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MICROHISTORY OF HEALTH ADVERTISING: FELLER'S *ELSA FLUID* AND PHARMACEUTICAL ADVERTISEMENTS IN GERMAN-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS IN OSIJEK AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Abstract

The paper offers a microhistorical analysis of advertisements for pharmaceutical products in German-language newspapers published in Osijek at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, with particular emphasis on Feller's *Elsa Fluid*. *Elsa Fluid* has been selected as the central case study due to its wide reach and its presence in as many as seventeen German-language periodicals, which enabled it to transcend the local setting and exemplify the formative phase of health marketing. Alongside an analysis of Feller's advertisements, the paper compares other pharmaceutical advertisements (remedies against cholera and tapeworms) in order to identify shared marketing and bioethical strategies of the period. Special attention is devoted to narrative techniques, appeals to authority, emotional manipulation, and exaggerated claims of efficacy unsupported by scientific evidence. From a bioethical perspective, all examined advertisements are characterised by a lack of transparency, the absence of information on risks and adverse effects, and a shortage of accurate, verifiable data, which together create the potential for consumer deception and misinformation. In this way, the analysis points to broader structural problems in health advertising in the historical context under consideration.

This research domain remains markedly underexplored. A primary factor contributing to this scholarly lacuna is the prevalence of Gothic script in the relevant periodicals, which hinders researchers' access to, legibility of, and interpretation of primary sources. Such challenges

underscore the critical need for digitization projects and interdisciplinary methodologies in prospective investigations of advertising and pharmaceutical history within the Central European sphere. The present work advances understanding of historical medical marketing practices, advocates for ethical standards and regulatory mechanisms to safeguard consumers, and addresses a notable void in Croatian academic literature by scrutinizing underutilized archival materials.

Keywords: historical advertising, bioethics in advertising, health marketing, German-language newspapers printed in Osijek, Feller's *Elsa Fluid*

1. Introduction

The development of advertising is inextricably linked to advancements in society, technology, and media. From the earliest written advertisements on papyrus in ancient Egypt, through wall postings in ancient cities, to the emergence of printed ads in newspapers and magazines, advertising has mirrored transformations in communication channels and social relations. Henry Sampson's 1874 book *A History of Advertising from the Earliest Times*¹ is regarded as the first comprehensive work dedicated to the history of advertising. Scholarly literature and digital sources highlight Sampson's study as a pioneering effort to systematically analyse advertising's evolution across historical epochs, from antiquity to the 19th century. A century and a half later (2022), amid numerous other authors who have significantly advanced the study of advertising history during that interval, Jef I. Richards published *A History of Advertising: The First 300,000 Years*. This book represents a contemporary scholarly pinnacle in the analysis and interpretation of advertising as a social, economic, and cultural phenomenon. Richards's study not only synthesizes prior research and theoretical approaches but augments them with interdisciplinary insights and critical reflection on advertising's role in civilizational development (Witkowski, 2022).

¹ *A History of Advertising from the Earliest Times* represents one of the most important works for studying the development of advertising. The author employs actual historical advertisements and engaging anecdotes to illustrate how advertising evolved over the centuries. It meticulously traces advertising's development from the earliest times—encompassing ancient Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages, and up to the 19th century—along with its transformations and contextualization within everyday life and commerce.

Additionally, the book provides biographical data on significant advertisers, publishers, and innovators who shaped this industry. Furthermore, Sampson analyses the connection between advertising and technological advancements, such as the invention of the printing press, as well as the social changes of that era. Although no specialized scholarly papers are dedicated exclusively to this work, it is frequently cited in broader studies of advertising history and remains accessible in digital libraries for more detailed examination.

1.1. Bridging Sampson and Richards

The connection between Henry Sampson's and Jef I. Richards's works lies not only in the temporal scope they encompass but also in their methodological and societal significance. Sampson's pioneering research, produced in the 19th-century context, offers a detailed depiction of early advertising forms and underscores advertising's role in the everyday life of that society. His approach relies on rich documentation and anecdotes, enabling an understanding of advertising as a mirror of social values and customs. By contrast, Richards's modern work expands the analysis to a global and interdisciplinary level, incorporating the digital age alongside shifts in communication technologies and consumer behaviour. Richards emphasizes that advertising is not merely an economic tool but a potent form of social communication that shapes identities, values, and cultural patterns. Crucially, both authors demonstrate that advertising is not a passive reflection of society but an active participant in its transformation. Advertisements have often served as carriers of new ideas, promoters of innovations, and catalysts for social change. Given the enduring scholarly importance of advertising studies, this paper focuses on a specific historical and local context: advertisements for health preparations and medical services appearing in German-language newspapers printed in Osijek at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Through a microhistorical approach to selected examples, it seeks to illuminate not only the content and format of these advertisements but also the social relations, ethical implications, and patterns of health communication shaped by contemporaneous cultural norms and market logics. In this vein, studying advertising history holds substantial value for comprehending broader societal contexts, as it reveals shifts in power relations, economic interests, and daily life (Hopkins, 1927; Presbrey, 1929; Turner, 1952; Nevett, 1982; Winer and Neslin, 2014; Haider, 2023, et al.). In sum, the works of Sampson and Richards testify to the enduring scholarly and societal relevance of advertising, affirming its status as an indispensable element of cultural history and collective memory.

