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Media-semantic Analysis of Christian Motifs on German Web Portals for Advertising: Aspect of Decoding Narrative News and Images

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ABSTRACT

Religious elements belong to effective and expressive creative means and are often used on web portals in advertising. On the one hand, they attract attention and contribute to the aesthetics of advertising. On the other hand, they fulfill different functions analyzed media-semantically in this paper. Experts in educational and linguistic sciences warn that incomplete media-semantic analysis and reinterpretation of religious symbols and narrative news in the media can undermine religious beliefs. The work aimed to determine how religious elements are verbalized and visualized in advertising. Analysis of Christian motifs on German web portals for advertising was carried out in the period from November 2022 to February 2023. 112 analyzed samples that included Christian themes were processed. The research monitoring matrix included different forms of linguistic and religious elements. The paper concludes that religious lexical elements in advertising have an ambivalent role and that the media support the Church's secularization process.

Keywords: Religious vocabulary; Christian motifs; Monitoring; Decoding; Forms of advertising; Doelker's model; Trans textuality

1. Introduction

Media advertising is a system of signs and sym-

bols, and with their (un)help, man constructs his world of reality and fiction. Our entire culture is based on symbolic objectification. Symbols are

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24 May 2024 | Revised: 17 June 2024 | Accepted: 28 June 2024 | Published Online: 20 July 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i3.6687>

CITATION

Müller M., 2024. Media-semantic Analysis of Christian Motifs on German Web Portals for Advertising: Aspect of Decoding Narrative News and Images. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 6(3): 543–557. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i3.6687>

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boundaries or bridges in communication (Tolić, 2011). The media, as the fastest transmitters of information, have two fundamental problematic aspects: the structural aspect, raises the question of what the media should inform the individual about how to prevent manipulation, and the second aspect, is based on the method of information and answers the question in what way (Tolić, 2011). The problem arises when modern communication actors face increasingly complicated tasks that individuals must master. On the other hand, this same communication opens up richer opportunities for information and communication, mobility, and active shaping of the (own) world for children and young people (Winter, 2006). In addition to informative and educational content, and entertaining content that often borders on or serves the function of indoctrination and manipulation. They define media manipulation as a designed procedure based on which manipulators transmit symbolic means in different media, which influence consciousness and behavior. Thus, the manipulator skillfully replaces real needs with false ones. It does this through various symbolic means (advertisements, creating an image of ideals, sexual fixations in magazines for teenagers, reality shows, etc.) (Miliša; Tolić; Vertovšek, 2019). Rapid technological progress, i.e. media digitization and globalization of communication, enable the mediation of symbolic content to viewers, readers, and listeners (Schrob, 2009). Advertising always tries to reach people's desires, hopes, and longings. To arouse trust in the product, advertising, and the biblical-Christian tradition is firmly rooted in historical-Christian society. Religious motives are known to recipients and represent a possible basis for accepting the advertised product. Religious issues and their high degrees of recognition are analyzed as so-called tools of expression that can reach individuals and influence consciousness and behavior a linguistic perspective, the interest is to determine how religious elements are verbalized and visualized in advertising (Williamson, 2002; Bauer, 2012). Religious symbols are expressed in the narrative text by visual images and symbols that can be identified by examining adver-

tising samples. Religious vocabulary has become an integral part of advertising language, and for this reason, an interdisciplinary connections with linguistic semantics are necessary (Bauer, 2012). As a discipline, semantics encompasses different levels and aspects of meaning: linguistic, formal, functional, and structural. The concept of Semantic similarity analysis plays a very important role in the understanding of natural languages because it enables comparisons and conclusions to be made (Jozić, 2013). Also, the semantic similarity of short texts is especially important today, because such types of text are widely used in the form of search engine queries and results, news headlines, comments on social networks, and the like. Semantic text analysis is the basis for evaluating the quality of articles, especially on web portals. Recent research implicitly affects the development of media semiotics (Jozić, 2013) to determine the decoding rules in the combination of text and image in advertisements, all to expose and prevent the secularization of the Church in digital media. Today's everyday life has become a time when religion becomes less and less important for the social value system. "We live in a time when everything has its price and the least possible value" (Schrob, 2009). Technological progress (computer, internet, blogs, globalization...) enables unhindered access to information from the media, as well as media manipulation. In addition to informative and educational content, entertaining content is often on the border or in the function of indoctrination, and manipulation (Tolić, 2011). Media are transmitters of symbols between people: from man to man (Schrob, 2009). Criteria in media analysis are classified into three groups: primary (e.g. language), secondary (related to media production of content, e.g. music), and tertiary (mixed group) (Boeckmann, 1994). Rapid technological progress, i.e. media digitization and globalization of communication, enable the mediation of symbolic content to viewers, readers, and listeners. Manipulating the image of an idol, symbols that indicate needs and false feelings of power are created in the masses when making decisions (for this or that product, choosing a lifestyle, etc.). This is why the

media are the most explicit bearers of symbolic messages (Tolić, 2011). The question is how new media reshape and create social symbols and how innovative media can influence the development and improvement of social-symbolic systems in the social community in such a way that society and culture stabilize and develop further, but remain religiously aware (Saussure, 1997). Boeckmann (1994) points out that communication media have three components. The first is the cognitive-semantic component, which includes signs and the meanings of symbols in a particular message/information; e.g. sender and receiver know the same symbols-signs. This relationship is called a message decoding and the opposite an encoding (Boeckmann, 1994). They know that the so-called encoding and decoding are not synonyms but have completely different meanings. The second is the cognitive-perceptual component, which enables recognition during a disturbance in the communication process. It refers not only to the production of music, tone, image, and color but also to index signs (so-called hidden symbols) (Saussure, 1997). The fundamental role of educational actors is the (un) discovery of hidden symbols. The third is the social component, which creates the main center of gravity in the media process. It is social contact that conveys communication. Changes in the signal area of symbols and codes affect the levels of signs and feedback.

