

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Chair of Distribution and Sales

**The Semiotics of Luxury and Fashion Brands
Advertising: A Literature Review**

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to understand the meaning hidden behind the advertising campaigns, in particular of luxury and fashion brands, using the semiotic analysis. Semiotics is a science devoted to the study of signs and symbols and could be applied to various fields from linguistic analysis to visual analysis. This kind of study could be very useful for businesses and brands that want to enforce their brand strategies, to show at best their brand values and to attract customers. This could be obtained with the use of semiotic strategies in order to develop powerful advertisement aimed to arouse a sense of desire in the viewer. Moreover they can use semiotics to convey information about the company and the product to the viewer. So it is also important that this one would be able to decode and understand the meaning that the advertising campaign wants to deliver. To solve this question are usually used symbols and myths linked to the cultural and social background to which the potential customers are linked.

Chapter one will focus on the origin of the term semiotics and its evolution. Will be taken into account the various authors that had made semiotics as the main subject of their studies and analysis. In particular will be analyzed the two principal school of thought regarding semiotics that could be linked to the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Finally will be analyzed the work of Umberto Eco, which wanted to break the distinctions between the Anglo-Saxon and European perspectives and to find a general theory of semiotics.

Chapter two will be devoted to the analysis of all the authors that have found an application of the semiotics to the consumer culture. There will be addressed the concept of myth and the concept of code, and the way in which those are linked to cultural and social environment. Finally will be

explained the process linked to the passage to the various phases of structuralism, deconstructionism and socio-semiotics.

Chapter three will deal with the principal aim of this thesis, and so with the relationship that occurs between semiotics and brand strategy. Will be analyzed all the tools that could be exploited in order to increase brand awareness, brand loyalty and in this way to empower brand identity and brand equity. Then there will be a focus on the application of semiotics to media and in particular to marketing and advertising. Furthermore there will be an analysis of the visual semiotics and the way in which colors could be used as signs. Then there will be a deeper analysis of print advertisement and on the use of visual space in the advertising campaigns. Finally it will be introduced the case of luxury and fashion advertisements with the semiotic analysis of some practical cases.

This thesis consist in the study of all the already existent articles and literature about semiotics, with the aim of develop a common analysis of the semiotic theory and in particular its application to the advertising campaign of luxury and fashion brands.

1. History

1.1. Origins

The origin of the words semiotics and semiology (in the Saussurean tradition) resides in the Greek word σημεῖον (semeion), which means sign. Since the sign is in general something that represents something else, as medieval philosophers said "*aliquid stat pro aliquo*", semiotic could be seen as the science that studies the phenomena of signification and communication. The signification is the relation that determines the linkage between something that is present and something that doesn't, which determines a process of communication. Semiotics studies both linguistics and non-linguistics sign systems. It considers all signs as polysemic, which means that every sign generates a multiple significations within the mind of whom has to analyze it, creating an association among different things.

The first figure interested in signs was Hippocrates (460-370 BC), which wanted to see their connection to medical symptoms, in fact with the word *Σημειωτική* (semeiotics) is called that branch of medical science that refers to the study of symptoms of disease (*σημεία*). Moreover a lot of philosophers such as Aristotle (384-322 BC), Plato, Stoics and Epicureans were dealing with this topic, distinguishing between the theory of linguistic sign and the study of the logic sign. This because for the Greeks the term "sign" occurred in the world of nature while "symbol" was referred to the world of culture.

After that Saint Augustine, also called Augustine of Hippo, (354-430) gave to the verbal sign a collocation into the general theory of signs identifying symbols as no more than a species of signs proposed in a formal way. He said that:

“The sign is in fact something that, besides the sensitive aspect which it presents, leads one to think of something else starting from him” (De Doctrina Cristiana, I.1.1).

Also philosophers of the Empiricism like Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and John Locke (1632-1704) gave some insights about semiotics. Locke proposed, in the closing chapter of his work: *Essay concerning Humane Understanding* (1690), to include the term “semiotics” (σημιωτική) into the English language as a synonymous for “doctrine of signs”.

In the Scapula’s abridgement of Henricus Stephanus’ *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (1579), the word σημειωτική was used to refer to “diagnostics”, which was the branch of medicine devoted to the interpretation of the various symptoms linked to the diseases. This because the Henry Stubbes (1632–1676), in his work *The Plus Ultra Reduced to a Non Plus*, transliterated the word σημειωτική into the English term “semeiotic”. In the light of these two theories, in order to differentiate his idea of the study of sign from that devoted to medicine, Locke deliberately omitted the letter epsilon after the mu, introducing the term semiotics, rather than semeiotics as his Greek counterpart. He wanted to distinguish between the word semeiotic concerned as the science to analyze symptoms in medicine and the semiotic (σημιωτική) as a general doctrine of signs. So the omission of the epsilon made by Locke was not a semantic error but a deliberate spelling in order to don’t confuse and so differentiate the general doctrine of signs (Σημιωτική, “semiotics”) from the existing name of the specialized branch of medicine (Σημειωτική, “semeiotics”).

Very important for the modern semiotics have been also the reflections of the philosophic rationalist school, both in France with René Descartes (1596-1650) and in Germany with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716).

It was Juri Lotman to adopt the Locke's term σημιωτική introducing it to the Eastern Europe with the first semiotic journal: *Sign System Studies* (1964).

1.2. The modern semiotics

The start of modern semiotics could be found in the works of Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sandler Peirce (1839-1914). They are considered the two founding fathers of modern semiotics, since their works are considered the two major paradigms of the application of semiotics to fields like consumer industry and marketing, taking the name of consumer semiotics and marketing semiotics. While Saussure used the term semiology, Peirce used the term semiotics.

1.2.1. The Saussurean school

The Saussurean vision of semiotics was principally related to linguistics, since he thought that it could be the basis for all kind of the semiotic analysis. In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1966) Saussure described his vision of the sign and what he meant for it:

“Language is a system of signs that expresses ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of these systems.

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek σημεῖον “sign”).

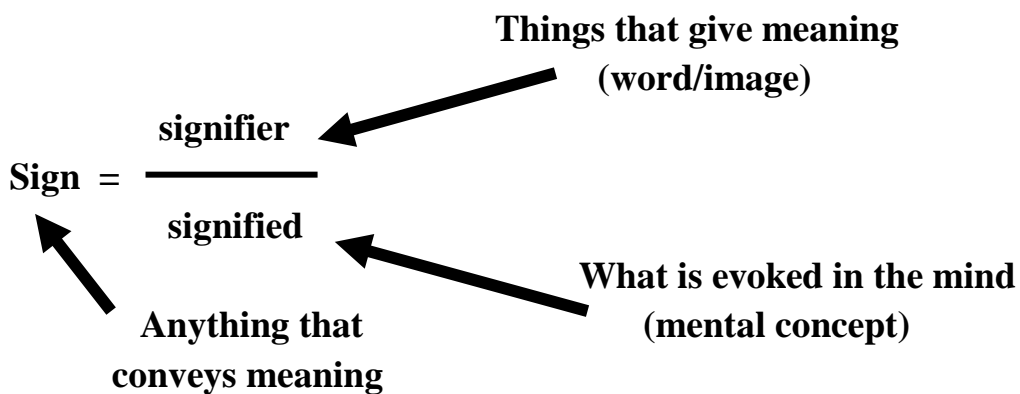
Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance.

Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts [...]" (F. De Saussure, 1996, p.16).

Saussure defined the language as a system constituted by signs that acquire a meaning only because of the relationships they have each other.

As said before the saussurean paradigm is referred to a linguistic view of the sign. In the definition of Saussure signs are composed by two parts: a sound-image or *signifier* that is the form taken by the sign and a concept or *signified*, which is the concept to which the sign refers, the mental-image of that.

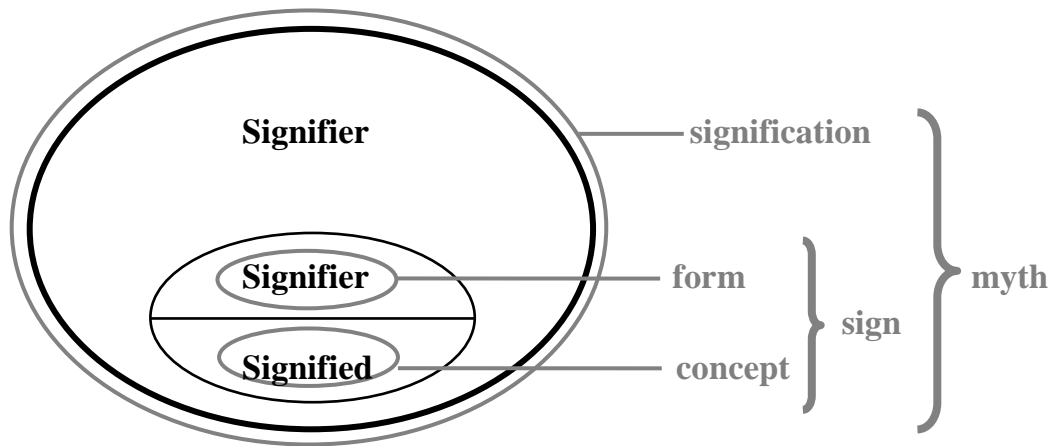
Figure 1: Signifier/Signified Concept



The signifier is the image, the term linked to the sign itself, instead the signified represents the idea of that, the mental concept. The relation between these, called *signification*, is arbitrary and based on social and

cultural conventions, so the meaning assigned to signs could change overtime.

Figure 2: Signifier/Signified Relationship



In the opinion of Saussure the language is constituted by signs that have an intrinsic meaning since they are able to communicate something. Because of that, in order to understand the meaning of all the other things, those could be treated and studied like linguistic signs. Every time is found a sign that carries a particular meaning, that could be studied with the same semiotic approach, like for example image-based media or language-based advertising, since the language is the most powerful means of communication.

Moreover the meaning of a sign is affected by its relative position and not by its intrinsic value, since concepts could be defined in different ways. So the signification of a sign depends on the relation that this sign has with other signs. Signs haven't meaning if considered isolated, since because of the nature of the language, people use to think about sings in terms of their polar opposition with their antagonists, like for example rich and poor, cheap and expensive, bad and good, night and day and so on. So concepts are defined not by their positive content, but by their negative relations with

the others terms of the construction. In this way concepts are differential and are determined by the fact that they are what the others are not.

As said before he considered the signifier as the mental representation of a thing. If we think at the language, it means that every sonority is able to generate a common visual representation among people imagination. Thinking for example at a car, every interpreter will focus on their mind on a similar representation.

Saussure said that signs could be studied both diachronically and synchronically. He applied this kind of distinction also to the analysis of language. In order to have a more persuasive synchronic approach, he divided the language in three parts:

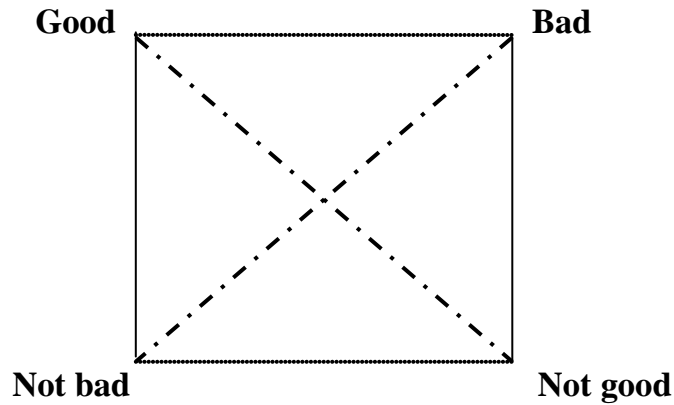
- Langage, referring to the human capacity of developing structured communication systems, linked to the system of grammar predetermined rules and conventions
- Langue, about what we are thinking in terms of language (English, Italian, etc.)
- Parole, which is the personal way of speaking of the individual, and the way in which he use it according to particular circumstances.