1.2. Ethical Dimensions in Health Advertising

Although classical and contemporary works on advertising history primarily emphasize developmental trajectories, societal impacts, and market mechanisms, they often incorporate foundational reflections on ethics, particularly regarding the promotion of medical products, health, or public interest. Contemporary history and sociology of bioethics—as outlined, for instance, by John H. Evans (2012)—highlight that ethical issues surrounding health and medical

marketing are subjects of profound debate both in bioethics and advertising history. This interdisciplinary lens reveals that the evolution of medical marketing cannot be viewed in isolation but as part of a broader societal and ethical dynamic, intertwining professional responsibility, consumer protection, and public trust.

The paper analyses printed advertisements from historical newspapers, with particular emphasis on digitized sources that facilitate an in-depth investigation of advertising's development and characteristics over time. It must be stressed that this is not a detailed analysis of global trends or an exhaustive study of advertising history; rather, the focus is on a specific local corpus: advertisements in German-language newspapers from Osijek at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Within this corpus, emphasis falls on health-promoting advertisements—for instance, those for medicines, pharmacies, spas, medical preparations, and services by physicians or pharmacists. Such advertisements reflect prevailing social values alongside growing awareness of health, hygiene, and medical care.

1.3. Microhistorical Focus and Bioethical Implications

This approach provides deeper insight into the social, cultural, and economic circumstances that shaped the emergence of local advertisements, offering a window into the community's daily life and values at the time. The paper's aim is thus to analyse how local health-related advertisements reflected population needs, habits, and expectations, eschewing broader examinations of international or global advertising practices. In doing so, it underscores the value of the microhistorical method in advertising history, where local sources prove pivotal for understanding specific social processes and changes at the turn of the 19th to 20th century.

Examining historical health advertisements from a bioethical perspective raises critical questions of responsibility, truthfulness, and consumer protection:

- **Truthfulness and transparency.**

Historical advertisements frequently featured exaggerated efficacy claims without scientific validation or clear disclosure of potential side effects. The absence of regulation permitted manipulative messaging incompatible with modern bioethical principles.

- **Beneficence and consumer protection.** Contemporary bioethical tenets demand that health product advertisements safeguard users and avoid misleading them. Historical ads rarely warned of risks, which would today violate the principle of non-maleficence.

- **Autonomy and right to information.**

The right to informed decision-making constitutes a core bioethical principle. Historical advertisements seldom provided sufficient data for autonomous consumer choices.

2. Methods and research approach

Newspapers served as the primary medium for information and public communication in the 19th century, whereas the 21st century is marked by accelerated digitization and increasingly broad public access to historical newspaper editions. Two decades ago, Šojat-Bikić noted the very limited availability of historical newspapers to users at the time:

„Stored in libraries, accessible to readers only in reading rooms, exposed to potential damage from handling, unwieldy due to large formats and binding into bulky volumes, and difficult to search due to the lack of indexes, they are in fact ‘virtually’ technologically obsolete. Their use is restricted to one user at one location during a single time period, and they rely on linear searching. Digitization of historical newspapers (or retrodigitalisation of newspapers) is a worthwhile endeavour for a number of reasons” (2006: 21).

Today, however, the process of digital transformation is advancing through numerous projects supported by state institutions, academic communities, and private corporations, enabling the preservation of newspaper heritage and its accessibility to researchers, students, and the interested public via online platforms. Virtual reading rooms have emerged as a new digital format for reading and searching historical newspapers and periodicals online (Kuharić and Hocenski, 2025). Thanks to the digitization of German-language newspapers from the 19th and early 20th centuries—now increasingly available in online repositories as part of European initiatives to preserve cultural and media heritage—this research was successfully conducted. While Pederson (2012) particularly emphasizes the importance of digitized databases containing 19th-century German-language newspapers such as **ANNO** (Austrian Newspapers Online), **Europeana Newspapers**, and **ZEFYS** (Zeitungsinformationssystem), this study

draws on digitized editions accessible via the **DiFMOE** (Digital Forum for Central and Eastern Europe)² and Slavonia Museum network platforms.³

2.1. Analytical Framework

Through qualitative content analysis, combined with comparative and descriptive methods and a microhistorical research approach, this paper selects and interprets examples of advertisements for medical products and health services from German-language newspapers published in Osijek at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The microhistorical framework enables a detailed focus on local materials and specific social situations, thereby underscoring the significance of individual cases for understanding broader historical, cultural, and ethical contexts.

Special attention is devoted to advertisements exemplifying so-called *quackery*—that is, the promotion of dubious, insufficiently verified, or falsely represented medical preparations and treatments, which was a widespread practice at the time. The analysed advertisements are evaluated through the lens of contemporary bioethical standards, with emphasis on truthfulness, consumer protection, and the right to informed choice. By comparing the historical context and prevailing social values with modern bioethical postulates, the study highlights how many advertisements neglected responsibility toward users, often employing exaggerated or deceptive claims about product efficacy while omitting potential risks and side effects. This analysis, through a microhistorical lens, contributes to a better understanding of the development of health advertising and professional ethics via a concrete local example. The following section presents selected advertisement examples identified through qualitative analysis of digitized newspaper materials. All examples originate from Osijek newspapers printed in German and illustrate advertising strategies in the context of early 20th-century medical and pharmaceutical offerings. The advertisements are presented as visual reproductions with translations, accompanied by brief analytical commentary, including a bioethical interpretation aligned with contemporary standards.

² The DiFMOE project digitized the most important Osijek newspapers in German (*Die Drau, Slavonische Presse, Essegger Bote*) from the holdings of the Slavonia Museum and the National and University Library in Zagreb (NSK), as part of scientific collaboration between institutes from Gießen and Osijek (2017–2019), supported by the German Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM). The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek coordinated the project, digitizing over 147,000 pages and thereby creating a valuable corpus for further research (Engler and Möbius, 2022).