Digitization enables the combination of sign systems (Saussure, 1997; Vollbrecht, 2011). In this way, the contact between the sender and recipient are also changed (Tolić, 2011). It is imperative how the sender forwards the messages to the recipient, the way these messages act on the recipient, and whether there is a difference between the virtual and the real world. How symbols are interpreted is one of the fundamental issues of media semiotics in the reinterpretation of religious vocabulary.

1.1 The significance of the analysis of religious vocabulary in advertising

German linguist Sabine Bauer (2012) in her book *Religiöser Wortschatz in der Printwerbung* (Bauer,

2012) analyzes vocabulary from the religious field based on selected advertising sectors. The author believes that the focus of religious vocabulary research is exclusively based on the lexical aspect. In her book, she analyzes advertisements and posters from the following sectors: personal care and cosmetics, textiles, tourism, media, communications, and the automotive, food, and pharmaceutical sectors (Bauer, 2012; Janich, 2013). The same author examines vocabulary that is not only from the area of the Christian faith, but that originates from Buddhism and Hinduism (Janich, 2013). Linguist Sabine Bauer (2012) examines this question from a linguistic perspective¹. After summarizing the basics of educational values and linguistics and the definition of the term religious vocabulary, the author analyzes printed advertising from eight sectors and tries to justify the advertising effect of religious vocabulary using the tools of linguistics (Bauer, 2012). Not only are the most important words in the religious vocabulary used in advertising presented but the reasons for their use in certain sectors are also discussed. Today, there are many contemporary recent studies on advertising language. One of the most extensive and key studies of advertising from a linguistic perspective were conducted by Nina Janich (2013). In her book *Werbesprache (Advertising Language)*, the author examines advertising from various aspects and provides an overview of possible areas of research in that area (Janich, 2013). These works were used as a basis for the preparation of the research matrix in the methodology of this work, that is, for the media-semantic monitoring of Christian motifs on German web portals. One of the most important linguistic studies in the field of text-image relations was conducted by Hartmut Stöckl (1997) in his work *Werbung in Wort und Bild: Textstil und Semiotik*

¹ The term symbol (Latin *symbolum* < Greek *σμβολον*: sign, omen) which is used in various ways in many humanities. In the broadest sense, it is synonymous with the concept of sign, while it is most often held that all symbols are signs, but that all signs are not symbols (<https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/simbol>). A symbol derives its meaning from the opposites of the world, which is why, unlike a sign, which denotes something specific, it is multi-meaning (a snake, for example, can symbolize both life and death) (Citation: Croatian encyclopedia, online edition. Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute, 2013 – 2024. Accessed on 6/20/2024. <<https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/simbol>>.)

englischsprachiger Anzeigewerbung (Stöckl, 1997). Stöckl (1997) does not investigate theoretical perspectives for the stated problematic topic and offers specific analyses of various studies based on advertising examples. Examples from the research practice of the author Stöckle were used in this research as one of the important theoretical supports and as an analytical tool for the monitoring protocol in methodology (Stöckl, 1997). Christian traditions and religious ideas, as well as manners and customs, have existed for a long time in all the world's speaking areas represent an inexhaustible series of elements and symbols, which advertising resorts to again and again and which many recipients subconsciously and directly associate with the Christian faith. Susanne Lanwerd (2012) in her work *Religiöse Differenz: Darstellungen in Printmedien und zeitgenössischer Kunst* (Lanwerd, 2012) (in free translation: *Religious Difference: Representations in Print Media and Contemporary Art*) analyzes author Stuart Hall (according to Lanwerd) (2012) who advocates the thesis on the necessity of decoding religious symbols in the media (Lanwerd, 2012). The author thinks that for a long time advertising marketing propaganda has been using various allusions to the Christian tradition using religious symbols such as angel wings and the like (Stöckl, 1997) Advertisements clearly show that Christian content, symbols, and/or rituals can have negative connotations and thus support the process of secularization of the Church (Bauer, 2012). At the same time, the playful and often misuse of religious motifs in advertisements clearly shows the distance and ability of society to distance itself from religion. Media advertising moves within this ambivalence, thus» religious and conveys the religious and Christian motifs and elements, but at the same time transforms and alienates them” (Bauer, 2012). Stöckl (1997) believes that the reader must be critical when interpreting Christian motifs from advertisements, especially when interpreting religious vocabulary from the New Testament (Stöckl, 1997). Symbolic themes from the New Testament, especially those about Jesus' death, redemption, sacrifice, and salvation are often misused and used in advertising (such

as Jesus' crown) (Stöckl, 1997). Linguist Bauer (2012) believes that it is necessary to decode and analyze the religious vocabulary in the media because Christian religious signs and language are used in all aspects of the mass media. Here the questions can be raised to what extent the media-semantic analysis of the religious lexicon can also help contemporary teaching of religious studies to help students develop a reflexive-critical awareness towards media information to raise awareness of a greater interest in religious content and deal with theological topics (Bauer, 2012). According to contemporary philosopher Norbert Bolz (2021), the postmodern search for meaning moves in two ambivalences; on the one hand, there is a modern society that can no longer come to terms with religious interpretations of meaning, and on the other hand, there is an anthropological need for meaning, which is manifested in the fact that people want to understand their lives to the end, i.e. to the last detail, such as the theme of life after death (Bolz, 2021). Bolz (2021) believes that people therefore yearn for meaning, support, and security and questions about the meaning of life or orientation will always appear in the media. This is precisely why a media-semantic analysis of Christian motifs on German web portals for advertising and the aspect of decoding narrative news and images is necessary because it offers reflection and critical awareness against media (dis)information (Bolz, 2021). Bolz (2021) starts from the hypothesis that the traditional language of religion has lost its persuasiveness, but the religious meaning that is often hidden in the language has not. This may mean that while the Church is losing its importance in modern society, on the other hand, the religious sense offers the possibility of getting answers to (spiritual) questions that people often have to deal with (Bolz, 2021).