1.2.1.1. The Semiotic Square

Starting from the Saussurean approach to signs, Greimas developed the *Semiotic Square* (1966) exploiting the reciprocal supposition of two opposite terms.

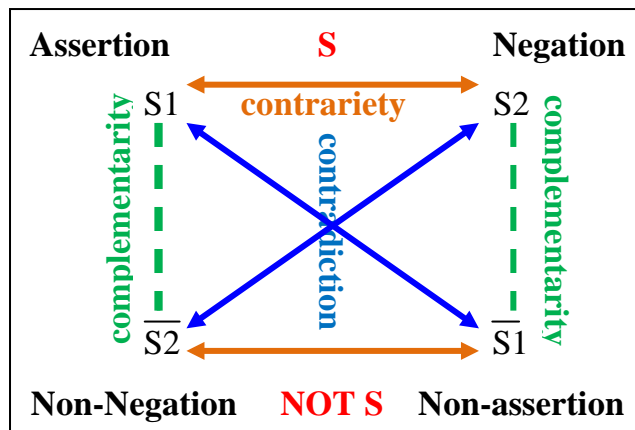
It was J.M. Floch (2002) that extended this kind of studies and gave an application of that in the field of marketing and in the analysis of the advertising messages.

Figure 3: The Semiotic Square



The square is based on the use of logical-semantic links. It is conceived as mapping the logical conjunctions and disjunctions that link the semantic elements contained within a paradigm each other. It is very useful when the analysis of a discourse is necessary, giving an advantage if compared to a form/content analysis approach. It is able to stimulate the meaning analysis and moreover it gives a methodological constraint, making simpler for non-semioticians the analysis of a paradigm.

Figure 4: The Semiotic Square



Greimas thought at this square as a mean able to analyze paired concept in a deeper way. Frederic Jameson highlighted that this square was able to

generate at least ten positions, rather than the only two binary opposition introduced by Greimas.

Looking at the semiotic square, the symbols S1, NOT S1, S2, NOT S2 symbolize the positions that could be occupied.

The vertical relationships between the four corners are defined by Greimas as contradiction, complementarity or implication, contrariety or opposition.

The arrows with double heads symbolize the bilateral opposition. The corners represent the opposition between S1, S2, NOT S1, NOT S2.

The relation between NOT S1 and NOT S2 doesn't represent a simple binary opposition, since saying that a thing is not another thing, for example "it is not black" is different from said that it is white. In fact while S1 and S2 represent situations of presence, NOT S1 and NOT S2 represent situations of absence.

An example of the semiotic square was offered by Varda Langholz Leymore with the introduction of two opposite terms, which are beautiful and ugly. So in the corners of the semiotic square there will be ugly, beautiful, not ugly, not beautiful. In this case emerges that the terms beautiful and ugly don't represent a binary opposition, since the fact that a thing is not beautiful, doesn't mean that it must be inevitably ugly, and vice versa.

Moreover Alan Rhodes and Rodrigo Zuloago make an example of the semiotic square applied to high fashion advertising. When people look to an advertising campaign, they could or not identify their selves in the people of the advertising. So the corners of the semiotic square will be self, other, not self, not other.

The same thing is true for a lot of other opposite terms.

1.2.1.2. Further application of the semiotic square

As said before the Greimasian square could be applied to a lot of contexts, for example Dan Fleming applied that to the world of children's toys.

Moreover Gilles Marion used the semiotic square to explain how is possible to communicate thorough fashion and clothes. In this case the four corners of the semiotic square identified by Marion will be: wanting to be seen; not wanting to be seen; wanting not to be seen; and not wanting not to be seen.

Furthermore Jean-Marie Floch applied the semiotic square to the analysis of marketing, advertising and consumption, focusing on the behaviors and values that are linked to Ikea and Habitat.

1.2.1.3. Critics to the semiotic square

Even if it found a lot of applications, the Greimasian square received a lot of critics since it leads to interpretations that appear too programmatic and reductionist.

Moreover sometimes it is used only like an objective framework of analysis that seems to be coherent but at the same time it causes the loss of a subjective opinion.

The Greimasian square needs to carry out several confirmatory studies, since it doesn't allow the use of the value of proof or some mathematical formalism.

Furthermore if the semiotic principles are applied to an advertisement for example, the problem would be in the fact that the signifier and the signified should be linked in order to be interpreted and understood by the viewer. If that link isn't comprehensible, the hidden meaning that the advertisement wants to transmit to the viewer and possible clients with the sign becomes unintelligible. In this case it would be necessary a

contextualization in order to understand the hidden meaning of the advertising campaign.

The critics to the Greimasian analysis show how the binary opposition needs not only the correlations between the opposite terms and their interpretation, but also a contextualization of the cultural and social framework in order to make the square more intelligible.

This kind of structural approach is often used to analysts that want to find the “latent meaning” of a text or for example of an advertising campaign, they want to give a contextualization in order to understand what the advertising or the text really mean. The problem with this kind of analysis is that subjectivity of the context presented by the author is in a certain way minimized. This because is quite common that some inexplicit oppositions are clear in the mind of who is viewing, the interpreter, but is not so clear in the text itself.

Moreover Young explained that we must think of whether the binary oppositions of the things used in the semiotic square like sacred/profane or misery/happiness could be psychologically meaningful in the reality. And the fact is that the structuralism suggests that it is not a real problem.

1.2.1.4. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations between signs

Saussure’s linguistic paradigm can be resumed in three points: the role that the structure has in communication, meaning creation and the nature of them; the role represented by the symbolism and its nature; the cultural influence on communication and meaning creation.

When the meaning of a word is generated, it is very important to focus on the actions, relations and interactions with the other single words. So the paradigm is essentially a set of syntagms and signs taken from different kind of paradigms in order to create the message.

De Saussure made a distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations within the elements used in language. He explained that the meaning depends from the differences that stand between signifiers. These differences could be of two orders, syntagmatic in referred to the positioning of the signifier, or paradigmatic if linked to the possible substitution of the signifier with others signifiers within the paradigm. Paradigmatic relation was called by Saussure associative, since the term paradigmatic was introduced later by Roman Jakobson.

So the syntagmatic relation is referred to all the possible combinations and successions that could be done with the interacting elements of a discourse in order to produce a meaning. This kind of relation could subsist between one item and the others in a sequence, or between elements which are all present. The construction of the sequence is made by the use of conventions and syntactic rules. The sequential nature of the language means that linguistic signs have syntagmatic but also semantic relationships. The opposition to what succeed or precedes that, is called asyntagm. A syntagm is a combination of signifiers that combined together create a meaning. For example if we think to an advertising campaign, it could be considered as a syntagm composed by visual signifiers. To find what is the paradigm hidden behind the advertising campaign and its signification, we have to break the sequence and isolate the various elements contained in the syntagm.

Syntagms could be spatial and temporal, in the case of visual signifiers they are able to exploit more than a single dimension at the same time. The spatial syntagmatic relation is present in photography, drawing and painting. While cinema, television and web are characterized by both temporal and spatial syntagmatic relationships.

Paradigmatic relation subsists among elements that are replaceable each other for what concerns their position within the discourse, or between one element yet contained in the structure and one absent from that. Moreover

this kind of relation could work on the signifier, the signified, or both of them.

We can say that a sign is in a paradigmatic relation with all the others signs that can occur in the same context but not at the same moment. This means that if I'm using one element I'm not using its substitute. In this way the paradigmatic relation is also seen as contrastive.

This kind of relationship could be also associative, since both items are in a single membership set. It refers to the mental association that could be done between two terms regarding their form and meaning. For example verbs cannot be used in this way. Usually the perfect candidate for that is a noun. But there are also strict constraints for what regards all the possible kind of noun that could be replaced. Paradigmatic structures facilitate the connotative and associative use of terms, assuming a sort of codification that depends on the cultural knowledge of the viewer.

Paradigmatic and syntagmatic are often represented as axes, the first as horizontal and the last as vertical. The sequence that takes place in a syntagmatic relation, also vertical relation or choice relation, is called structure. The sequence of signs in a paradigmatic relation, also horizontal relation or chain relation, is called system.

The meaning of a sign is determined by both its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. Thanks to those relations signs are linked to codes.

“Ferdinand de Saussure emphasized that meaning arises from the differences between signifiers; these differences are of two kinds: syntagmatic (concerning positioning) and paradigmatic (concerning substitution). The syntagm is understood as the linear sequence of oral and written language. Saussure called the latter associative relations (Saussure, 1983, 121; Saussure, 1974, 122) but Roman Jakobson's term is now used. The distinction is a key one in

structuralist semiotic analysis. These two dimensions are often presented as 'axes', where the horizontal axis is the syntagmatic and the vertical axis is the paradigmatic. The plane of the syntagm is that of the combination of 'this-and-this-and-this' (as in the sentence, 'the man cried') whilst the plane of the paradigm is that of the selection of 'this-or-this-or-this' (e.g. the replacement of the last word in the same sentence with 'died' or 'sang')" (Quoted in Chandler, 2002).

In Saussure's theory, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations could be applied at every level of the linguistic analysis.

1.2.1.5. Diffusion and future application of the Saussurean Paradigm

The paradigmatic relation theory of Ferdinand de Saussure has been developed by Barthes, Derrida, Greimas, Baudrillard, Lacan.

Some of those have applied this theory in their studies about marketing, advertising and consumer phenomena, like Barthes (1967), Durand (1970), Peninou (1972).

It found also an application in the economic field, considered as the fuel of a fair market competition with the contribution of Gardner and Levy (1955) and then with Sahlins (1976) that described it as an institutionalized flaw of western culture.

1.2.2. The Peircean School

With Charles S. Peirce came into being the second dominant semiotic paradigm. It was based on philosophy and in some extent also on physical science. As DharmaKeerthi Sri Ranjan said (2010), "Peirce is the one who

has so far delivered the broadest and most advanced theoretical frame work on semiotics”.

1.2.2.1. Peirce’s Triadic Model

Peirce considered the semiotics as the doctrine of signs and focuses their paradigm on a “triadic” relation¹:

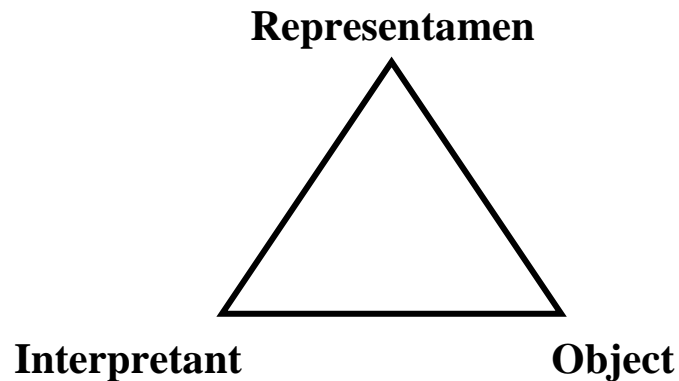
“A sign...[in the form of a representamen] is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addressed somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stand for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen (Peirce, 1931-58, 2.228). The interaction between the representamen, the object and the interpretant is referred to by Peirce as ‘semiosis’ (ibid., 5.848)” (Quoted in Chandler, 2003)

As he said a sign is everything that stands for something else.