³ Collection “Osijek Newspapers in German Language”

3. Advertising of Pharmaceutical Preparations: Between Marketing and Bioethics

Fatović-Ferenčić and Brkić Midžić (2018, per Fatović-Ferenčić and Ferber Bogdan, 2018) emphasize that

“(...) during the 19th century, advertisements for physicians, dentists, pharmacists, and surgeons became increasingly prominent in daily press, professional, and other publications. Print media at that time became more accessible to the wider public, and the advertisements they published began to significantly boost their sales. The formation of consumer society influenced the development of modern marketing systems, including advertisements from the medical and hygiene spheres—such as medicines, medical and pharmaceutical supplies, cosmetic products, spas, mineral waters, and radioactivity—becoming increasingly attractive to consumers. A large portion of the promotion related to pharmaceutical products consisted of advertisements for patented pharmaceutical preparations produced in contemporary factory manufactories.”

Even in reconstructions of the earliest pharmaceutical and health advertisements, issues of truthfulness, exaggerated claims, and lack of consumer protection stand out—core themes in all contemporary bioethical debates. Historical analyses highlight that advertisements for *patent medicine* (miracle drugs)⁴, for instance, were often fundamentally vague and dysfunctional from a bioethical standpoint: no regulations existed, ads concealed risks and side effects, and advertising claims were frequently manipulative and unsubstantiated.

Unlike in the English-speaking world, no analytical work exclusively dedicated to miracle drugs has yet been published in Croatia. More recent overviews and review articles touch on this topic only within the broader framework of pharmaceutical history, the development of drug advertising, and medication regulation (Lončar, L., 2009; Suljagić, 2021; Brkić Midžić and Fatović-Ferenčić, 2022).

3.1. Croatian Pharmacists in Historical Advertising

In advertisements published in old newspapers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, alongside well-recognized and established Austro-Hungarian pharmacists, names of

⁴ Currently, no work in Croatian scholarly, historical, or pharmaceutical literature is analytically dedicated entirely to the phenomenon of *patent medicine* in the historical and Anglo-Saxon sense of the term. Most available Croatian scholarly articles and discussions address this topic within the broader issues of pharmaceutical industry development, drug history, advertising, or medical ethics, but not as an exclusive subject of analysis.

pharmacists from Croatian territories also appear. These Croatian pharmacists promoted their preparations, medicines, and services on equal footing with colleagues from the rest of the Monarchy, thereby contributing to the diversity and richness of the pharmaceutical market at the time. While pharmacists like Thierry and Feller operated with clearly structured business models and factory production, a large number of contemporary advertisements—particularly those tied to fringe activities outside professional pharmacy—relied on the rhetoric of so-called miracle drugs (patent medicines). These products, often advertised as universal solutions for a range of health ailments, were characterized by a lack of scientific evidence, marketing that relied on sensationalism, and unclear formulations. The subsequent sections of this paper focus precisely on such media examples, through their content and ethical analysis.

Advertisements frequently highlighted the geographical origin or unique features of Croatian pharmacies, using promotional messages to build trust among the local population and emphasize the quality of domestic preparations. Such presence in print demonstrates not only the strength and reputation of Croatian pharmacists within the broader health and economic space of Austria-Hungary but also their ability to adapt to market trends and contemporary needs.

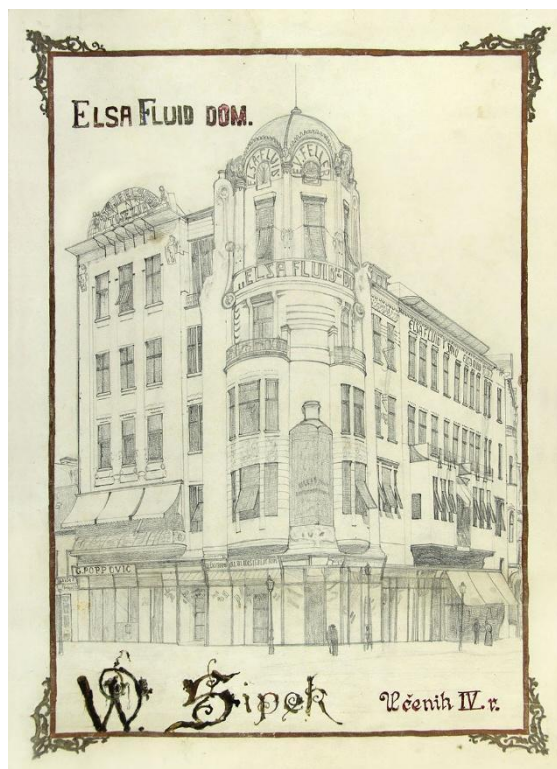
3.2. *Pioneers of Industrial Drug Production in Croatia*

The beginnings of industrial drug production in Croatia are directly linked to the region of Croatian Zagorje and the activities of pharmacist Adolf Alfons Thierry de Chateaufieux. After obtaining official permission in 1892, Thierry built a facility in Pregrada, opening the Guardian Angel Pharmacy and integrating factory premises into it. This institution represents the first pharmaceutical-chemical company in southeastern Europe. Several years after Thierry's arrival in Pregrada, in 1899, Croatian Zagorje became the site of activity for another prominent pharmacist, Eugen Viktor Feller⁵.