The fact that the number of believers in free Christian churches is increasing in the world, while the number of members of the Catholic and Protestant Churches is decreasing, especially in Europe, shows that religion should not be equated with the Church (Hühn, 2009). People's religiosity takes place less frequently in public space than it did a

few decades ago. Religious symbols and motifs can no longer be found only in the church, but can also be found in other contexts, especially in the media (Hühn, 2009). In modern society, reversals are taking place in the search for religious meaning and its expressive forms, where, on the one hand, it can be said that today we live in a post-religious time and religion is no longer a social authority, on the other hand, there is post-secular continuation outside religious institutions (Hühn, 2009). These reversals mean that religious symbols “move out” from the church and reappear in many different contexts, such as narrative news, text, and images in the media. This can be explained by the concept of religious dispersion, which says that religious content is dispersed like a particle from one religious symbol and appears as a transformed symbol in other forms (like angel wings on an advertisement for a cosmetic product, etc.) (Hühn, 2009). Hühn (2009) believes that the aggregate state of religious supplies in society is changing (Hühn, 2009). This means that the religious elements cannot be found in their original form, as they have also been adopted into new contexts, but instead appear in a changed and alienated form (like the angel wings on the advertisement for the energy drink Red Bull). One example of advertising with a Christian theme from the Bible is the advertising slogan of Volksbanken-Raiffeisenbanken which reads “We clear the way” (Hühn, 2009). It is about the motive of the exodus, more precisely, the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. Angels and crosses can also be found in various constellations in medium space. Interestingly, Jürgen Habermas (1990), who always described himself as an “impractical believer” (Habermas, 1991) considers it very important that a society modernize its public consciousness must learn to decode religious vocabulary and recognize transformed symbols in other social contexts (Habermas, 1991). Know how to recognize and interpret them from the religious aspect. It is precisely this creation of a new understanding of religious beliefs that implies a significant analysis of religious vocabulary in advertising, in which religious dispersion is visible and decoded (Bauer, 2012). So, today,

religious beliefs in their old form and a return to what was then are not crucial, but a reinterpretation of religion, which can also have a positive impact on our society dominated by the market and political power. So, if the recipient recognizes that it is about the subject of salvation from the New Testament, he may be motivated to read the New Testament (Bolz, 2021). However, experts in the field of linguistics and educational sciences warn that incomplete semantic analysis and distorted reinterpretation of religious symbols and narrative news in the media can undermine religious beliefs (Bauer, 2012). On the one hand, the media can indeed support the processes of secularization because they determine the internal dynamics of a society in which many children and young people identify with celebrities and stars, and it is often said that the so-called substitute religions. Actors in the media quickly become saints. Likewise, ever-increasing brand awareness can also lead to a substitute religion, as young people, for example, identify so much with a brand that it takes on an “aura of the sacred” (Bauer, 2012). At this moment, the media contributes to the fact that brands can quickly draw attention to themselves and leave a mark on young people through advertising. Therefore, the power of the media as the fastest transmitters of information should not be ignored. One of the examples is the spread of news about abuse scandals in the Church or the wrong steps of the clergy, which show a rapid expansion and contribute to the damage that could even accelerate the process of secularization of the Church (Bolz, 2021) The significance of the semantic analysis of Christian vocabulary and the decoding of narrative texts and images that can serve as a form of mitigation and/or prevention of secularization emerges from the above. Advertising language borrows words and phrases from the standard language, selecting the most appropriate elements and forms for a particular ad (Laux, 2012). It includes, for example, expressions in superlatives, characterizations with high-value adjectives, summaries, loans, foreign words, etc. (Dawidowski, 2021). The consequence of this is that, for example, only a few words can have an extremely highly symbolic

religious meaning, such as an Austrian advertisement for a football club that reads: *Become immortal* in the original: *Werde Unsterblich*, **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. Advertisement for a football club in Austria on the website of the city of Graz.

Source: <https://www.wien.gv.at/presse/bilder/2008/05/21/fussball-und-religion-im-dommuseum>