His vision of the semiotics is based on the concept of a *Triadic Model*, adding a third element to the signifier-signified model of Saussure, the interpretant.

¹ Collected Paper of C.S. Peirce, 1931-58, 484

Figure 5: Peirce's Triadic Model



Differently from the Saussurean view of the sign referred to language, Peirce gave a broader characterization of the sign:

"[...]every picture, diagram, natural cry, pointing finger, wink, knot in one's handkerchief, memory, dream, fancy, concept, indication, token, symptom, letter, numeral, word, sentence, chapter, book, library"(Quoted in Goriée, 1994, 50).

As Peirce (1958) said, a sign is used like a substitute of another thing that may not be present. In that way the sign represents the thing, transmitting a concept about it, giving an interpretation of it.

Goriée focused on the fact that Peirce considered as a sign everything that is knowable, perceptible, imaginable. But to be considered as a sign it has to be related with his object and be interpreted by the viewer, creating in this way a new sign called interpretant.

"A sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign" (Peirce 1931-35, 228).

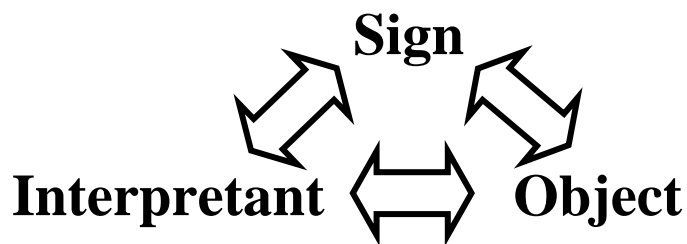
The representamen is the form taken by the sign.

The interpretant of the sign is the sense represented by that. It is very important to don't confuse the interpretant with the interpreter. While the interpreter is the personal agent that exerts the interpretation process, the interpretant is the representation of the sign, the result of the sign. It is referred to the vision and interpretation that the viewer attaches to the sign.

The object is the thing to which the sign is referred.

The process, deriving from the interaction between representamen (sign proper), interpretant (interpretation or response with the observer/communicator) and object (to which the sign refers), is called *infinite semiosis*. The elements are dependent from each other and can be understood only if considered in relation among them.

Figure 6: Peirce's Triad



According to Currie (1995), the way in which signs are linked to object is purely conventional and the fact that the idea that a picture generates could be like the real objects of the picture only depends on ideology of the realism.

In his approach to sign, Peirce developed a categorization of the models of meanings in signs: iconic, symbolic, indexical.

“Every sign is determined by its object, either first, by partaking of the characters of the object, when I call the sign an Icon; secondly, by being really and in its individual

existence connected with the individual object, when I call the sign as Index; thirdly, by more or less approximate certainty that it will be interpreted as denoting the object, in consequence of a habit (which term I uses as including a natural disposition), when I call the sign a Symbol.” (Quoted in J. Jay Zeman, Peirce’s Theory of Signs, in T. Sebeok, A Perfusion of Signs, 1997, 36)

“In Iconic signs, the signifier represents the signified by apparently having a likeness to. This type of sign is often very important in visual images, especially photographic ones. Diagrams are also iconic signs, since they show the relations between the parts of their objects.

In Indexical signs, there is inherent relationship between the signified and signifier. Index based on contiguity or casualty: e.g., smoke as a sign of fire.

Symbolic signs have a conventionalized but clearly arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, as in Saussure’s ‘arbitrary’ sign: e.g., a balance scale is a symbol for justice. In a society the meaning of this kind of symbols must be learn.” (Rose, 2001, 78)

As said previously a sign, in order to be considered as a sign, has to be into a relationship with its object and in this way produce a new sign, the interpretant. Moreover the sign could be of three orders.

The iconic sign is the one that looks like its object, it reminds its object, it communicates by resemblance. The signifier represents the signified, since it looks like it. It is the case of visual images, like maps, photographs, diagrams and so on.

The indexical sign is the one that is in inherent relationship with its object. The signified and the signifier are directly linked because of casualty, existentiality or contiguity. They are in a logical connection.

The symbolic sign isn't connected or resembled to its object. Signified and signifier are in an arbitrary relation, purely based on conventions, rules or agreement among users. So the only way to understand these kinds of signs is learning the conventions and rules attached to them.

1.2.2.2. Further application of Peirce's theory

A lot of scholars like Morris, Jakobson and Sebeok helped to extend the Peirce's theory in order to give it an international recognition.

As Sebeok (1976) said, Peirce had determined the reaction of the interpreter through the sign, since the semiotics is present in the real world within its institutions, culture, people, social environment. The active participation of an interpreter is fundamental in order to understand the linkages between the object and the sign. So the relation among the sign and the interpreter is vital in the Peirce's semiotic paradigm. It involves the cognition, which is the process that allows understanding the sign and generating a meaning through that. This process is articulated in three phases, which are deduction, induction and abduction.

1.3. The semiotics after Saussure and Peirce

Semiotics and semiology have become a very important field of study and research, and up to now there has been a lot of semioticians around the world, like for example Stuart Hall (1932) in England, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) in France, Juri Lotman (1922-1993) in Russia, Umberto Eco (1932) in Italy, Kristian Bankov (1970)

in Finland, Thomas Sebeok (1920-2001) in Hungary, Marcel Danesi(1946) and Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) in Canada.

The European tradition of saussurean semiology has been followed by Roland Barthes, Louis Hjelmslev, Julia Kristeva, Christian Metz, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean Baudrillard. Furthermore the American tradition of semeiotic, developed by Peirce, has been pursued by Ivor A. Richards, Thomas Sebeok, Charles W. Morris, Charles K. Ogden.

A lot of semioticians instead combine in their works the two approaches of Saussure and Peirce.

1.3.1. A Theory of Semiotics: Umberto Eco

With his book *A Theory of Semiotics*, the aim of Eco was to break the distinctions between the Anglo-Saxon and European perspectives of semiotics. He wanted to find a general theory of semiotics, in order to have the possibility to apply it to different kinds of disciplines and fields.

“A unified method of approach to phenomena which apparently are very different from each other, and as yet irreducible” (Eco, 1976, 8).

“The whole of culture must be studied as a semiotic phenomenon [...] all aspects of culture can be studied as the contents of a semiotic activity” (Eco, 1976, 22).

He said that a sign is everything that can be used as a substitute to another thing.

Eco was grateful to its predecessors Saussure and Peirce, and starting from their theories he tried to find a common universal theory of semiotics.

He thought that the saussurean distinction among signified and signifier was really useful but not well developed.

“[...] the signified was left half way between a mental image, a concept and a psychological reality” (Eco, 1976, 15).

Eco considered the Peircean theory as more exhaustible since it involved also non-human interactions. He started from the triadic model of semiotics, sign, interpretant and object, and focused on the distinction between denotation and connotation. From a deterministic point of view, he wanted to highlight how the connotation gave the possibility to attach different meanings to a thing. So messages are not strictly linked to a locked and predetermined single meaning, but they have a lot of levels of signification.

Since signs have a double valence, people could use those in order to lie. It is linked to the most famous quote of Eco's theory, according to which every time a sign is used for signification, maybe it could be used to lie and every time we find a lie, then there will be signification. It means that the use of signs in semiotics doesn't imply the real presence or existence of the thing represented by the sign. This phenomenon is called *referential fallacy*.

“Within semiotics the real thing must be excluded as an intrusive or jeopardizing presence which compromises the semiotic model's theoretical purity” (Eco, 1976, 61).

So semiotics is referred to everything that could be used to lie. Since a sign could have a double valence, if something cannot be used to lie, then it could neither be used to tell the truth.

“Semiotics is not only the science of everything subject to the lie, it is also the science of everything subject to comic or tragic distortion” (Eco, 1976, 65).

The distortion proves that a message couldn't be true or false a priori because of the semiotic theory. Semiotics is only linked to the analysis and

the study of the phenomena that determine the transmission and the comprehension of the message itself.

Here emerges the distinction made by Eco among sign and signal. The signal is sent by machine to machine, but since the signal is not a sign, there isn't signification. In order to be signification it is necessary that the destination of the signal is a person. This subject has not only to receive the message, but also to interpret it.

In this way the role of the interpretant become very relevant, since he is the figure that decodes in a certain way the sign. In the interpretation of the sign many factors come into play, like for example the differences among cultures.

“[...] semiotics studies all cultural processes of communication [...] every act of communication to or between human beings [...] presupposes a signification system as its necessary condition” (Eco, 1976, 8,9,22)

The use of a code makes the signal systematized and is no more necessary the presence of the interpretant. So is the code that can:

“[...] foresee an established correspondence between that which 'stands for' and its correlate (Eco, 1976, 8).

At this point it becomes fundamental the process of signification. Eco gave a definition of signification, determined by the codification, and communication, which involves in turn the production of the sign. While the first implies the development of a code, the latter is the transmission of that code, so communication always follows the signification phase. So semiotics must be studied under the hypothesis of its signification system.

In Section 3.3.4 *Ideas as sign* Eco broke the limits of his theory and extended the concept of meaning to that of the phenomenology of the perception. The result is a comparison among the concept of meaning

intended by the phenomenology and the *sememe* of semiotics. The sememe (from the Greek word σημαίνω, sēmaino, translation: mean, signify) is a semantic language unit of meaning, correlative to a morpheme. This concept is related to the structural semiotics and in particular referring to the connotation and denotation notion.²

The difference between semiotics and phenomenology resides in the study of cultural units. The first studies cultural units as mere data, the latter instead looks at the various phases and conditions of their development and confronts the texts of the explicit message arising by it.

The reason of the comparison between semiotics and phenomenology is explained by the Eco's thought that not only object but also abstract things like ideas or concepts could be studied as signs:

"[...] every object may potentially become a sign within the environment of a given culture"

"Eco's view is that there is a continuum from the perceptual experience of things to the abstract significations of ideas, and that his conception of the sememe enables semiotics to transverse this continuum quite systematically" (Garcia, 165)³

² It can be thought of as the semantic counterpart to any of the following: a meme in a culture, a gene in a genetic make-up, or an atom (or, more specifically, an elementary particle) in a substance. A seme is the name for the smallest unit of meaning recognized in semantics, referring to a single characteristic of a sememe (en.wikipedia.org)

³ Reyes Garcia, A short critique of the role of sign in Umberto Eco's "A Theory of Semiotics"

2. Semiotics and Culture

Some semioticians didn't focus only on the mere semiotic theory and his historical development, but they preferred to combine the semiotics to other theories and apply it in other fields linked to the society and the culture, like psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and so on. Between them we can find very important figures like Barthes, Warner, Cassier, Langer, Lwei, Garfienkel, Gottdiener, Lagopoulos, Levi-Strauss, Douglas, Rapaille, Goffman, Blunder, Singer, McLuhan, Danesi, Blonsky.

“The modern commercial and consumer world is emphasized as a web of meanings and behavioral patterns among people, consumers and marketers, woven from the symbols and the signs ensconced in their time, space in the culture and society. The formation and the use of symbols in particular, can be argued that the ability in the central and differentiating characteristics of the human species which based on human action and interaction are cause for the particularity and the glory of a man” (Kenneth Boulding, 1956, 44).