⁵ Eugen Viktor Feller (Levoča, 1871 – Zagreb, 1936) was one of the most prominent Croatian pharmacists and entrepreneurs at the turn of the 19th to 20th century, and a pioneer of industrial drug production and modern pharmaceutical advertising in Croatia. He began his career in 1897 in Grubišno Polje, where in his Red Cross Pharmacy he developed and produced *Elsa-fluid*—a multi-purpose *elixir* and a range of other preparations (pills, tinctures). In 1899, he relocated his business to Donja Stubica, and later to Zagreb, where he founded a pharmaceutical factory employing over 100 workers. Through the production of fluid and successful placement on international markets (Austria, France, China, USA, etc.), Feller built a recognizable brand. In central Zagreb, he commissioned a building featuring a large advertisement for his product *Elsa-fluid*, known as the *Elsa Fluid House* (Photograph 1), thereby combining pharmaceutical production with visual identity and marketing innovation (Curiosities of the Croatian Museum of Medicine and Pharmacy, <https://hmmf.hazu.hr/elsa-fluid-cuveni-proizvod-ljekarnika-eugena-viktora-fellera/>).

Recent publications, such as the book *What is Elsa-fluid? That is known: Eugen Viktor Feller – Pharmacist and Investor* by Stella Fatović-Ferenčić and Jasenka Ferber Bogdan (2021), as well as the 2022 translation of Miroslav Feller's 1932 work *Psychodynamics of Advertising*, enable the study of marketing and advertisements in Croatian newspapers during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century in several ways. While the book on the father, Eugen Viktor Feller, and his product *Elsa-fluid* provides an exhaustive depiction of the development of the pharmaceutical industry in Croatia and advertising strategies of that period, the son's work represents one of the first scientific approaches to advertising in Croatia and a better understanding of psychoanalytic concepts in advertising communication. Both publications offer an interdisciplinary approach encompassing the history of medicine, pharmacy, economics, and culture, which can inspire researchers to analyse advertising activities within the broader context of social and economic changes in Croatia. Furthermore, they enable the contextualization of the advertising strategies used in the early 20th century and a better understanding of advertising campaign design in Croatian newspapers.

Photograph 1. Viktor Šipek: *Elsa Fluid House*, drawing, Zagreb, 1910, HMMF-633



Source: <https://hmmf.hazu.hr/elsa-fluid-cuveni-proizvod-ljekarnika-eugena-viktora-fellera/>

Feller promoted his preparations, medicines, and services on equal footing with colleagues from the rest of the Monarchy, thereby making a significant contribution to the diversity and richness of the pharmaceutical market at that time⁶. However, to what extent did his marketing strategies—often relying on exaggerated claims, emotional testimonials, and trust symbolism—neglect the boundaries of professional responsibility? This raises the question: were these forms of advertising entrepreneurial innovations consistent with the spirit of the age, or did they represent a form of (bio)ethically questionable manipulation of the trust and hopes of sick people?

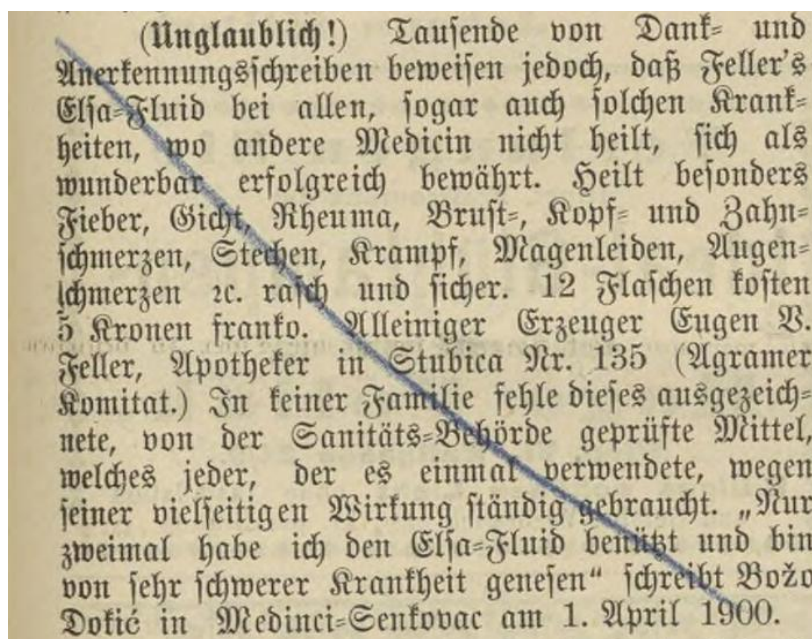
Advertisements for so-called miracle drugs—preparations that not infrequently promised rapid, complete, and universal healing—became an increasingly prominent form of consumer communication, strongly shaping the era's health discourse. Such products were promoted under sonorous names, accompanied by illustrations, testimonials, and quasi-medical terminology, with their success grounded in suggestion, authority symbolism, and the market mechanism of over-the-counter availability without prescription.

In this context, German-language newspapers, which served as the dominant medium of communication in urban centres such as Osijek, are key sources for understanding advertising patterns. The advertisements published in their editions reveal not only the style and content of promotional messages but also broader social values, levels of medical education, and trust in new forms of treatment. Precisely these advertisements, analysed from microhistorical and bioethical perspectives, prove invaluable for understanding the interplay between medicine, market, and public communication during this pivotal historical period.

⁶ E. V. Feller's advertisements appeared in 17 additional German-language publications (outside present-day Croatia) according to DiFMOE. <https://www.difmoe.eu/search?q=Elsa%20fluid>

3.3. Elsa-fluid – Universal Remedy or Advertising Phenomenon?

Photograph 2. Advertising text from Slavonische Presse, no. 132, June 10, 1900.



Source: <https://www.difmoe.eu/uuid/uuid:b7b221d2-7c29-4e90-a752-0ea058486859>

Translation of the advertisement text (translated by the author, D. K.)