1.2 Methodological matrices for monitoring media-semantic and lexical analysis

Author Bauer (2012) considers that in the media-semantic analysis of Christian vocabulary, it is necessary to distinguish the following elements: logo, title, slogan, image elements, and continuous text that contains more detailed information about the properties of a product. Thus, the division of ad elements is based on visual and linguistic elements. The methodological matrix for monitoring includes an analysis of language elements. The title is the first language element that needs to be examined in more detail. The title carries the basic message of the ad or represents a concise statement that, among other things, also has the function of directing attention, because the title is the first thing that is noticed next to the image. The title thus fulfills the function of attracting linguistic attention and acts as an introduction to the dialogue between sender and recipient (Doelker, 1997). Next, an analysis of the slogan. A slogan is usually designed to be short, meaningful, memorable, and rhyming. Religious elements are often used in the slogan (Jozić, 2013). The next step is related to continuous narrative text or news. Here, the different properties of the

advertising product are described in more detail and its special benefits and possible advantages compared to other similar products are highlighted. Since the continuous text is viewed as a carrier of factual information and therefore as a rational part of the advertisement, or is often classified as an aesthetic element, religious elements are hardly integrated with this analysis, as they are predominantly based on an emotional rather than a rational level (Bauer, 2012, Doelker, 1997). Religious elements form a bridge between the recipient and the product and create a foundation of trust between the brand and potential customers. One of the important reasons for using religious elements in advertising is the knowledge of the religious lexicon, with symbols and elements that come from the religious field. In addition, it is necessary to know how to interpret intertextuality and trans textuality (Doelker, 1997). Jozić (2013) points out, “Just as with texts, there are also images with content that are repeated within a medium and in this way realize their intertextual meaning, while they get their trans-textual meaning from parallel texts, motifs, and images of an issuer, all to interpret his biographical and time-historical relationships” (Jozić, 2013). The term intertextuality emerged from a literary debate in the 1960s. If advertisers intentionally use religious elements in advertising, religious texts serve as reference texts. The adoption individual lexical elements as well as complete quotations or adoption of syntactic structure is often combined with pictorial allusions. Author Laux (2012) lists how religious motifs can be integrated into advertising: (a) explicit quotes from the biblical text; (b) references to the history of art inspired by Christianity; (c) inclusion of Christian ideas; (d) presented some religious situations, i.e. critical-polemical approach to religion (Laux, 2012). Religious lexical elements that appear in advertising have religious connotations to varying degrees. Such adjectives and combinations of words like heavenly good or heavenly pleasure have a religious origin, but their meaning has been expanded over time, so the religious background no longer shapes this word (Laux, 2012; Bauer, 2012). Originally,

the word heavenly came from the noun sky, which evokes associations with heaven or a better place in a religious sense (Laux, 2012). It is the same with the words devil and angel. As linguistic elements, they act as individual embodiments of good and evil forces in advertising. The word angel finds its extension in the term guardian angel, which was taken from the religious area into popular religious ideas under the influence of culture, but is often used in film, fine art, and advertisements (such as angel wings for marketing propaganda of L'Oréal cosmetics, etc.). Sabine Bauer (2012) cites, among other things, the example of Milka's chocolate advertising slogan, which has been used since 1971: "The gentlest temptation since chocolate existed." This shows the importance of understanding regional semantics. Religion is reflected in advertising, so religious semantics are important in influencing the feelings and moods of the recipient (Bauer, 2012). The elements most associated with symbolic religious images are a halo, wings (for an angel), horns, and a devil's tail (for a devil) (Bauer, 2012).

2. Method

Media-semantic analysis of Christian motifs on German web portals for advertising was carried out in the period from November 2022 to February 2023. The German web portals were selected according to the author's assessment as the four most-read German web portals (Bild.de; Spiegel.de; Otto.de and Focus.de). 112 analyzed samples were processed that included Christian themes. The research matrix included the following forms of religious elements: a) Verbal and figurative elements of religious origin: angel, seduction/temptation, sin, devil, heaven/heavenly, god/gods/goddess/divine, infernal, and biblical quotes; b) symbols: cross, wreath, wings (angel), horns, and a trident (devil); c) representation of the religious scene from the Bible: paradise, the fall of man and the exodus; d) institutional figures: priest, nuns, and monks; e) religious holidays and traditions: Christmas, sacraments/weddings, and f) religious buildings: church, monasteries. Furthermore, it was important for the observation to establish what kind of comments are under the articles, if any, to see how

readers react to the article depending on its context, and whether the article succeeds in achieving the desired attitude conveyed by the text if it is a negative or positive-oriented article. The research matrix was divided into the aforementioned eight forms of analysis and included the general features of the articles for descriptive purposes, i.e.: portal section, type of article, genre of article, author and author's name, interpretation in articles, way of presenting the topic, etc. One of the more important subtopics was titles, i.e. the type of title and the symbolic image used in the article. To determine the rules for decoding the symbolic messages of the image and their relationship trans textually, the Doelker's model was used (according to Jozić, 2013). So, 1) the visual representation does not use unnecessary details; 2) visible ad hoc decoding (i.e. a valid combination of a formal element and a certain meaning at the level of the entire text); 3) there is a strong connection between text and image (symbol, shape, color); 4) always using the same logo for advertising on other web portals; 5) symbolic meanings are taken in their basic semantic definition (cross-faith) and 6) the dynamics of the image follow the dynamics of the text and vice versa. Although the author Jozić states in her paper ten rules of Doelker's decoding model, six of them were used in this paper because only those texts and images related to Christian symbols on web portals were decoded (according to Jozić, 2013).

3. Results and discussion

In the observed period from the beginning of November 2022 to the middle of February 2023, **Figure 1** shows a significant linear increase in the number of religious motifs in advertisements. This proves the return of religious symbols in society. At the same time, the increased number of advertisements with religious or religiously equivalent content points to the dialectic of advertising, as it simultaneously conveys religious and Christian motifs and elements, but simultaneously transforms and alienates them. From a religious point of view, therefore, it is evident that we are less concerned with breaking tradition and more with the transformation of traditional religion.

There are periods in which religious motifs are used more in advertising, such as Christmas and New

Year in this research. **Figure 2** indicates a significant increase in the number of religious motifs in advertisements compared to the period November 2022 and February 2023. **Figure 3** shows data on the use of religious motifs in advertising that are specific to a particular company. One of the examples is shown by the graphic message of the inscription *Gefallene Engel machen sich auf der Erde auf die Suche nach einem gutriechenden Mann* (Fallen angels went to earth in search of a sweet-smelling man).