The use of semiotics is applicable to everyday life in order to find and understand the hidden meanings of all the things to which we are exposed every single day. Being a part of the society people are exposed to media, in particular in the case of the consumer culture, with advertising messages, marketing campaigns and so on. Barthes was of the idea that objects and events hide more than they show. As McNeill (1999) said, “they are always caught up in system of representation, which add meaning of them”.⁴

⁴ Tony McNeill, Roland Barthes: Mythologies

2.1. The application of semiotics to consumer culture

A big contribution to semiotics applied in consumer culture was made by Roland Barthes (1915-1980) with his book *Mythologies*, published in French in 1957 and then in 1972 in English.

“This book has a double theoretical framework: on one hand, an ideological critique bearing on the language of so-called mass culture; on the other a first attempt to analyze semiologically the mechanism of this language. I had just read Saussure and as a result acquired the conviction that by treating ‘collective representations’ as sign-systems, one might hope to go further than the pious show of unmasking them and account in detail for the mystification which transforms petit-bourgeois culture into a universal nature”
(Roland Barthes, 1972, 9).

In this preface of his book is evident the aim of Barthes to analyze from a semiological point of view the aspects of the language use in the mass-culture.

Barthes was associated to figures like Marx, Brecht, Lacan and Freud, in particular with the school of structuralism and the two schools of semiology and semiotics. Barthes's relationship with his intellectual influencers is notoriously idiosyncratic. He didn't limit to take concept and ideas elaborated by the others, but he altered and stressed them to find new implications, using and applying them to its own purposes and goals.

Since Structuralists philosophers see society as governed by structures that guide and limit human being, Barthes is linked to this school of thought because of his view of cultural phenomena as a system of language. He thought that semiotics could have explained the phenomena of the sociological system.

The starting point was the saussurean theory of the language as a model to analyze and study the concept of signs present in all the other symbolic fields of study.

Moreover the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss with his application of the saussurean theory to anthropology influenced the work of Barthes. Lévi-Strauss found that all the myths and societies could be explained with the same common system.

Even if it is evident the influence that the structuralists had been on the work of Barthes, he broke in a certain way the belonging to this school of thought with the introduction of the concept of *metalanguage*. In this way Barthes started to be seen as “the link between structuralism and post-structuralism” (Pope, 2002, 13)⁵.

In the book of Barthes, *Mythologies*, has been analyzed a lot of commercial products using a semiotic analysis. With that Barthes wanted to show how semiotics combined with the Marxist theory could explain in which way some products are presented to cultures away from the one of origin, “breaking the rules” in a certain way. In particular he focused on the way in which some products are offered to French people.

Barthes wanted to face with the innocence and naturalness of cultural scripts, and to find all their other connotations, as he called them. While objects, things, procedures, actions, gestures own a sort of functional utility, they are anyway subject to the imposition of a meaning. The example suggested by Barthes is the one of the car. The car is a mere functional object that theoretically should not have additional connotations or meanings. Taking as example two different cars, a BMW and a Citroën 2CV, they have without doubts the same utilitarian function, they perform the same function of use, which is being a mean of transport. But the fact is that the two cars say different things about their owners. So, practically, these two objects provide their owners of a connotation, they are signs to

⁵ Rob Pope, *The English Studies Book: An Introduction to Language, Literature and Culture*

express a connotation. This kind of *secondary connotation* is the focus of the work of Barthes. “He divided the language in two parts, the first represented by the language itself (first-order language) and the second represented by the metalanguage (second-order language) regarding the use of the language within the language itself” (Moriarty, 1991).⁶ He wanted to show what objects represented as signs independently by their proper function of use.

Its aim was to unmask some conditions of social culture that he thought were used only as imposition of their value over others people by the bourgeoisie.

As said before Barthes tended to alter and extend the theories of its influencers. In the case of Saussure for example, he went beyond the saussurean concept of signs:

“[...] take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex association of all of these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification” (Roland Barthes, 1957, 9).

Is evident that its analysis of cultural signs is extended to a lot of fields, among which there are music, fashion, photography, literature magazines.

The desire of Barthes was to investigate over things that are taken for granted and show the obvious, making explicit what should be implicit. He focused on the fact that, making explicit what it isn't, we can see what are the hidden social and cultural implication hide by neutral objects. A relevant example of that is represented by the essay *Iconographie de l'abbé Pierre* (Roland Barthes, 1970, 54-6).

⁶ Michael Moriarty, Roland Barthes

The abbé Pierre was a Catholic priest who came under the attention of media in the 1950s and then 1980s and '90s because of his work with the homeless people in Paris. The interesting thing was the attention put by media on the way of dressing and on the haircut of the abbé Pierre. What people expect to see in a priest is the indifference regarding fashion and about what concern the way of appearing. It should have pass unnoticed, as normal, instead his aspect generated a lot of interpretations, a lot of messages. His austere and 'canadienne' aspect reflected the simplicity, minimalism, sacrifice and devotion, proper of the aspect and essence of a priest. The way of appearing of the abbé Pierre represented a sort of fashion like any other fashion dress for example. It generated a lot of connotations.

“[...] la neutralité finit par fonctionner comme signe de la neutralité, [...] La coupe zéro, elle affiche tout simplement le franciscanisme; conçue d'abord négativement pour ne pas contrarier l'apparence de la sainteté, bien vite elle passe à un mode superlatif de signification, elle déguise l'abbé en saint François” (Barthes: 1972, 54).

The abbé Pierre's case is a classical example of how neutral objects could be used by media in order to hide the cultural and social reality. In this particular situation the attention focused on the way of appearing of the abbé Pierre divert the attention from the crucial situation of the homeless in France. Barthes started by making explicit the meanings of apparently neutral objects, showing the obvious, then he tried to find a link with the social and historical conditions that are hidden behind the neutral objects.

The American counterpart of Roland Barthes was the semioticians Marshall Blonsky (1938), with the publication of his book *American Mythologies* in 1992. Like Barthes also Blonsky analyzed a lot of aspects of the consumer culture, as for example automobiles, advertising, clothing, food. Fundamental for the comprehension of the thin line dividing fiction

and reality was the experience made by Blonsky in the show business. Another important contribution to understand the use of semiotics occurred with the publication of *On Signs* in 1985.

“Happy millionaires, floating above money. Tastemakers and models where the substance of sign are widgets produced from the mysteries of Eurocentric style. Even anti-style is currency spoken at the proper moment. [...] Marshall Blonsky, in American Mythologies, examines the symbolic discourse between the performers and the performed upon as if to examine the state of the ceiling in the house whose walls have already collapsed. Yet it remains a valid work because while we all stand in the cold ruins, the ceiling remains frozen in mid-air suspended like our disbelief, while from its reflections we measure our steps. As intellectual excavator and personal ruminator par excellence, Blonsky will become the McLuhan of the 90s”
(Michael David Cobb Bowen).

The words of Bowen enlighten how also the study of the American commercial culture given by Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) with the publication of his book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* in 1951 has been of a relevant importance. His aim was:

“[...] to apply the method of art analysis to the critical evaluation of society” (Marshall McLuhan, 1951,6).

Even with McLuhan the study of sign was applied to different aspects of the everyday life, like newspapers, advertising campaigns, comic strips. Starting from the advertising campaigns he deconstructed the advertisement in order to analyze and show how the advertisers and media are able to manipulate people with their campaigns, pushing them to buy their products

and services. He showed how advertisers exploit the basic necessities and values of people, transforming those in a mean to capitalize.

2.2. The Concept of Code

Is evident how people are dependent and influenced by culture and society in their everyday decisions.

Moreover growing up we tend to learn a certain number of codes imposed to us by our society and by our cultural background. All this was explained by Gilbert Clotaire Rapaille (1941) in his book *The Culture Code* published in 2008, in which he proposed a system of cultural codes linked to people's everyday decisions and actions:

"[...]the unconscious meaning we apply to any given thing- a car, a type of food, a relationship, even a country- via the culture in which we are raised".

The book focus on the way children receive the imprinting of the culture in which they born and grow up. They learn a particular system of cultural codes regarding all kinds of things that will influence them for the rest of their lives. All that occurs at an unconscious level and semiotics is the instruments that could be used to understand in which way culture and society use some sings in order to have an influence and imprint the people belonging to them.

Every country has its own codes and principles that determine the cultural unconscious of the individual, in that case primarily of the children. The various codes are generated by a mind-set proper of the country of origin.

"There is an American mind, just as there is a French mind, an English mind, a Kurdish mind, and a Latvian mind.

Every culture has its own mind-set, and that mind-set teaches us about who we are in profound ways” (Gilbert Clotaire Rapaille , 1941, 27).

Rapaille indentified three levels of the unconscious: Freud’s individual unconscious, the one that guides individuals in their actions and decisions; Jung’s collective unconscious, which represents the guide of all the human beings; a cultural unconscious that strictly depends on cultures, and in particular on national cultures.⁷

Talking about a cultural code Rapaille wants to focus on how societies and cultures impose their codes.

But at the basis of one of the critics moved against Rapaille there was the fact that he didn’t use any kind of data or quotations from authorities and experts in order to support his thesis and researches. He thought that surveys and scientific means weren’t helpful for his research. This because in his opinion people are influenced by who made them questions, giving the answers they think the asker wants from them. Rapaille (1941, 14)⁸ said that “*most people don’t know why do the things they do*”.

“My primary intent is to liberate those who read this book. There is remarkable freedom gained in understanding why you act the way you do This freedom will affect every part of your life, from the relationships you have, to your feelings about your possessions and the things you do, to the attitudes you have about America’s place in the world” (Gilbert Clotaire Rapaille, 1941, 11).

So he developed five principles useful to conduct research.

⁷ Arthur Asa Berger, The Culture Code Review

The first point is that you cannot believe about what people say to you, so making a research you have to interpret the role of the “professional stranger” that necessitates understanding why people do what they do.

The second principle is linked to emotions. Since a large part of the imprinting is exercised on people in their childhood, emotions are the key to receive the imprinting and learn the cultural codes. As he said “Emotion is the energy required to learn anything” (Rapaille, 1941, 17).

The third point, inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss, states that “the structure, not the content, is the message” (Rapaille, 1941, 19). When Rapaille analyzed the statements of the society taken under observation for their studies, he focused on the structure themes. One of the projects of which Rapaille was more proud was the work about Chrysler’s PT Cruiser. In this case he found that the aim of the statements was linked to the fact that automobiles represented for Americans a way to express their identities. He discovered that the US code for an automobile was the “identity,” instead in Germany, for example, it was the “engineering.” And he did this analysis for a lot of other branches of products enlightening the difference deriving from the fact of belonging to a country or another.

The fourth principle is linked to the belonging to a particular country and culture. Rapaille said that “There is a window in time for imprinting and the meaning of the imprint varies from one culture to another” (Rapaille, 1941, 21).

The fifth and last principle regards the unconscious imperatives that are linked to the different cultures and explains why they act in a particular way. The key is to decode their imperatives in order to understand the way of behaving that characterizes a particular culture or country. As he said, “to access the meaning of an imprint with a particular culture, you must learn the code for that imprint” (Rapaille, 1941, 24). Moreover he said:

“If I could get to the source of these imprints - if I could somehow ‘decode’ elements of culture to discover the emotions and meanings attached to them - I would learn a great deal about human behavior and how it varies across the planet. This set me on the course of my life’s work. I went off in search of the Codes hidden with the unconscious of every culture” (Gilbert, Clotaire Rapaille, 1941, 10).

The aim of Rapaille was, without doubts, discover the codes hidden at the unconscious level of every culture and society. This would have given a way to understand and solve the problems affecting not only the corporations, but also every other aspects of the society, from politics to social, from food to fashion, and so on.