(Incredible!) Thousands of thank-you letters and testimonials, however, prove that Feller's Elsa-fluid has been miraculously successful even in those diseases where other medicine fails. It particularly cures fever, gout, rheumatism, chest pains, headaches, and toothaches, stings, cramps, stomach complaints, eye pains, etc., quickly and reliably. 12 bottles cost 3 crowns, including postage. Sole manufacturer Eugen V. Feller, pharmacist in Stubica No. 135, Agram County. No household should be without this extraordinary remedy, which has been tested by the health authorities. Everyone who has used it once continues to use it regularly because of its multiple benefits. "I have only used Elsa-fluid twice and have recovered from a very serious illness," writes Božo Đokić from Medinci-SenjkoVac on April 1, 1900.

The Elsa-fluid⁷ advertising text by Eugen Viktor Feller (Photograph 2) is a typical example of miracle-drug promotion from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Content analysis reveals several key characteristics that classify it as such. Rhetorically, it employs strong language emphasizing intense emotions ("*Incredible!*", "*miraculously successful*"). Moreover, it is

⁷ Elsa-fluid advertisements appeared in Slavonische Presse from 1900 to 1904. <https://www.difmoe.eu/periodical/uuid:740963eb-73b4-4bbc-9cc5-90482f796112?fulltext=Elsa%20fluid>

described as a remedy that successfully treats “even those diseases that other medicines cannot cure.” Such universality and spectacular promises point to the typical approach in presenting the efficacy of miracle drugs. Furthermore, listing a wide array of different ailments allegedly cured quickly and reliably (fever, gout, rheumatism, chest pains, headaches, toothaches, cramps, stomach and eye complaints) is characteristic of this type of preparation—promising healing without medical evidence. Citing purported thank-you letters and user testimonials (“*I have only used Elsa-fluid twice and have recovered from a very serious illness*”) enhances the impression of authenticity, though they constitute no scientific proof of efficacy. The claim that the preparation was tested by “*health authorities*” and should be in every household creates an illusion of official approval and safety—a common strategy in miracle-drug advertising, absent genuine regulatory oversight. Finally, stating a fixed price and mail-order availability reflects the mass-market business model typical of miracle drugs. Alongside this promotional text, later printed advertisements for *Elsa-fluid* and all other Elsa-brand products⁸ provide excellent illustrations of the historical practice of exaggerated and unverified claims in drug marketing, employing emotional rhetoric, trust-building through individual testimonials, and manipulation of product status via claimed awards (Photograph 3)⁹ or the manufacturer’s own titles, such as Feller’s designation as “*court supplier to His Royal Highness the Duke of Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha*” (Photograph 4). This title highlighted the product’s marketing prestige, suggesting official recognition and status, thereby affirming consumer trust and quality while implying widespread satisfaction and popularity.

⁸ In addition to the aforementioned Elsa-fluid, products under *the registered trademark Elsa* (Photograph 4) included digestive aid and cleansing pills, corn tincture, personal hygiene and cosmetic products (tar-based soap—*medicinal soap for beauty and skin health*; face ointment—*for removing freckles and improving complexion*; hair pomade; shaving soap; moustache wax), and other preparations. Highlighting brand registration in advertising text aimed to create consumer impressions of safety, originality, and legal recognition. In the context of the era, when the market was flooded with similar preparations, emphasizing “brand protection” positioned Feller’s products above the competition.

⁹ Gold and silver medals won at exhibitions in Berlin, London, Marseille, Nice, Rome, and Paris.

Photograph 3. Elsa-fluid advertisement with awards prominently featured in the upper left corner (*Slavonische Presse*, no. 74, March 30, 1902)



Source: <https://www.difmoe.eu/uuid/uuid:653b5c05-d7e4-438e-89ab-c61340eff189>

Moreover, the mention of a free brochure in the 1904 advertisement (Photograph 4) represents an important—and well-considered—marketing tool. The ad states that “a free brochure with recommendations is sent by mail, postage unpaid, by court supplier E. V. Feller, Stubica near Zagreb.” In the context of miracle drug advertising, this was the cheapest and most effective way to build consumer trust, channel information, and encourage orders—disguised as information and assistance. The distribution of free brochures with recommendations was a common technique for building trust and stimulating sales, as Presbrey (1929) confirmed in his historical study of advertising. From bioethical and marketing perspectives, this constitutes a strategically designed tactic to attract customers under the guise of concern for their information needs.

multiple platforms for the success of a pharmaceutical product on the regional market. One advertisement in *Die Drau* stands out in particular (Photograph 5), demonstrating Feller's ingenuity and ability to adapt rhetorical strategies and advertising approaches to different audiences, thereby further solidifying his position as a pioneer in pharmaceutical marketing at the turn of the 20th century.

3.4. Narrative Techniques in Feller's Advertising

The introductory section employs a “true story from life” with a personal testimonial from a cured user—a narrative technique characteristic of miracle drug advertisements of that era, as supported by historical handbooks on advertising development (Presbrey, 1929; Young, 1961).

Photograph 5. Example of Feller's Elsa-fluid advertisement published in *Die Drau*, no. 137, November 17, 1901



Source: www.difmoe.eu/uuid/uuid:3c25c49a-2e0e-46bf-a03a-681a714ae530

Translation of the advertisement text (translated by the author, D. K.)