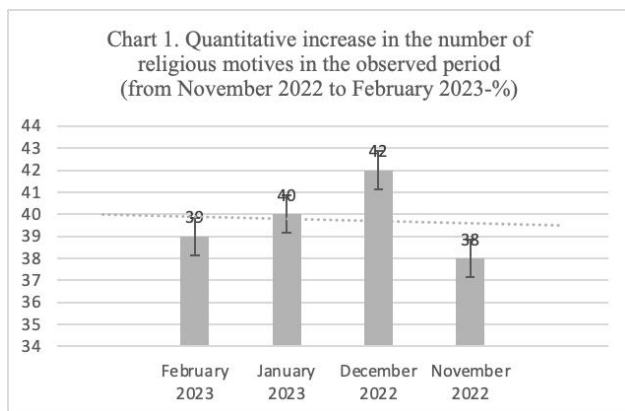


Figure 2. Quantitative presentation of the increase in religious motives in the observed period.

(source: author)



Figure 3. Fallen angels went to earth in search of a sweet-smelling man.

Source: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000055665048/religion-in-der-werbung-marken-und-mythen>

Christian motifs² in the form of images such as

² *Motive* (Late Latin *motivus*: which moves). Any motivation that directs human behavior towards a certain goal.

The term *motive* is ambiguous, because in practical life, even in psychology, it is very often replaced by other expressions, such as, for example: need, desire, will, reason, urge, aspiration, intention, etc. Citation: Croatian encyclopedia, online edition. Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute, 2013 – 2024. Accessed on 6/20/2024. <<https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/motiv>>.

The term “goal of a motive” can mean the motive itself (“money was his motive”) (<https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/motiv#:~:text=1.,poriv%2C%20te%C5%BEnja%2C%20namjera%20itd.>)

angels and monks often appeared on the web portal. These figures were in (controversial) advertising strategies, especially for the web portals Gucci³. Red Bull (energy drink) often likes to use the motif of a priest in its advertisements to promote its product through a web portal (as shown in **Figure 4**). This type of advertisement is often found on web portals: Müller, Media-Markt, and Kaufhof. From the image analysis, it is evident that religion has been alienated. The Red Bull product has replaced the religious image. One example is the marketing advertisement for Meggle butter. Whoever prays: Give us our daily bread today - then he no longer thinks of God, to whom he turns with confidence, but of the butter of the Meggle company. So the product becomes big, making the religion small.



Figure 4. Advertisement for Red Bull.

Source: <https://www.bild.de/regional/dresden/red-bull/118-paletten-red-bull-in-dresden-geklaut-41816346.bild.html>

First, it should be clarified which companies (in the observed period) often advertised with religious motives. However, it should be noted that only absolute numbers are available here, not relative numbers, i.e. the company’s basic advertising presence in the advertising section of a certain web portal. Therefore, it is not possible to make any statements about the relationship between the number of ads set in principle and the number of ads with religious motifs that appear in them. **Figure 5** shows the nine (9) companies with the most religious motifs in their advertisements, but only in absolute terms, not in relative terms. Religious motifs in their ads (companies with less than 5 ads are not included in this

³ Although Gucci is an Italian fashion house many German web portals promote it for sale (for example Outlet-Stores für Schule und Taschen: <https://www.gucci.com/de/de/st/capsule/gucci-outlet>)

chart). Individual companies advertise either only in substantive or functionally religious ways (Müller, BMW; Gucci, Lufthansa, etc.). Overall, however, a content-functional ratio of 2:1 can be established.

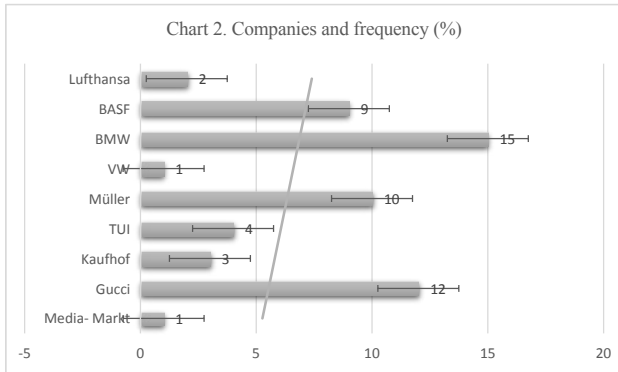


Figure 5. Use of religious motifs in advertising specific to a particular company.

(source: author)

Figure 6 shows that Gucci (99%), Lufthansa (96%) and Müller (88 %) have the highest percentage of functional and meaningful advertisements for the company. **Figure 7** and **8** show data on the percentage of Old Testament and New Testament motifs displayed on web portals.

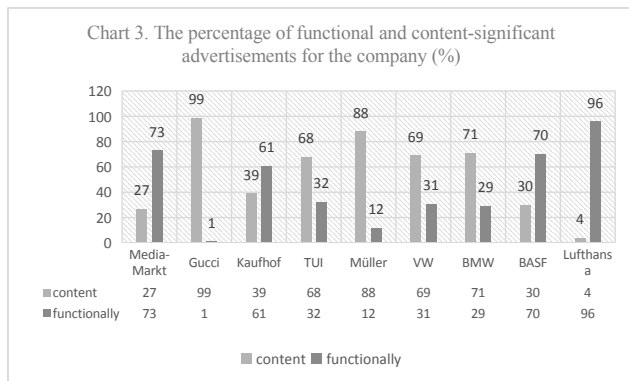


Figure 6. Presentation of data on the percentage of functional and content-significant religious advertisements for a specific company.