However this book received a lot of critics since Rapaille was a French observer giving a description of the American culture. In the end of the book is explained why he didn’t apply the culture codes to French people, because: *“French children imprint the value of ideas as paramount and refinement of the mind as the highest goals”*.

As the “American dream” also Rapaille had bigger dreams, big ideas that he wanted to apply to a reality that had goals bigger than those of its country, this is why he left France.

On the other hand Warren Bennis described this book as astonishing. In the review of the book Bennis wrote a blur, saying:

*“This book is just plain astonishing! Filled with profound insights and ideas that have enormous consequences for today’s organizations. If you want to understand customers, Constituencies, and crowds, this book is required reading”.*⁹

⁹ Warren Bennis, Distinguished Professor of Business, University of Southern California

Even if, as said before, in the book there isn't any kind of scientific data proving the results of the research made by Rapaille, *The Culture Code* is considered one of the most important contribution to understand everything linked to culture and society.

The most exhaustive description of the work of Rapaille is without doubts given by Arthur Asa Berger:

“ [...] Although The Culture Code is written for the general public and lacks scholarly apparatus, it is a fascinating book and one that has insights that may actually be quite important and useful for social scientists and those involved with policy making in a number of areas. I don't think Clotaire Rapaille is a snake-oil salesman, but if I were a manufacturer of snake-oil, he'd be the first person I would contact to find out how to market it” (Arthur Asa Berger, 1-9).

Is evident in the work of Rapaille the influence of his predecessors like the Collective Unconscious and the concept of Archetypes of Carl Jung, or also the contribution of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Looking at his contemporaries in the branch of brand and media influences, the figure that emerges is the one of Douglas Atkin. In his book *The Culting of Brands*, published in 2004, he analyzed the fact that brand are able to generate loyalty without real reasons. For example a lot of people have a sense of belonging to some brands, they have inside of them a real brand loyalty. It is the case for example of Nike or Starbucks, people feel a loyalty that doesn't depend on the fact that they sell shoes or coffee. These brands are able to attract people that see them to be different from their competitors, different from the masses. At the light of that Atkin decided to focus on cults, and to analyze such brands that use cult-branding techniques to attract new customers and increase their retention rate.

Moreover he analyzed also full-blown cults. The strategy of all these brand resides in the fact that they make their customers part of an exclusive group, they feel their selves important and unique. This sense of belonging is the starting point of a solid relationship between brand and customer. Only developing a “Cult Status” a brand could overtake their competitors and gain a relevant piece of the market.

At this point is evident that people don't buy things only moved by a necessity, but some objects are purchased for the socio-economic status that they represent, for their cultural meanings, as a representation of the belonging to a particular group.

A further analysis on what motivates people when they purchase something was given by Mary Douglas. In her article *In Defence of Shopping* she explained how our tastes are determined by our culture, so the act of purchasing is not guided by individual desires but is linked to our belonging to a particular group.

“Consumption behavior is continuously and pervasively inspired by cultural hostility [...] We have to make a radical shift away from thinking about consumption as a manifestation of individual choices. Culture itself is the result of myriads of individual choices, not primarily between commodities but between kinds of relationships [...] Food is eaten, clothes are worn, music, holidays, all the rest are choices that conform with the initial choice for a form of society” (Mary Douglas, 1997, 17-18).

She enlighten the existence of four group of belonging in the modern society, four consumer lifestyles or cultures: hierarchists or elitists; individualists; enclavists or egalitarians; isolates or fatalists. Each lifestyle is in conflict with the others even if they all need the existence of the others. The four cultural groups found an application in the work of the social

scientists Aaron Wildavsky, Michal Thompson and Richard Ellis. In their book “Cultural Theory” they proposed the Grid-Group theory:

“Our theory has a specific point of departure: the grid-group typology proposed by Mary Douglas. She argues that the variability of an individual’s involvement in social life can be adequately captured by two dimensions of sociality: group and grid. Group refers to the extent to which an individual is incorporated into bounded units. [...] Grid denotes the degree to which an individual’s life is circumscribed by externally imposed prescriptions” (Wildavsky, Thompson, Ellis, 1990, 5).

Figure 7: four categories¹⁰

Group - Strength of Boundaries

		Weak	Strong
<u>Grid – Rules and Prescriptions</u>	Many	Fatalists	Elitists
	Few	Individualists	Egalitarians

Wildavsky described how the four political cultures/lifestyles moved toward (Berger, 1990, 6-7):

¹⁰ Arthur Asa Berger, A Cultural Approach to Understanding Tourist Preferences

“Strong group boundaries coupled with minimal prescriptions produce social relations that are egalitarian [...] When an individual’s social environment is characterized by strong group boundaries and binding prescriptions, the resulting social relations are hierarchical [...] Individuals who are bound by neither group incorporation nor prescribed roles inhabit an individualistic social context. In such an environment all boundaries are provisional and subject to negotiation [...] People who find themselves subject to binding prescriptions and are excluded from group membership exemplify the fatalistic way of life. Fatalists are controlled from without”.

Arthur Asa Berger explained that hierarchists see the stratification as a fundamental thing, at the same time they feel the pressure of the responsibility they have towards the categories residing under them in the stratification system. To maintain their position over the top of the people, they need the presence of fatalists within the pyramidal structure of their society.

Individualists are more focused on their interests and do not care so much to what happens to the others. They don’t want to be completely under the control of the government, so they give to it only a little power concerning the protection of individualists’ freedom, so as to compete fairly with the other categories. Individualists need the stratification, since they see the necessity of a figure guiding the others in order to maintain the stability within the society, in that case the one of hierarchists.

Egalitarians see all the people as equal human beings, their aim is to break down the differences among people, since they all have the same basic necessities. So they are against stratification, they would see all the people considered in the same way.

Fatalists are the one governed by others, they suffer for their condition of dominated, so they continuously hope to find a way to get away from all that, they hope in a lucky way of escape.

Figure 8: four categories¹¹

<u>Group</u> <u>Boundaries:</u> <i>Strong or Weak</i>	<u>Grid Aspects:</u> <i>Kinds and Number of</i> <i>Prescriptions</i>	<u>Consumer Cultures</u>
Strong	Numerous and Varied	Elitist
Weak	Numerous and Varied	Fatalist (Isolates)
Strong	Few or Minimal	Egalitarian (Enclavist)
Weak	Few or Minimal	Individualist

Each consumer culture is antagonistic, in conflict with the others. The belonging to one of the four lifestyles determines the consumer choices of the individual. People are not aware to belong to a particular culture, but they are able to recognize that their beliefs and values are not the same of the others consumer cultures. That is in line with the saussurean philosophy that things are defined negatively by the relation with their antagonists:

“Concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively, by their relations with the other terms of the system.” (Ferdinande de Saussure, 1966,117).

¹¹ Arthur Asa Berger, A Cultural Approach to Understanding Tourist Preferences

In the theory of Douglas consumption decisions are determined by cultural alignments and hostilities. So are not the tastes, wants and desires to determine the consumption but a sort of hidden cultural imperatives.

“None of these four lifestyles [...]is new to students of consumer behavior. What may be new and unacceptable is the point that these are the only four distinctive lifestyles to be taken into account, and the other point, that each is set up in competition with the others. Mutual hostility is the force that accounts for their stability. These four distinct lifestyles persist because they rest of incompatible organizational principles. [...] Hostility keeps them going” (Mary Douglas, 1997, 19).

Consumption choices are not the result of particular individual wants, but depend on the membership in one of the four lifestyles group.

“[...]The idea of consumer sovereignty in economic theory will be honoured in market research because it will be abundantly clear that the shopper sets the trends, and that new technology and new prices are adjuncts to achieving the shopper’s goal. The shopper is not expecting to develop a personal identity by choice of commodities; that would be too difficult. Shopping is agonistic, a struggle to define not what one is but what one is not”(Mary Douglas, 1997, 30).

Douglas went against the theories of consumption that see the individual at the center of the consumption choices. Preferences are determined by the class we belong to.

“[...] *Cultural alignment is the strongest predictor of preferences in a wide variety of fields*” (Mary Douglas, 1997,23).

2.3. The concept of myth

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) was the first interested to analyze the essential structures of cultures, applying saussurean concept of semiotics for the anthropological understanding of kinship, myth and the structure of the “savage mind”. He was also considered as one of the founding fathers of Structuralism, with his *Structural Anthropology*, in which all the cultural aspects can be analyzed using semiotics. Is evident the influence exercised by Marx on the thought of Lévi-Strauss, that he considered as one of the few “purely structuralist thinkers”. His main goal was to transform the saussurean structural linguistic paradigm into an analytical mechanism capable to be used in the anthropological examination.

From a semiotic point of view Sahlins explains that “a kinship system does not consist in the objective ties of descent or consanguinity between individuals. It exists only in human consciousness; it is an arbitrary system of representations, not the spontaneous development of a real situation”.¹² This is linked to the fact that linguistic and anthropological researches are both facing with symbolism.

The way to understand symbolism is finding the system of relationships that determines their signifying units.

The aim of Lévi-Strauss was to use anthropology as a general theory to understand all the aspects of the social life expressed as relationships. In this way it could be possible analyzing the society in relation to the

¹² Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is-And Is Not*, 2013,66

system's set of the characteristics that defines it. It could be seen as a prosecution to the work of Marx, as the first goal of the structuralism.

Moreover the Lévi-Strauss' vision of the anthropology was broader than the mere definition of the branch. For him anthropology provided "a knowledge of man that incorporates all the different approaches which can be used" to understand how "our uninvited guest, the human mind, works".

About what concerned the myth, Lévi-Strauss introduced the concept of "The Savage Mind", saying that: "the same logical processes operate in myth as in science, and that a man has always been thinking equally well; the improvement lies, not in an alleged progress of man's mind, but in the discovery of new areas to which it may apply its unchanged and unchanging powers"(Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1966).

"If, as we believe to be the case, the unconscious activity of the mind consists in imposing forms upon content, and if these forms are fundamentally the same for all minds – ancient and modern, primitive and civilized (as the study of the symbolic function, expressed in language, so strikingly indicates) – it is necessary and sufficient to grasp the unconscious structure underlying each institution and each custom, in order to obtain a principle of interpretation valid for other institutions and other customs, provided of course that the analysis is carried far enough" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 21-22).

Lévi-Strauss was interested to understand the structural pattern determining the meaning of the myth. He found that myths are similar to the basic linguistic units and are determined by binary opposition. Myths can be divided into single units, *mythemes*, which, like the basic sound units of language, *phonemes*, acquire meaning only when jointly combined to construct the discourse.

He thought that linguistic model could have revealed the structure that governed the human mind, the way in which human beings determines their artefacts, institutions, behaviour, knowledge. Lévi-Strauss believed that the relations determining the true meaning of the myth could be studied like a grammar system of combinations.

Another vision of the myth is given by Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies*. The book refers to all the meanings of the signs that are present in the humans, in their daily life. The concept of myth has a double valence. First it is the story of a superhuman of an earlier age, which stories were set in ancient Rome, Greece, Egypt. Secondly it is referred to an illusory thing, fictitious, not yet proven.

This second consideration is in line with the concept of myth intended by Barthes. His aim was to analyze the artificial representation and unreal beliefs that surrounded its society, the myths of its everyday life. Relating to the myths circulating in the France of his time, he wrote:

“La France tout entière baigne dans cette idéologie anonyme: notre presse, notre cinéma, notre théâtre, notre littérature de grand usage, nos cérémoniaux, notre Justice, notre diplomatie, nos conversations, le temps qu'il fait, le crime que l'on juge, le mariage auquel on s'émeut, la cuisine que l'on rêve, le vêtement que l'on porte, tout, dans notre vie quotidienne, est tributaire de la représentation que la bourgeoisie se fait et nous fait des rapports de l'homme et du monde” (Roland Barthes, 1970, 227).

