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Advertisements: Mirrors of the Soul

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ADVERTISEMENTS: MIRRORS OF THE SOUL

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Recent political changes in the former Soviet Union have led to important social changes, including the Americanization of social and cultural values. This study focuses on Russian television and print advertising, viewing it as a reflection of these changes.

In the Communist era, central planning and a state-run economy changed the format of advertising. Advertisements simply stated which goods a particular store was carrying on a particular day. No competitive language was used; none was necessary, since the state had no competitors. The rise of a market economy in present-day Russia has resulted in a new age in advertising, as well as a new approach to it.

The lack of precedent for competitive advertising has had important consequences for Russian advertisers. They have had to look to America and other Western countries for instruction and example. In some cases, they have adapted American advertisements and used them in Russia. More important, though, is the freedom, due precisely to this lack of precedent, to pick and choose what messages and images are useful and to leave out those that are not; to advertise in a way which uniquely reflects the values of both the advertiser and the intended audience.

Advertisements are analyzed in terms of structure, unusual or irregular language (indicative of a cultural import), extra-linguistic content (dress of actors, music, etc.), similarity (or dissimilarity) to American advertisements, and overall reflection of contemporary societal changes.