(source: author)

The results shows that the highest percentage (32%) refers to the motive of temptation/seduction, followed by 24% to biblical quotes, 14% to the depiction of paradise and heavenly themes, and 12% to the hallelujah symbol.

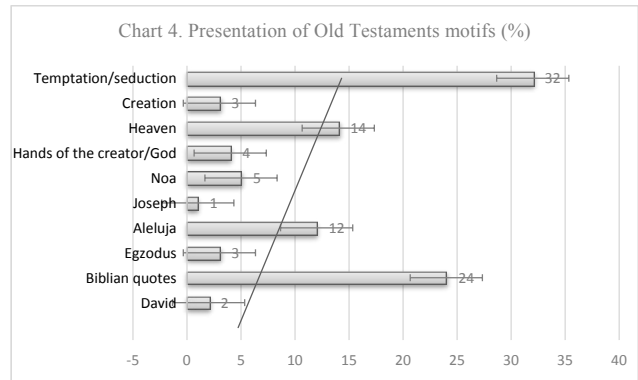


Figure 7. Presentation of Old Testament motifs.

(source: author)

From **Figure 8**, it is evident that the highest percentage belongs to the motive of passion/passion, followed by 25% to the motive of wonder/surprise and 23% to the gospel.

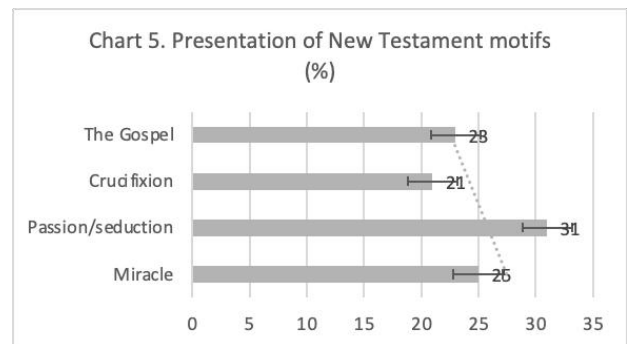


Figure 8. Presentation of New Testament motifs.

(source: author)

Figure 9 indicates the data on the percentage of Christian symbols and individual figures. The highest percentage (35%) is attributed to the figure of an angel, followed by the symbol of the cross at 16%, the figure of the devil at 14%, the symbol of light at 11%, St. Christopher at 10%, and the Christian figure of the dove at 7%. Next, **Figure 10** shows data on the most represented ethical topics in the form of narrative text/news about commercial companies. Commercial companies advertise using ethical themes in the form of narrative news rather than pictorial symbols. Ethical topics are nutrition/health, problematic thematic areas, peace/war, non-profit organizations, role models, tolerance, world population, and change in values.

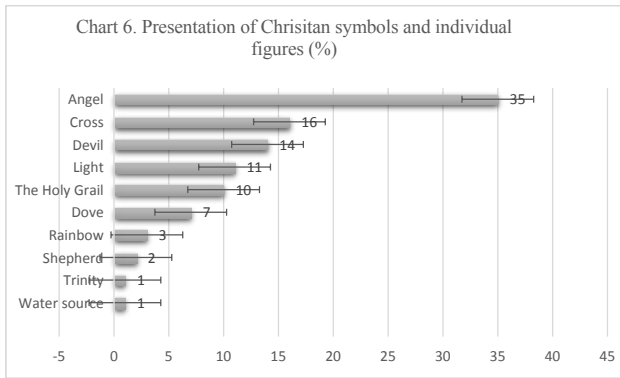


Figure 9. Presentation of Christian symbols and individual figures.

(source: author)

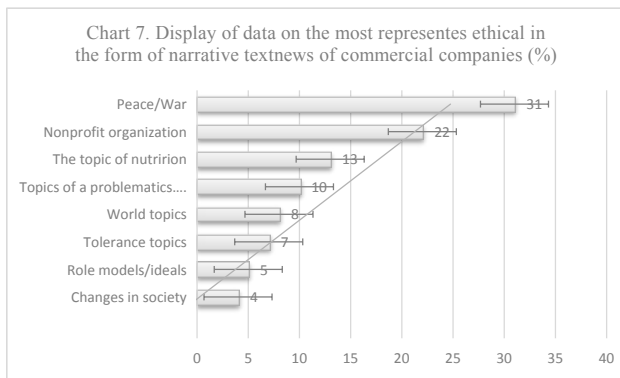


Figure 10. Display of data on the most represented ethical topics in the form of narrative text/news of commercial companies.

(source: author)

Therefore, the results shows that the most represented topic is peace/war with 31%; 22% relate to non-profit organizations; 13% to the topic of nutrition, and 10% to the topic of a problematic thematic area (such as floods, earthquakes, the COVID-19 virus, etc.). **Tables 1, 2, and 3** show the medium-se-

mantic analysis of Christian vocabulary based on the language type of the element; they highlight the most frequent expressions in superlatives, adjectives, and loanwords used in Christian advertising vocabulary; and they analyze the representation of Christian vocabulary according to the type of advertising language. The semantic analysis of the Christian vocabulary according to the type of elements consisted of (1) logos; (2) title; (3) slogans; (4) image elements and (5) continuous text about the type of advertising language: (a) expressions in superlatives; (b) adjectives and (c) loanwords (see **Table 3**).