Barthes wanted to show how the mass culture, dominated by la petite bourgeoisie, constructed its own myths basing on which people followed the traditionalism to their values. In this context emerges the role of the mythologist, as the figure that has the task of showing the signs as what they really are. It is linked to the concept expressed before regarding the

first-order language and second-order language. The myth resides on the metalangue (second-order language).

“[...] on peut attaquer le monde et l'aliénation idéologique de notre monde quotidien, à bien des niveaux: Système de la mode contient aussi une affirmation éthique sur le monde, la même d'ailleurs que dans des Mythologies, à savoir qu' il y a un mal, un mal social, idéologique, attaché aux systèmes de signes qui ne s'avouent pas franchement comme systèmes de signes. Au lieu de reconnaître que la culture est un système immotivé de significations, la société bourgeoise donne toujours des signes comme justifiés par la nature ou la raison” (Roland Barthes, 1981, 67).

He thought that myth was a sort of hegemonic connotation imposed on social and cultural phenomena, with the aim to hide the reality and make it seem that it was the result of a natural condition, in this case the existence of difference social classes.

“Le propre des Mythologies n'est pas politique mais idéologique. Le propre des Mythologies, c'est de prendre systématiquement en bloc une sorte de monstre que j'ai appelé la 'petite-bourgeoise' (quitte à en faire un mythe) et de taper inlassablement sur ce bloc; la méthode est peu scientifique et n'y prétendait pas; c'est pourquoi l'ouverture méthodologique n'est venue qu'ensuite, par la lecture de Saussure; la théorie des Mythologies est l'objet d'une postface” (Roland Barthes, 1971, 96).

Barthes wanted to show how myths are determined by history, how they depends by the hierarchical composition of the society. He saw myth as a semiotic system built on the top of other pre-existing signs, a meta-system.

Some see the concept of myth used by Barthes as a sort of synonymous of ideology (Brown, 1994).

The term ideology is often used to define the beliefs and symbols used to determine situations of power. It is the mean that sustains and empowers the dominant group within a community.

In the case of Barthes the myth is considered a socially constructed reality believed to be “natural” and not constructed “ad hoc” from who have the power.

“Le départ de cette réflexion était le plus souvent un sentiment d'impatience devant le `naturel' dont la presse, l'art, le sens commun affublent sans cesse une réalité qui, pour être celle dans laquelle nous vivons, n'en est pas moins parfaitement historique: en un mot, je souffrais de voir à tout moment confondues dans le récit de notre actualité, Nature et Histoire, et je voulais ressaisir dans l'exposition décorative de ce-qui-va-de- soi, l'abus idéologique qui, à mon sens, s'y trouve cache” (Roland Barthes, 1970, 9).

Barthes gave a political and historical application of semiotics, but arguing that myths are “*depoliticized speech*” since the original political construction of a sign has been hidden in order to make the sign system to seem “natural”.

The concept of myth and mythologist is similar to the concept of code and interpretant of Eco’s theory.

2.4. From Structuralism to Deconstructionism

As said before a point of passage from Structuralism to Post-structuralism could be seen in the figure of Roland Barthes with his introduction of the concept of metalanguage.

The Structuralism was a critical intellectual movement born in France diffused in Europe in the first half of the 20th century. He found its roots in the conviction that Human culture could be analyzed and understood using a structure, in particular linguistic structures.

The Post-structuralism emerged in seventies as critique to structuralism and in particular to the conviction that every aspect of human being could be studied with a structural analysis. Post-structuralist figures rejected the theory of the self-sufficiency of the structure. Moreover they cast doubt on the theory of the binary opposition advanced by the Structuralism.

The binary opposition theory stated that human logic associated some theoretical opposites concept, binary opposites, to the structure of the text. For example signified-signifier, male-female, logos-pathos, culture-nature good-evil, day-night, emotional-rational and so on.

One of the main currents that emerged in Post-structuralism was the Deconstructionism, which criticized the vision of the language had by Post-structuralists. It derived principally from the work of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) *Of Grammatology* published in 1967. The book contains a review of the saussurean structuralism regarding the concept of sign that Saussure considered composed by signifier and signified. Derrida quoted the definition of Saussure about what regards writing and language and the fact that the only reason for the existence of writing is to represent the language. The critic of Derrida is linked to the fact that written texts are not secondary to the language, but they represent signifiers by themselves.

Is evident the influence of Martin Heidegger on the definition of this line of thought. Derrida applied the concept introduced by Heidegger of

“*Destruktion*” of the text, deciding to use the word deconstruction rather than the literal translation of destruction, in order to show the aim of a work of precision. Heidegger’s *Destruktion* was referred to the analysis of the concept and signification linked to a word by the tradition or the nature and understand the reason why the history has determined some linkages between a word and its meaning.

The critic moved against Structuralism was about the fact that in the reality the signifier isn’t linked to a predetermined signified, but it could produce other signifiers. It stated that the only way to understand the meaning of a thing is deconstructing the initial assumptions and the system that linked the signifier to only one predetermined signified.

A lot of writers had seen the influence of Post-Structuralism on their works, among them the figures of Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault.

In the lecture series of *Society must be defended* published by Michel Foucault (1926-1984) in 1976 could be found a description of the aim of Post-structuralism:

“[...] For the last ten or fifteen years, the immense and proliferating criticizability of things, institutions, practices, and discourses; a sort of general feeling that the ground was crumbling beneath our feet, especially in places where it seemed most familiar, most solid, and closest to us, to our bodies, to our everyday gestures. But alongside this crumbling and the astonishing efficacy of discontinuous, particular, and local critiques, the facts were also revealing something... beneath this whole thematic, through it and even within it, we have seen what might be called the insurrection of subjugated knowledge” (Foucault, 1976, 6-7).

To make understandable the aim of Post-structuralism Derrida take as example a theory advanced by a Structuralist, Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Lévi-Strauss in his work analyzed the phenomenon of the incest. The incest is considered a taboo within every society and it could be seem linked only to the culture, showing the binary opposition culture-nature. Instead Lévi-Strauss argued that people not only avoid incest for the simple reason of the preservation of the health, but also for a social reason that is linked to the fact that marriage with person that are not part of the family could represent a way to escape from their parental origins and make alliances with other families, creating new social groups.

Derrida take the example of the incest taboo and its culture-nature binary opposition, to show the fallacy of this theory:

"The incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural"
(Derrida, 1978, 283).

Here is evident the rejection of the binary opposition made by Derrida.

Is important to specify that Post-structuralism is not an opposition to structuralist reflection but as an extension of the concepts moved from that, arriving to the point to deconstruct those concepts.

The work of Derrida *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences* (1966) represents the manifesto of the Post-structuralism.

As said earlier Roland Barthes born like Structuralist and then moved to Post-structuralism in seventies. The point of passage is determined by the publication of his book *The Death of the Author* in 1967. The book represent a metaphor with the death of the author as a source to understand the meaning of a text, since every text could be interpreted in different way, arriving to different meanings, instead it is limited by the presence of the author and its interpretations. Simultaneously with the death of the author

came the birth of the reader, with the opening to a multitude of meanings to interpret the text.

Another important contribution to Post-structuralism has been given by Umberto Eco with his work *The Open Book* (1962). For Eco the work of art had an indefinable meaning, it is an “open work”, since the aim of the artist is to let free the emotions and interpretations of the observer, leaving a condition of openness of the work. The task of the observer is to interpret the work of art basing of its cultural background and knowledge.

In the same way works of literature must be conceived as open and dynamic, since words aren't locked in their lexical meaning and should be considered in the context of the expression

This concept is today accepted, but at the time of the publication of *The Open Book*, it received a lot of critics, especially from Eugenio Montale and Claude Lévi-Strauss

2.5. Socio-semiotics

Socio-semiotics started as a reaction to deconstructionism, Gottdiener in particular criticized deconstructionism for its continuous regression of meaning.

The aim of socio-semiotics was to stress the relation that existed between the signification process and the world that surrounds the sign system.

Socio-semiotics is a branch of urban semiotics that analyzes the social dimension of meaning and the cultural connotations linked to the surrounding space. Moreover it analyzes the process of signification and interpretation and the ideologies influencing the individual experience and society.

Gottdiener and Lagopoulos gave a definition of socio-semiotics:

“Socio-semiotics is materialistic analysis of ideology in everyday life” (Gottdiener and Lagopoulos, 1986, 14).

They proposed this new semiotic approach with the publication of their book *The City and the Sign* in 1986. In the book they talked about the socio-semiotics of the city, saying that it found its basis in the works of Eco, Barthes, Ledrut, Greimas, Hjelmslev.

“The city is a symbol, and there is symbolization of the city, but it is and image itself, apprehended through and by discourse, that what the city represents for man is revealed and expressed, and that the city and its aspects are manifested in various figures, i.e., symbolized (Raymond Ledrut, 1986, 223).

Socio-semiotics shows how in the city there is a power concentrated within various sign systems, among of which there are streets, monuments, facades, literary representation, films, advertising campaigns, everything that deals with media and culture, that represented the signification vehicle. So the object of study could be everything, visual, written, verbal and so on, that is part of the city, since the symbolic act is linked to the presence of a physical object. These are called semiotics modes, and are the basic social meaning making practices.

In the vision of Louis Trolle Hjelmslev (1899-1965) signs were composed by expression plane (signifier) and content plane (signified), as an extension of the saussurean bilateral sign model constituted by signified and signifier that could be seen also from the point of view of form and substance.

This vision of Saussure is in line with the dichotomy expression-content of Hjelmslev.

In his book *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1963/1943) he wanted to introduce a theoretical model useful for the analysis of the language, in a way more abstract than the one of Saussure.

“The sign is an entity generated by the connection between an expression and a content” (Hjelmslev 1963/1943, 47).

“There can be no content without an expression, or expressionless content; neither there can be an expression without a content, or content-less expression (Hjelmslev, 1963/1943, 49).

Hjelmslev called this kind of interconnection as “relation of solidarity”.

At this point Hjelmslev gave an example, saying that if we think but we don't speak, then the thought doesn't represent a linguistic content so it hasn't the function of sign. Instead if we speak, even without thinking, we produce a series of sounds to which no one could be able to attach a content, and so it isn't a linguistic expression neither a sign representation.

This relationship between expression and content is not referred only to the interaction between the act of thinking and the sound deriving from that, but it can occur at a lot of levels of abstraction thanks to the semiotics system.

The interaction between the expression plane and the content plane generates the sign, in this case there are two kinds of abstraction, which are phonic abstraction and conceptual abstraction.

As said before, in the saussurean theory, every sign could be decomposed into four parts: substance of content, form of content, substance of expression, form of expression.

Traditionally is common to define the substance as the essence of the thing, which tends to remain unaltered even in the case in which the form, that is its way of appear, changes.

Hjelmslev add the concept of purport that is similar to the saussurean unformed thought and sound.

The purport content is the aspect of the content of a sign that is commonly used and understand by all kind of language, it could be further used as a basis to compare and understand the other sings of the various languages. Hjelmslev gave an example of that using colors, if we think to the color green, every language has its own word “to say green”, in this case the purport content is the color itself, that represent the basis to understand the word linked to this color by other languages. It is the “amorphous thought-mass” (Hjelmslev, 1943, 52) that is formed in different ways by the various kind of languages.