<i>The</i>	<i>Secret</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>Old</i>	<i>Man!</i>
<i>A True Story from Life. Told by Hans Straka from Banat.</i>					
<i>“The most important thing a person has is health. Only when one falls ill does one realize how difficult it is to find a remedy that helps. I was sick for six years and tried everything, but in vain. A year ago, I was completely weak and ill. Finally, I read in a newspaper about Feller’s Elsa-Fluid from the pharmacy in Stubica (Croatia) and thought: ‘Stop! Try this one too!’ I ordered a dozen for trial and can now share the following with you:</i>					
<i>For six years, I could not walk due to gout and terrible pain in my legs. I could not lift my legs, and at night I could not sleep. For ten days, I applied Feller’s Elsa-Fluid and could already walk and sleep, and after three weeks, I was healthy as a fish. All the neighbours came to see this miraculous remedy that helped me...”¹¹</i>					

Advertisement for Eugen Viktor Feller’s Elsa-fluid published in the 1907 *Esseker Bote* calendar (Photograph 6) represents an exceptionally powerful and sophisticated example of early 20th-century pharmaceutical advertising. Its effective marketing strength derives from several elements. First, Feller invokes social prestige and authority by presenting the preparation as the Shah of Persia’s choice. This is followed by endorsements from high-ranking officials (princes, barons, physicians, and even noblewomen), which artificially endow the product with an aura of exclusivity and social approval. Furthermore, the advertisement features a series of personal testimonials from satisfied users—from the nearly blind to those with chronic digestive issues—emphasizing the “miracle” of healing across a wide range of diseases. References to physicians’ opinions, professional journals, and “*medical gazettes*” lend the advertisement an appearance of objectivity and medical grounding, although no genuine scientific evidence is provided. The text suggests that the product is used by “*everyone*,” regardless of the type or severity of health problems, thereby maximizing the potential market. The use of spectacular claims, praise, and emotive narration creates trust and stimulates purchase desire. This truly unique advertisement—compared to the average corpus of advertising notices in German-language newspapers printed in Osijek—is exceptionally effective for its historical era due to strong social proof (authorities, testimonials) and psychological persuasion mechanisms. It successfully targets both emotional and rational consumer dimensions, building trust through a combination of pseudo-authoritative and narrative techniques.

¹¹ Due to the length of the original source, only the first part containing sufficient relevant sentences needed for interpretation has been translated (D.K. The advertisement for Eugen Viktor Feller’s Elsa-fluid, published in the 1907 *Esseker Bote* calendar (Photograph 6) ,)

Photograph 6. Elsa-fluid advertisement published in *Esseker Bote* 1907

Im Namen Seiner Majestät

des Schah von Persien hat Hofapotheker Eugen V. Feller in Stubica Nr. 40 (Agramer Komitat) folgendes Anerkennungs-schreiben erhalten:

«Ich habe die Ehre Ihnen hiermit mitzuteilen, dass Seine Majestät der Schah von Persien während der Zeit seines Aufenthaltes in Belgien Ihr vorzügliches Präparat: Fellers Elsa-Fluid angewendet hat und mit demselben sehr zufrieden ist.»

Bruxelles, am 11. August 1905. Hassan Khan, Legationsrat.

Hofapotheker Feller in Stubica Nr. 40 (Agramer Komitat) hat auch den Persischen Löwen- u. Sonnenorden erhalten.

Seine Durchlaucht Josef Prinz Rohan schreibt folgendes: Die überraschende Wirkung Ihres Elsa-Fluids übertrifft wirklich alle Erwartungen und können Sie es veröffentlichen, dass mir und meinen Bekannten Ihr Elsa-Fluid und Ihre Elsa-Pillen bei den meisten Krankheiten, wie Kopf- und Zahnschmerzen, Stechen, Reissen, Kreuzschmerzen, Schaupfen, Magenschmerzen, Ueblichkeiten etc., vorzügliche Dienste geleistet haben, besonders bei geschwächter Sehkraft stützt Ihr Elsa-Fluid die Augen, weshalb ich Ihr Elsa-Fluid als ein im Haushalte unentbehrliches Heilmittel allerbestens empfehle. Schottwien, 30 IX 1903. **Josef Prinz Rohan.**

Die Stimme eines Arztes. Ersuche höflichst um ehestige Zusendung von 30 Doppelflaschen Ihres vorzüglichen Elsa-Fluids, welches ich in meiner Praxis schon seit 2 Jahren mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolge benütze. Bitte alles mit Nachnahme. **Med. Dr. Kittel.** Proha-Kral Vinohradý Paleckého tř. č. 12.

5 Jahre beinahe blind war ich, da ich seit 5 Jahren mein Augenlicht verloren habe. Ihr berühmtes Fellers Elsa-Fluid hat es erwirkt, dass ich jetzt wieder sehe, — schreibt **Johann Banca.** Czófalva (Háromszéker Kom.)

Magenleiden, Appetitlosigkeit, Blutarmut, Magendrücken, Ueblichkeiten, Krämpfe, Ekel, Erbrechen, Sodbrennen, woran ich jahrelang litt, haben mir auskeriert nur Ihre Fellers Elsa-Pillen und Elsa-Fluid — schreibt **Karl Palkovits.** Béi, u. p. Ipoly-Pászó.

Eine Baronin schreibt: Ich wollte schon lange schreiben, dass Sie es in den Zeitungen veröffentlichen sollten, dass Ihr Elsa-Fluid ausgezeichnet ist. Ich habe so viele Leiden gehabt, Gicht und Augenschwäche, Müdigkeit und Kopfschmerzen, Rückenschmerzen, Schwäche und seit ich Ihr Elsa-Fluid brauche, bin ich gesund. Ich kann es nur jedem Menschen anempfehlen. **Baronin Geramb.** April 1903, im Bad Buziás (Temeser Kom.)

