traditionally depicted as being above the sky” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “A taste of heaven on earth.” (Blue Bell Ice Cream slogans), “Doorway to Heaven.” (Glace Artisan Ice Cream); Klondike “a tributary of the Yukon River, in Yukon Territory, north-western Canada, which rises in the Ogilvie mountains and flows 160 km (100 miles) westwards to join the Yukon at Dawson; it gave its name to the surrounding region, which became famous when gold was found in nearby Bonanza Creek in 1896; a source of valuable material” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “What would you do for a Klondike bar?” (Klondike); New England “an area on the north-eastern coast of the US, comprising the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “New England’s Ice Cream for More than 100 years.” (Hood); path “a way or track laid down for walking or made by continual treading” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Pleasure is a path to joy.” (Haagen Dazs); Vermont “A state in the north-eastern US, on the border with Canada” (Lexico, 2019) (1): “Vermont’s Finest.” (Ben & Jerry’s); world “the earth, together with all of its countries and peoples” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Change the World, One Scoop at a time.” (Ben & Jerry’s);

- 15 terms (21 occurrences) are indirectly related to ICE CREAM: art “a skill at doing a specified thing, typically one acquired through practice” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “The art of Swiss Ice Cream.” (Movenpick); bite “a piece cut off by biting.” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Vadilal Flingo – A surprise in every bite.” (Vadilal); bowl “the contents of a bowl” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Life is a bowl of Perry’s.” (Perry’s Ice Cream); classic “a thing which is memorable and a very good example of its kind” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Good Humour. Return to the classics.” (Good Humour); day “the part of a day when it is light; the time between sunrise and sunset” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Have yourself a Blue Bell country day.” (Blue Bell Ice Cream slogans);

diamond “a precious stone consisting of a clear and colourless crystalline form of pure carbon, the hardest naturally occurring substance” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Forget Diamonds. Ice Cream is a girl’s best friend.” (Huckleberry’s); dinner “the main meal of the day, taken either around midday or in the evening” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Magnum After Dinner. Little shivers of excitement.” (Magnum); ending “an end or final part of something” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Cornetto. Enjoy the ride, love the ending.” (Cornetto); kind “character or nature” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “The purest kind.” (Hershey’s Ice Cream); life “the existence of an individual human being” (LEXICO, 2019) (5): “Life is a bowl of Perry’s.” (Perry’s Ice Cream), “Life Never Tasted So Good.” (FatBoy Ice Cream), “Magnumize your life.” (Magnum), “Scooping Happiness to Life.” (Ben & Jerry’s), “The sweetness of everyday life.” (Cold Stone Creamery); name “a word or set of words by which a thing is known, addressed, or referred to” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Even the names taste good.” (Haagen Dazs); reason “a justification for an action or event” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “A reason to smile.” (Edy’s), “It’s another great reason to smile.” (Edy’s); ride “a journey made on a horse, bicycle, or motorcycle, or in a vehicle” (LEXICO, 2019) (2): “Cornetto. Enjoy the ride, love the ending.” (Cornetto), “Let’s take a ride in a world of scoops.” (Baskin Robins); treatment “the manner in which someone behaves towards or deals with someone or something” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “Enjoy the royal treatment.” (Magnum); year “the period of 365 days (or 366 days in leap years) starting from the first of January, used for reckoning time in ordinary circumstances” (LEXICO, 2019) (1): “New England’s Ice Cream for More than 100 years.” (Hood).

2. Relational Analysis

Relational analysis was used to identify what other words related to ice cream appear in the corpus and then to determine the different meanings these words bear. Thus: Terms related to HUMANS: humans are seen as either groups (family, people) or individuals (connoisseur, expert, farmer, friend, girl, kid, seeker), as young (friend, girl, kid) or adults (connoisseur, expert, farmer, friend, seeker), as novice (farmer, seeker) or experienced (connoisseur, expert).

Terms related to LOCATION: Ice cream seems to be the perfect solution for escaping one’s world and go, through a doorway or taking another path, to the city, to the country, to Klondike, to New England, to Vermont, to America, to earth, to the world, or even to heaven / Heaven.

The 23 explicit terms in ice cream ads represent 46.93% of 49 implicit terms, while the 58 occurrences of explicit terms represent 92.06% of 63 occurrences of implicit terms (Figure 1).

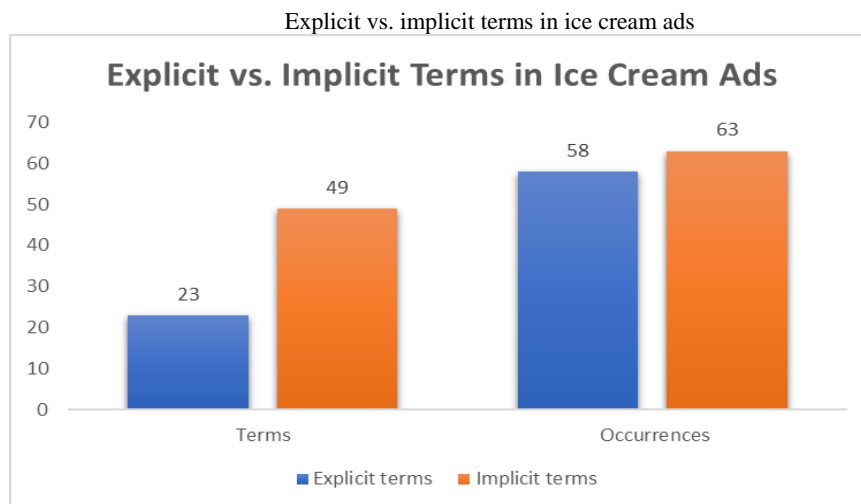
This shows that ice cream manufacturers and advertisers are concerned rather with suggesting what ice cream is (terms pointing to human feelings and emotions, humans, and location) than with what it really is (terms pointing to ice cream types, ingredients, features, and shapes).

However, both explicit and implicit terms have a positive denotation and/or connotation.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the wide range of fields in which content analysis can be used as a research method, we found that the most frequently analysed were health and media studies (in most cases, they go hand in hand).

Table 1.



Ice cream ads make up the proper corpus for content analysis. The number of implicit terms related to “ice cream” is twice as big as explicit ones because both manufacturers (who agree with the ads they pay for) and advertisers focus on suggestion rather than on reality.

Content analysis of ads is twofold beneficial: first, because it can help companies understand the vision of their competitors, and second, because it can help companies better advertise their own products and services.

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