The substance of content is the material manifestation of the sign in its conceptual and psychological aspects, it represents the codified ideologies that belong to a particular culture. It is the purport from the point of view of a particular language. It is the way in which a particular word is attached to the purport.

Furthermore there is the form content that Hjelmslev defined as in relation with the sign function.

“The substance depends on the form to such a degree that it lives exclusively by its favor and can in no sense be said to have independent existence” (Hjelmslev, 1963/1943, 51).

The form content is referred to the ideology linked to the material object, what it represents in function of a particular symbolic or social behavior. It is the content expressed with the act of speaking.

Moreover the form content added to the form expression generates that thing that within a language represents the sign.

Reminding to the previous example of the color green, the form content is the color green as opposition to all the other color existent.

Expression and content are in mutual relation, they find a definition only if referred to one another.

“[...] They are defined only by their mutual solidarity, and neither of them can be identified otherwise. They are each defined only oppositively and relatively, as mutually opposed functions of one and the same function (Hjelmslev, 1963/1943, 60).

So analyzing the purport expression, paralleling to the purport content, it is the not yet manifested or analyzed sequence of sound that constitute the material act of speaking.

In the same way the form expression comes to exist in virtue of the link with the form content. It is the sequence of sounds belonging to a language in relation to all the terms of the phonemes present in that particular language, in function of all the possible human vocalization and pronunciation. As the form content also the form expression exists in function of its linkage to a determined content and so to the sign meaning. The relation between content form and expression form give origin to the sign.

The purport expression is created with the formation of the substance expression as a consequence of the form expression. The substance expression is the sequence of sounds that determines a phrase pronounced in a determined language, by a particular person. It refers to the object itself.

Is evident the strict relation that links together purport, form and substance.

*“[...] purport provides the substance for a form”
(Hjelmslev, 1963/1943, 52).*

Any single thing of those three comes to exist only in relation to the other two.

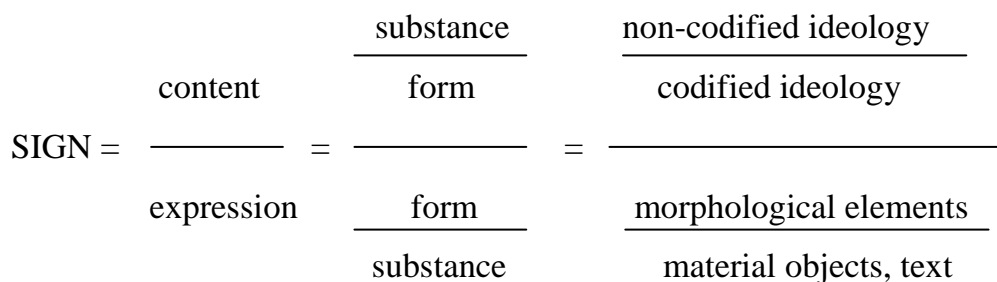
The semiotic function is seen by Hjelmslev as the relation between form content and substance content.

“That a sign is a sign for something means that the content-form of a sign can subsume that something as content-substance” (Hjelmslev, 1943, 57).

“The sign is then – paradoxical as it may seem – a sign for a content-substance and a sign for an expression-substance. It is in this sense that a the sign can be said to be a sign for something [...] The sign is a two-sided entity, with a Janus-like perspective in two directions, and with effect in two respects: ‘outwards’ toward the expression-substance and ‘inwards’ toward the content-substance” (Hjelmslev, 1943, 58).

The decomposition of sign in content and expression is present also in the work of Gottdiener, and like in saussurean analysis, those could be seen from the form and substance perspective.

Figure 9: Socio-semiotic model of the decomposition of sign



Gottdiener considered the expression substance as the mechanism to exercise the power within a society. The way to understand a material form is strictly linked to the culture in which it comes to exist.

He gave a model to apply socio-semiotic analyses to a lot of fields, like consumption, tourism and leisure. This model find an application on phenomena linked to the consumer and material culture, nut could be also used to analyze images fixed and non-fixed.

Since images could be seen as signs, and could be decomposed like those, this model represents the first fundamental step that found an application of the socio-semiotics to the analysis of print advertisements.

3. Semiotics and Brand Strategy

The most important things within any kind of company are the brand strategy applied in order to build and maintain its brand equity and brand identity.

A strong brand equity is the financial value of brand benefits that aren't tangible, it means that the product or service offered by the company has an added value compared to similar products and competitors within the market. It allows the company to charge more for its products and to apply an higher price than competitors that will be accepted by costumers that recognize the added value that they are buying.

The brand identity is the outward expression of a brand through all the aspects that he communicates to the people, like its trademark, name, image and so on. It reflect the values that the company wants to communicate, the perception that they want arouse in the potential customers.

The way in which a company communicates their values to customers with audio, visual and verbal is fundamental in order to maintain its brand identity and equity. The secret resides in the capability of attract and capture the attention of customers and push them to acquire the product offered by the brand. The aim is to build brand awareness in the mind of customers. For brand awareness is intended the ability of customers to recognize and recall a particular brand liking it to their logo, brand name or jingle.

These phenomena are called brand recall and brand recognition, and they are strictly influenced by the visual communication of the brand. The way in which the brand communicates all its values constitutes the visual identity of the brand. It is closely linked to the logo, colors, fonts and all the things that make a brand recognizable. As Zena O'Connor said, the use of

color is very important to generate brand recognition, since it determines the differentiation among other brands within the market.

The main instrument to build brand recognition and brand awareness is marketing, and in particular advertising.

Semiotics is very useful in marketing and advertising, since it helps to build analysis and researches that could be used to improve and develop brand strategy. Since the brand strategy is linked to the communication through the use of symbols that made the brand recognizable, the use of semiotics, that regards the analysis and study of symbols, is very useful. So semiotics could be used to communicate brand values and generate brand awareness and brand loyalty. Semiotics helps to understand the signs and symbols linked to a brand or a product, what people think of that, and in this way gave the information useful to change and innovate in order to change the hidden symbol linked to the product by people. Moreover it helps to chose for example a brand name that has not a negative connotation across other countries or cultures, or how to reach the same scope using different codes to express a common idea. Semiotics can be used also to understand what is the best logo or color that fits perfectly with the brand identity of the company.

It could be said that before the same task was performed by market research, but the difference brought by semiotics is in the fact that it doesn't limit to make questions to consumers about what regards their behavior and opinions about a particular product. Semiotics goes into more depth examining culture, in order to understand what is the reason determining some responses from customers.

In this way, with the help of semiotics, companies are able to develop product in line with the culture of customers and with the cultural needs. Moreover company could use semiotics to create a culture around a product or a brand.

Another application of semiotics to brand strategy is about the position that a brand has within the market, as a follower or as a leader. While brand leaders have the role of the trend-setter of the market, they are the one that take risks and make innovations in order to reach the top position in the market or in their segment, against their competitors. Instead brand followers prefer to copy in a certain way the innovation made by their competitors, an example of that could be Gap in the fast fashion, or Zara that give to customers products similar to the one produce by luxury brand. The advantage gave by semiotics in this case is that it could help brand to leave the position of follower and become leaders.

So is evident that semiotics could be fundamental within a business, as an instrument to understand communication and cultural tools and guide strategic choices.

An application of the structural semiotics to the analysis of visual and verbal signs system is given by Laura R Oswald in her book *Marketing Semiotics: Signs, Strategies, and Brand Value* published in 2012. She wanted to show how semiotics helped to understand cultural codes and to develop brand equity, because of the relation between brand and symbols. She gave a lot of example of companies that used semiotics to reposition their brand within the market, or to extend their brand to other product lines, or to gain new customers and new markets.

Moreover in her article of 2007, *Semiotics and Strategic Brand Management*, she talked about the effects of semiotics on brand strategy, brand equity and marketing.

“The semiotic dimension of brands is therefore instrumental for building awareness, positive associations, and long-term customer loyalty, and contributes to trademark ownership and operational advantages such as channel and media clout” (Laura Oswald, 2007,1).

Being able to manage semiotics means be able to manage brand strategy. For Oswald brand is system of symbols and signs that stimulate the imagination of the viewer and it bring to link a brand to some values. Symbols are strictly linked to the communication that a brand made through logo, advertising, packaging, jingle and so on, so the use of semiotics is vital to gain and increase brand equity.

Using marketing tools the brand communication is obtained through a matrix that includes five dimension: material, structural, conventional or codifies, contextual, performative. Oswald makes the example of the McDonalds' logo.

The material dimension is the visual icon, the logo.

The structural dimension is represented by the background of color red, the two golden arches, the brand name in white over the arches. Moreover the position of the arches in the left of the red square, and the brand name in the left give a sense of movement.

The conventional dimension is linked to the fact that white brand name, golden arches and red background are linked to brand identity. What makes the brand recognizable.

The contextual dimension is the cultural environment that determines the negative or positive association of meaning to the brand, like for example the fact that in United States McDonald's is associated to unhealthy fast food, while in china it is seen as a special pleasure.

The performative dimension depends on the way in which marketing produces signs and codes that take the attentions and make work the imagination of the viewer. This dimension is fundamental to create a brand relationship and then a brand loyalty.

Is evident at this point the importance of semiotics in brand strategy, since it helps to bring a strong brand identity and to understand the cultural environment that influences the interpretation of symbols.

Moreover semiotics has a very important role in advertising, since it is a system of symbols in which there is a direct link between products, people, place and action.

Another example of semiotics applied to advertising was given by Roland Barthes in his book *The Fashion System* published in 1967. He showed how usual words were used to manipulate the perception of symbols. Barthes gave an example of the advertising campaign of a blouse saying “if you buy it, it will give your skirt a romantic look”. He considered the language used in fashion advertising and explained that there were an hidden constructed meaning behind the words used. It is real in all the fashion advertising campaigns, in which the use of words is linked to the goal of generating a sense of desire in the viewer. These advertising developers use semiotics to understand the myths and the ideologies hidden under the consumerist culture in order to take advantage from and use those to bring effective advertising campaigns.

Barthes said that fashion is implicit within objects, or in the description of those. In the fashion system objects, and so clothes, are functionally determined, for example a shoes could be perfect for walking and another could be worn in particular occasions. Fashion writings are referred to clothes rather than to fashion, and the relation between signifier and signified determines the clothing sign. The fashion signifier is the relation between object, support and variant, instead the signified is the environment that surrounds the object. For example the signifier could be a shoe that is the object, with high heel that is the support, and opens toe that is the variant, the signified will be the context in which this shoe is used, that could be for example spring.

Since in fashion we find connotation but not denotation, the fashion sign will be the fashion writing.

As said before the aim of fashion advertising campaigns is to evoke in the viewer a sense of desire. Here we can assist to the rationalization of

fashion, the fashion object is changed into something indispensable to the viewer, it is described and presented as something that is at the same time natural and essential since it fulfills our necessities.

The semiotic analysis of cultural phenomena could help to understand how some myths and ideologies are linked to particular things. For example researches on gender in the western culture has highlight the fact that the word pink is linked to the female gender, instead the color blue is linked to the male gender. In western culture girls used to wear pink clothes and boys blue garments in their childhood. This is seen by western people like natural, even if they don't know why it has become an accepted tradition of their culture.

The aim of fashion industry and more broadly of the industrial is to calculate and to form consumers that aren't able to calculate. This because if consumers would think like a fashion producers, clothes would be acquired at a slow rate. If fashion industry would not be able to generate the sense of desire in the customer, making it appear as a natural thing and a necessity at the same time, people would buy only when they find something that really fits their primary necessities. In this case there wouldn't be a real and powerful fashion industry.