Ein Wiener Medizinisches Blatt schreibt: ... Fellers Elsa-Fluid hat, nachdem es einer klinischen Prüfung unterzogen wurde, den Ruf, den es bereits im grossen Publikum genießt, vollauf gerechtfertigt. Besonders wird gelobt die prompte, schmerzstillende Wirkung des Fellers Elsa-Fluids, die auch dort zutage trat, wo mittels der jetzt üblichen Therapie kein nennenswerter Erfolg zu erzielen war.

Husten, Heiserkeit, Nervosität, Halsschmerzen, Brust- und Gelenkschmerzen, Rachen- und Kehlkopfleidens sind Schmerzen, von denen ich viel erzählen könnte. Erst nachdem ich Ihr Fellers Elsa-Fluid benütze, fühle ich mich gesund, — schreibt **Peter Todor.**

Wunden, Geschwüre, skrophulöse Drüsen, Ausschläge verunstalteten die Kinder. Die armen bekamen Fraisen und Fieber und verdanken nur Ihrem Fellers Elsa-Fluid ihre vollkommene Heilung, — schreibt **Dorothea Engel.** Altfrataucz, Bukowina.

(Fortsetzung siehe auf der nächsten Seite.)

Source: <https://www.difmoe.eu/uuid/uuid:28fc41ec-dffd-4f89-a1ff-48af9c6f9cd2>

3.5. Advertising of tapeworm remedies through the lens of marketing and bioethics

The advertisement for Dr. Rappaport's tapeworm remedy (Photograph 7) exemplifies the intensely powerful, emotional advertising of the early 20th century. It is characterized by several marketing strategies: an alarming headline emphasizing a mass problem ("Thousands of people suffer from tapeworm!"), creating a sense of shared danger; a broad spectrum of symptoms and consequences (weakness, pain, fluid loss, death in children), further amplifying urgency and

concern among readers; an offer of “*complete safety and guarantee*” in eliminating the parasite with its head, suggesting an effective and permanent solution; references to “*numerous satisfied parents, teachers, and physicians*” leveraging community and professional authority without concrete evidence or references; and finally, clear purchase instructions (“*can be obtained by mail directly from us*”), reducing barriers to ordering and encouraging impulsive decisions.

Such strategies were typical of an era with minimal regulation of advertising, when marketing messages were often explicitly emotional, making bold promises of efficacy to rapidly attract purchases.

Photograph 7. Advertisement for Dr. Rappaport’s tapeworm remedy published in *Die Frau*, no. 91, November 7, 1886



Source: www.difmoe.eu/uuid/uuid:98d7b5b1-680c-44dd-b009-9f8bdb89cd72

Translation of the advertisement text (translated by the author, D. K.)

<i>Thousands</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>suffer</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>tapeworms!</i>
<i>Few</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>know</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>true</i>	<i>cause</i>
<i>Absolute</i>	<i>guarantee</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>safety</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>provided</i>
<i>(Illustration</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>tapeworm</i>	<i>with</i>	<i>labels:</i>	<i>“tapeworm,”</i>
					<i>“head”</i>)

Like other worms, tapeworms in children and adults can cause weakness, abdominal pain, fluid loss, pallor, irritability, insomnia, loss of strength, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes even drowsiness and fainting. It is particularly dangerous in children, where it hinders growth and development, and can even cause death.

*There exists an easily administered remedy against tapeworms that, if applied according to instructions, completely clears the body of tapeworms, including their heads, thereby halting the diseases they cause! This remedy has already been tested thousands of times with great success—as testified by numerous letters from satisfied parents, teachers, and physicians, available for anyone's inspection. Seek out **exclusively** this proven effective and safe remedy in all better pharmacies, drug stores, and apothecaries—or obtain it by mail directly from us. Price of bottle for complete treatment: by mail, 6 forints per bottle.*

For orders, write to:
Specialist Dr. Rappaport
Boryslaw (Galicia)

From today's bioethical perspective, the advertisement contains several questionable and risky elements. Claims of an "absolute guarantee" and a "complete removal" of the parasite create a false sense of efficacy without scientific validation. The advertisement provides no information about possible side effects, contraindications, or the actual composition of the remedy. By focusing on children ("*particularly dangerous in children... can cause death*"), it emotionally blackmails parents and encourages purchases driven by fear rather than reason. Alongside the emphasis on pseudoscientific authority ("*proven effective and safe remedy,*" "*physicians' opinions available to everyone*"), there is also social pressure and indirect shaming (the remedy "*should be in every home*").

3.6. *Between Hope and Deception: Advertising Anti-Cholera Remedies*

During the 19th century, when numerous cholera epidemics struck Europe and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy¹², no scientifically proven, effective remedy against cholera existed. Popular at the time were various "elixirs," home remedies, homeopathic medicines, and herbal remedies. The advertisement for Bastler's anti-cholera drops¹³ represents an excellent example

¹² Six global cholera pandemics struck Europe between 1816 and 1923, with Austria-Hungary frequently affected due to trade, migration, wars, and population density.

<https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/contagion/feature/cholera-epidemics-in-the-19th-century>

¹³ During the 19th and early 20th centuries, no proven remedy against cholera existed, nor any scientifically confirmed treatment method. The first truly effective therapeutic approaches were developed only mid-20th

of sophisticated market communication from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. The advertisement (Photograph 8) invokes endorsements from physicians and pharmacists, thereby fostering consumer trust and a sense of safety. The product is positioned not only as protection against cholera but also against *other intestinal diseases*, significantly expanding the target buyer group. Mentioning a special pharmacy and the warning “*beware of counterfeits*” implies that the original product is particularly valuable and distinct from potentially dangerous imitations. However, from a bioethical perspective, the advertisement exhibits several problematic features: from exaggerated claims without evidence and abuse of trust in authorities, to the absence of risk information and potential for emotional manipulation (“*terrible diseases*”). The advertisement is undoubtedly a skillful marketing document of its time, but in bioethical terms, it would today be flagged as potentially dangerous to public health

3.7. Product variations

The advertisement lists “*cholera drops*” as a drinkable elixir and for “*disinfection*” to prevent contagion through air, water, and clothing, making the product range more attractive and suitable for mass use.