Table 1 indicates that Bild.de. uses the most loanwords (36%), followed by adjectives at 34% and superlative expressions at 30%. The Spiegel.de portal also mostly uses loanwords (48%), followed by expressions in superlatives (35%) and adjectives (17%). Otto.de uses the most expressions in superlatives (53%); followed by adjectives (29%) and loanwords (18%). Whereas, Focus.de mostly uses adjectives (48%), followed by superlatives (28%) and loanwords (24%). This data was to be expected considering the different functions of the web portal. Thus, for example, the Otto.de web portal is more intended for promoting and selling clothes, so it uses superlative expressions to get more comments on a certain product compared to other portals. Bild.de is a portal with a more informative character and often Christian content is shown in the margin. The portal uses more loanwords like the Spiegel.de portal. The most common superlatives, adjectives, and loanwords used in Christian advertising vocabulary are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 1. Lexical analysis of Christian vocabulary according to the type of linguistic elements.

| Web- portals | | 1 Expressions in superlatives | 2 Adjectives | 3 Borrowers | In total |
|---------------|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------|
| 1) Bild.de | % | 30% | 34% | 36% | 100% |
| | f | 10 | 11 | 12 | N=33 |
| 2) Spiegel.de | % | 35% | 17% | 48% | 100% |
| | f | 8 | 4 | 11 | N=23 |
| 3) Otto.de | % | 53% | 29% | 18% | 100% |
| | f | 9 | 5 | 3 | N=17 |
| 4) Focus.de | % | 28% | 48% | 24% | 100% |
| | f | 7 | 12 | 6 | N=25 |

(source: author)

Table 2. The most frequent expressions in superlatives, adjectives, and loanwords that were used as Christian advertising vocabulary.

| Web- portals | 1 Expressions in superlatives | 2 Adjectives | 3 Borrowers |
|---------------|---|--|---|
| 1) Bild.de | -allerheiligste (holy of holies) - allergütigste (favorite) - ewigsten (most permanent) - am teulichsten gute Preise (the most diabolical prices) | -allgütig (benevolent) -Heilig (holiness) - Gottesfurcht (someone who fears God) - scheinheilig (hypocritical, this adjective was often used as a comparison with the devil in German Teufel) | - via Affirmative -Kristen (Old German: ahd. Schon-Krist) Engel and Demon Get in on the end of Word (a frequent advertisement for the symbolism of salvation from Covid-19) |
| 2) Spiegel.de | -höchste (the tallest) ewigsten (most permanent) -verteufeltsten (more demonized) am teulichsten gute Preise (the most diabolical prices) | Himmelkeiserin (St. Mary) - unvergänglich (impassable) gottserbärmlich (pathetic) - göttlich (divine) -allgütig (benevolent) -heilig (holiness) | -ungeschaffenheit (unrealized) - Angel and Demon - Test expression (frequent advertisement for West tobacco) -the sky is burning from the reduction --Get in on the end of Word (a frequent advertisement for the symbolism of salvation from Covid-19) |
| 3) Otto.de | -am größten (the biggest) -ewigsten (most permanent) -Heiligste (holiest) | -(Gott) wohlgefällig (Pleasant to God) tüchtig (effective) himmelschreiend (screaming) | - demoniosus - panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie. (Latin/German: unser tägliches Brot gib uns heute (our daily bread) - blessed and holy summer - falling divine prices - holy discounts |
| 4) Focus.de | - Teufelöen (most devilish-most mischievous) seelenvolsten (most spiritual) höllischsten (most hellish) -am teulichsten gute Preise (the most diabolical prices) | - göttlich (divine) heiliger Chor (holy mass) almos (merciful) unveränderlich (unchangeable) göttlich (divine) | - communitio sanctorum (expression of thoughts) -Engel und Teufel (Angel and Demon) --Get in on the end of Word (a frequent advertisement for the symbolism of salvation from Covid-19) -falling divine prices |

One of the most frequent phrases in advertisements was *Man spricht ihn auch nicht aus in einer Ewigkeit* (Neither is spoken in eternity), which was used to promote commercial companies, often seen on news-content portals like Spiegel.de; and Focus.de more than in Otto.de. The table shows a semantic analysis of the representation of Christian vocabulary according to the type of advertising language.

Table 3 indicates that the logo is the type of advertising language used most by Spiegel.de (39%), that the title/language attention is also used most by

Spiegel.de (31%); the slogan/Christian elements are mostly used by Bild.de (28%); image/symbolic message elements are used the most by Otto.de (55 %) and continuous text, which is the carrier of factual information and syntax, is used the most by Bild.de. So, from the above data, it is evident that image elements (symbolic messages) as a type of advertising language are the most tempting means of manipulation and that is why the Otto.de web portal uses them more than other types of advertising language because it is exclusively about a sales character, not

informational. From this, it is necessary to understand the decoding of symbolic messages and images as well as their relationship with trans textuality. Figure 10 shows the importance of decoding the symbolic messages of the image and their relationship with trans textually according to the aspect of Doelker's model. Furthermore, other variable results for recoding symbolic messages and images and their relationship with trans textuality according to the aspect of Doelker's decoding model shows that the Bild.de web-portal (1) visual presentation does not use unnecessary details, it is 9%; for Spiegel.de it is 11%; for Focus.de it is 31 %, and for Otto.de it is 23 %. For variable (2) visible ad hoc decoding, the analysis showed the following results: Bild.de (14%); Siegel.de (14%); Otto.de (9 %), and Focus.de (7 %). Further, for variable (3) there is a strong connection between text and image, and the following data were obtained: Bild.de (11%); Spiegel.de (17%); Otto.de (16%), and Focus.de (14%). Then, for variable (4) always use the same logo as the marketing