Photograph 8. Advertisement for Dr. Rappaport’s tapeworm remedy published in *Die Drau*, no. 58, July 22, 1886



Source: <https://www.difmoe.eu/uuid/uuid:b06df657-b065-4450-a394-a385cb999942>

century, while earlier methods were largely ineffective or harmful (mortality among patients remained high, around 50%). <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/contagion/feature/cholera-epidemics-in-the-19th-century>

Translation of the advertisement text (translated by the author, D. K.)

Dr. Bastler's Anti-Cholera Drops

These exceptionally effective "Dr. Bastler's Cholera Drops" are produced exclusively at the pharmacy Apoteka JOS. KALLIVODA with special privilege in FALKENSTEIN (Vinkovci).

All physicians and pharmacists recommend them as the safest remedy for protection against cholera and other intestinal diseases, but also as a treatment for diarrhea, vomiting, stomach weakness, cramps, and other stomach ailments.

*V. KALLIVODA Cholera Drops: stomach elixir (in drinkable bottles).
V. KALLIVODA Disinfection: for disinfecting air, clothing, objects, water, etc., as well as for protection against household diseases, epidemics, fever, cholera, typhus—completely harmless and very affordable.*

Orders can be placed by mail or in person at the special pharmacy and chemical laboratory of Jos. Kallivoda von Falkenstein, VINKOVCI.

Beware of counterfeits!

4. Conclusion

Analysis of Feller's and other pharmaceutical advertisements in Osijek's German-language newspapers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries reveals the complex relationship between marketing strategies and ethical challenges in early health advertising. Through a microhistorical approach, it becomes clear that emotional narratives, appeals to authority, and exaggerated claims were employed to attract consumers, while transparency and risk information were simultaneously absent. This historical analysis not only fills a scholarly gap resulting from the limited accessibility of Gothic-script sources but also underscores the importance of ethical regulation and responsible approaches to advertising health products—a topic that remains equally relevant today.

The availability of digitized materials opens new possibilities for future research. Digitization of historical newspapers and advertisements enables easier access to rare sources, thereby encouraging interdisciplinary studies and deepening understanding of the history of advertising, pharmacy, and social values. This research provides a foundation and impetus for further analysis of cultural, linguistic, and ethical issues in historical advertisements.

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MIKROHISTORIJA ZDRAVSTVENOG OGLAŠAVANJA: FELLEROV ELSA FLUID I FARMACEUTSKE REKLAME U NJEMAČKIM NOVINAMA OSIJEKA KRAJEM 19. I POČETKOM 20. STOLJEĆA

Sažetak

Rad nudi mikropovijesnu analizu oglasa za farmaceutske proizvode u novinama na njemačkom jeziku koje su izlazile u Osijeku krajem 19. i početkom 20. stoljeća, s posebnim naglaskom na Fellerovu Elsa tekućinu. Elsa tekućina odabrana je kao središnja studija slučaja zbog svog širokog doseg i prisutnosti u čak sedamnaest njemačkih periodičnih publikacija, što joj je omogućilo da nadiđe lokalno okruženje i primjerom prikaže formativnu fazu zdravstvenog marketinga. Uz analizu Fellerovih oglasa, rad uspoređuje druge farmaceutske oglase (lijekove protiv kolere i trakavica) kako bi se identificirale zajedničke marketinške i bioetičke strategije tog razdoblja. Posebna se pozornost posvećuje narativnim tehnikama, pozivanju na autoritet, emocionalnoj manipulaciji i pretjeranim tvrdnjama o učinkovitosti koje nisu potkrijepljene znanstvenim dokazima. Iz bioetičke perspektive, sve ispitivane oglase karakterizira nedostatak transparentnosti, odsutnost informacija o rizicima i nuspojavama te nedostatak točnih, provjerljivih podataka, što zajedno stvara potencijal za obmanu i dezinformiranje potrošača. Na taj način, analiza ukazuje na šire strukturne probleme u zdravstvenom oglašavanju u razmatranom povijesnom kontekstu.

Ovo istraživačko područje ostaje izrazito nedovoljno istraženo. Primarni čimbenik koji doprinosi ovoj znanstvenoj praznini je prevalencija gotičkog pisma u relevantnim periodičnim publikacijama, što istraživačima otežava pristup, čitljivost i interpretaciju primarnih izvora. Takvi izazovi naglašavaju kritičnu potrebu za projektima digitalizacije i interdisciplinarnim metodologijama u prospektivnim istraživanjima oglašavanja i farmaceutske povijesti unutar

srednjoeuropske sfere. Ovaj rad unapređuje razumijevanje povijesnih praksi medicinskog marketinga, zalaže se za etičke standarde i regulatorne mehanizme za zaštitu potrošača te se bavi značajnom prazninom u hrvatskoj akademskoj literaturi proučavanjem nedovoljno iskorištene arhivske građe.

Ključne riječi: povijesna reklama, bioetika u oglašavanju, zdravstveni marketing, njemačke novine tiskane u Osijeku, Fellerov *Elsa Fluid*