companies to advertise different products, the following data were obtained: Bild.de (21%); Spiegel.de (13%); and Otto.de (14 %). For variable (5) symbolic meanings are taken from the basic semantic definition (cross-faith), and the following data were obtained: Bild.de (22%); Spiegel.de (10%); Otto.de (12%) and Focus.de (14%). For the last variable (6) image dynamics follow text dynamics and vice versa, the analysis showed the following results: Bild.de (23%); Spiegel.de (35%); Otto.de (26%), and Focus.de (28%). Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that web portals that have more frequent advertisements for commercial companies with the help of religious motifs such as Otto.de, Bild.de, and Spiegel.de adhere to the rules of Doelker's model of decoding the symbolic messages of the image and their relationship with trans textually for the sake of better transparency of the advertising product, which also means that the greater aspect of decoding reaches more intensively towards the recipient, that is the recipient of the message.

Table 3. Semantic analysis of the representation of Christian vocabulary according to the type of advertising Language.

| Frequency of type of advertising language | | 1 Bild.de | 2 Spiegel.de | 3 Otto.de | 4 Focus.de | In total |
|---|---|--------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|----------|
| Logo | % | 21% | 39% | 24% | 16% | 100% |
| | f | 23 | 44 | 27 | 18 | N=112 |
| Title/language attention | % | 17% | 31% | 26% | 23% | 100% |
| | f | 19 | 35 | 32 | 26 | N=112 |
| Slogan/Christian elements | % | 28% | 21% | 25% | 26% | 100% |
| | f | 31 | 24 | 28 | 29 | N=112 |
| Image elements/ symbolic messages | % | 9% | 14% | 55% | 22% | 100% |
| | f | 10 | 15 | 62 | 25 | N=112 |
| Continuous text/bearer of factual information and agreement | % | 36% | 26% | 12% | 26% | 100% |
| | f | 42 | 28 | 13 | 29 | N=112 |

(source: author)

4. Conclusion

In the modern world of digitization, religion finds its reflection in advertising, so decoding religious vocabulary is essential to interpret the impact on the feelings and moods of the recipient. Considering

this, the research matrix included different forms of religious elements: (a) verbal and figurative elements of religious origin: angel, seduction/temptation, sin, devil, heaven/heavenly, god/gods/goddess/divine, infernal, and biblical quotes. The observed sample showed that the most frequent verbal-figurative el-

ements in the selected German web portals are the devil (51%), followed by the sky/heavenly elements (27%), the goddess (20%), hell, and biblical quotes (2%). Then, Christian symbols: cross (61%) and wings (angel) (21%), horns, and a trident (devil) (10%) and wreath (8%). Religious scenes from the Bible are also represented: paradise (69%), the fall of men (30%) and exodus (1%), as well as institutional figures: priests (51%), nuns (28%), and monks (21%). When it's time for Christian religious holidays and traditions, the most common motives are Christmas and a smaller percent refers to announcements of marriage as a sacrament. Monitoring of the time tracking of web portals showed that religious buildings such as churches (81%) and monasteries (19%) were also highly represented. Furthermore, it was important for the observation to establish what kind of comments are under the articles, if any, to see how readers react to the article depending on its context, and whether the article succeeds in achieving the desired attitude conveyed by the text if it is a negative or positive-oriented article. The research showed that there were more frequent comments under the article that had symbolic messages of advertising products, such as Lufthansa airline and BMW car sales company, and TUI travel agency for renting accommodation, especially during Christian holidays. The comments were ambivalent, which means that the reflexive-critical attitude of the recipient still dominates. The research matrix was divided into eight forms of semantic analysis and included general features of the articles for descriptive purposes, i.e.: portal section, type of the article, genre of article, author and author's name, interpretation in articles, way of presenting the topic, etc. The monitoring of the observed sample established that the type of article mostly referred to investigative journalism (79%), followed by the tabloid press (16%), and 5% only referred to the promotion of Christian values such as love, tolerance, altruism, and family. The symbolic image that was used on German web portals has a special relationship with intertextuality. The ratio was 60:40. Thus, the title and slogan were a key factor in

promoting the advertising product, accompanied by a symbolic pictorial message such as the cross, sky, and angel wings. The analysis showed the result that commercial companies advertise more with ethical themes in the form of narrative news than with pictorial symbols. Thus, with 1/3, the most represented topic was peace/war; 1/4 was on the topic of nutrition, and 1/6 belonged to the topic of the problematic thematic area. The results of the research indicated that image elements (symbolic messages) as a type of advertising language are the most tempting means of manipulation and that is why web portals that are more sales-oriented use them more than those that are informative content. But the opposite is true with analysis of the most frequent expressions in superlatives, adjectives, and loanwords that have been used as Christian advertising vocabulary. Web portals that are more informative and content-oriented use more loan words, and sales-oriented portals use adjectives and superlatives. Advertisements clearly show that Christian content, symbols, and/or rituals can have negative connotations and thus support the process of secularization of the Church. At the same time, the playful and frequent misuse of religious motifs in advertisements clearly shows society's distance and ability to distance itself from religion. The paper concludes that the media can support the processes of secularization of the Church, but still, a proper reinterpretation of Christian motives is necessary for the decoding of symbolic messages, and yet this requires an interdisciplinary connection between educational sciences and linguistics.

Author Contributions

Planning and implementation of the methodological procedure; analyzing data; concluding and discussing data; drafting; revision.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research received no external funding

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