The aim of fashion is to create, through visual and written, an imaginary world of fashionableness.

3.1. Semiotics and media

As said before semiotics starts to approach media theory in 1960s, in particular with the work of Roland Barthes. He focused on the fact that advertising campaigns, in particular in the fashion industry, had the aim to generate inside the viewer a sense of desire. Advertisements exploit the use of symbols that are linked to the cultural and social environment of the

possible customers. Since advertisement is based on the exploitation of symbols and signs, the semiotic analysis could be fundamental to understand what are the points on which focus in order to obtain an advertising campaign as effective as possible to generate the desire inside customers.

“Gestures, dress codes, traffic signs, advertising images, newspapers, television programs and so on are all kinds of media which use visual sign. The same principles underlie the semiotic study of visual signs and linguistic signs. In each case, there is a material signifier, which expresses the sign and a mental concept, a signified, which immediately accompanies it. (Jonathan Bignell, 1997, 14).

We are pervaded today by messages, symbols and signs of all kind that surrounds us in our everyday lives.

Also Nöth focused on the relationship between semiotics and media, defining those two as *“predestined to fruitful trans-disciplinary cooperation” (Wilfried Nöth, 1997, 1).*

“[...] semiotics provides the theoretical tools for the analysis of signs and communication process in advertising [...] semiotics expands the analytic horizon from the verbal message in the narrower sense to the multiplicity of codes used in persuasive communication” (Wilfried Nöth, 1990, 476).

The work of Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics*, together with the *Encyclopedia of Sebeok* have become the fundamentals of the methodology of semiotics application in every kind of field.

“Fundamental to all semiotic analysis is the fact that any system of signs (semiotic codes) is carried by a material medium which has its own principles of structure” (Robert Hodge and David Tripp, 1986, 17).

Hodge and Tripp introduce the concept of the medium used to carry the sign, so doing a semiotic analysis is very important to take under consideration also that. They analyzed, in their book *Children and Television* (1986), the children TV programs under a semiotic point of view. Talking about medium, in the case of television, the communication of the message occurs through two order of codes: aural and visual. In a TV program it can be found the visual composed by images, texts, pictures, then there is the sound sphere with music and speech. Any of those things is linked to a particular code, so the medium used is strictly linked to the semiotic analysis of a message.

Daniel Chandler (1995) gave a definition of medium similar to the definition of semiotics:

“[...] a symbolic system which serves to support the construction of reality” (Daniel Chandler, 1995, 3).

In this sense the medium used has an impact in the construction of the reality. Jay David Bolter argued that couldn't exist a message without a medium. Messages and signs are strictly dependent from the medium used to show them. The medium used influences the representation of the experience. It becomes as important as the message. Chandler said that the sign vehicle necessitates a medium in order to exist.

“ [...] signs are always anchored in a medium. Signs may be more or less dependent upon the characteristics of one medium - they may transfer more or less well to other media

*– but there is no such thing as a sign without a medium”
(Jay David Bolter, 1991, 195).*

For what regards the application of semiotics to media and communication fields, the contribution of Danesi has been very relevant. He focused on the fact that semiotics and communication are both involved in the systematic study of signs.

“The term ‘medium’ is used in a variety of ways by different theorists, and may include such broad categories as speech and writing, or print and broadcasting or relate to specific technical forms within the mass media or the media of interpersonal communication” (Daniel Chandler, 2001, Introduction).

Advertising is used to persuade people, with verbal and on-verbal means, to the purchasing of a particular object. Images used in advertisements exploit all the aspects of consumers’ cultural environment in order to make an object desirable. Elwyn Brooks White in an article of the *New Yorker* (1936) said that advertising campaigns are like the interpreters of people’s dreams. They exploit consumers’ weaknesses using them as points of strength, so advertisements take advantage from people’s fear, desire, ignorance, pride and so on.

Advertising make to seem objects as the completion of people’s needs and aspirations. Boorstin (1963) said that the advertising campaigns are used to encourage expectations, making images to seem as realistic as possible. So images are used with the aim of sell products to the possible customers, giving a realistic representation of the function of use in the everyday life.

“In advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signified of the advertising

message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to transmit as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading: the advertising image is frank, or at least emphatic” (Barthes, quoted in Evans and Hall, 1999, 33-34).

What Barthes was trying to say is that the interpretation of the images in advertising is in a certain way conveyed. As said before semiotics could be used to understand the cultural environment and create a product in line with its needs, or instead it could be used to create a cultural environment around a product. The products, and so its advertising campaign will have some characteristics that emerge from the images, some signs that will be perceived by the viewer.

In the mass communication of today is usual to find a linguistic message put beside the image. Since images are polysemic, the viewer could choose among a lot of signifieds. This could lead to a problem of interpretation of the real meaning of the image proposed. One of the tools to vehicle in a certain way the multitude of possible signifieds is the linguistic message. It helps to give a denotation of the elements in the image, anchoring them to their real meaning. The linguistic message is used as an instrument of elucidation over some symbols of the icon message, and not over the totality of those. The use of anchorage is very common in advertising campaigns or in press photographs for example.

Talking about denotation, it emerges a problem, a paradox, since photography is considered the only message that doesn't need a code. Chandler made a distinction between denotation and connotation as the two elements necessary to determine the meaning. In the case of photography the denotation come with the simple mechanical or digital reproduction of the object, the image photographed is equal to the real object. The

connotation may result only in the case in which the picture is modified using special programs, effects, filters, colors and so on.

“Denotation is what is photographed, connotation is how it is photographed” (Fiske, 1982, 91).

It is the opposite case of drawing that has a code even when it is yet denote, since the only action of making the drawing represents itself an act of connotation. Its denotation is less pure and natural than the one of the picture.

For what regards, instead, for example tv spots, and so images that are not fixed, is usual to apply the function of relay. In this case image and linguistic message are involved in a complementary relationship. The role of text is no more only elucidative but it is a fundamental mean carrying a meaning that isn't present in the pure iconic image.

As said in the previous chapters the signs within a text are organized in order to produce a system of meaning, to do it they follow some schemes and conventions, the codes. Codes could depend from social background, cultural environment and so on. For what regards communication and media has been introduced some codes by authors like Eco, Barthes and Fiske. For example there are textual codes, like mass media codes and so regarding magazines, newspaper, photographic and so on, stylistic codes, aesthetic code and many others. Then there could be social codes like behavioral codes, verbal language, commodity codes about fashion and clothing, bodily codes regarding gestures, expression, appearance and so on. Moreover there are interpretative codes linked to the production and interpretation of codes, ideological codes linked to class, race, capitalism and so forth.

John Fiske (1982) introduced a distinction among codes: broadcast codes and narrowcast codes. The first order of codes is linked to a mass audience, the latter involved a narrow audience. The narrowcast codes tends to

differentiate its members from the mass ad are learned aimed by a particular desire. Instead the broadcast codes highlight the similarities that could be found within the mass and are the result of the experience. Making an example, the fast fashion is referred to mass audience, instead the high fashion is oriented to a narrow audience.

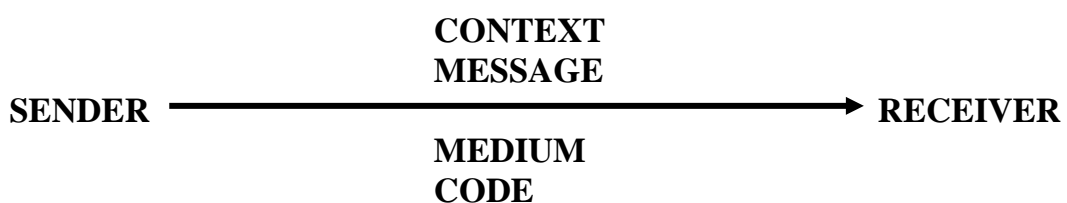
3.2. Visual semiotics

Visual semiotics is a branch of semiotic analysis that finds its origin in '90s, thanks to the work of Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1990).

“We intend to provide inventories of the major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of visual semiotics, and to analyze how they are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1990, 1).

This kind of semiotics is oriented to the study of visual signs, in particular in advertising, fashion and all the things related to mass media.

As said previously signs are the key of all the semiotic analysis, since they represents something else. In the classic model of communication developed by Roman Jakobson the act of communication influences the meaning, since this is not a stable predetermined entity only transmitted from the sender to the receiver.



The improved model of communication is based on the idea that there are two other phases within the act of communication that are related to the encoding and decoding of the message.



Through the processes of encoding and decoding is created the meaning of the sign. In visual semiotics images are composed by an harvesting of signs that the reader has to decode and link together.

Stuart Hall said that in the communication process images are first encoded and then decoded. Encoding come in the moment in which a particular meaning is given to the image, and this operation is strictly influenced by the cultural and social environment in which it takes place. The decoding is the operation made by the viewer or the reader in order to understand what is the meaning carried by the sign.

Moreover the context and the social and cultural environment are fundamental in the creation of signs and codes. It is fundamental to understand the context in which is created the sings, since it helps to understand the process used to link some codes to a particular thing. As De Vito (1991) said the act of communication takes place in a particular context that influences it and involves one or more individuals with the task of send and receive the message , and so encode and decode it.

The social and cultural context in which is formed the visual sign is very important since it is strictly related with the actions of encoding and decoding.

“The articulation and understanding of social meanings in images derives from visual articulation of social meanings in face-to-face interaction” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1999, 379).

Is important to contextualize a visual sign, since it is vital to understand for example an advertising campaign and all the hidden codes and meanings present in it. The reader must be able to encode the signs of the advertisement in order to understand its meaning and what the brand wants to communicate to its potential customers.

As Eco said, it could happen that signs are related to the object that they represent, and so to the thing they are “standing for”, because of conventions. As said before also Barthes highlighted that particular meanings are attached to signs because of rules that are arbitrary and conventional, and in some case people are neither able to explain why something is standing for something specific else. There could be a lot of interpretations of why a particular sign carries a particular meaning.

This kind of consideration is linked to the saussurean theory of signifier and signified. As said earlier Saussure decomposed the linguistic sign in signifier that represents the image, sound or word, and signified that is the meaning carried by the signifier. Is the relation among this two to be based on conventional and arbitrary rules, like Barthes underlined.

Visual signs are the only kind of signs that aren't arbitrary, differently from sounds, spoken language and written signs.

Moreover Peirce with his triadic model introduced the concept of object, representamen and interpretant. The sign is the representamen, which stands for the object, and then the interpretant is the sign created into the mind of the viewer looking at the representamen. The understanding of the meaning of the sign is then articulated in iconic, indexical and symbolic.

Iconic signs are fundamental in visual images and photography, since in this case the signifier stands for the signified. The icon represents something that the viewer is able to recognize in the reality.

The indexical one is referred to a link between signified and signifier, determined by fortuity or contiguity, resulting from the presence of a

contact or a trace. In this case the sign is physically related or depends on its object.

Finally the symbolic sign is the arbitrary correlation between signified and signifier. As said earlier, for example the linkage in western cultures between the color pink and the female gender, or again the use of the color red as a synonym of passion. This link among signified and signifier are arbitrary since in other cultures some color could be seen in a completely opposite way. So the symbolic sign has a meaning even if there isn't a direct connection between signifier and signified.

Iconic, symbolic and indexical signs are all used in visual communication, but the first are the most important since they are the equal representation of the object they are standing for. It is possible to deconstruct an image in order to understand its hierarchy of meanings and also what signs are iconic, symbolic or indexical. This because as Eco said regarding language communication, it is composed by text that is the collection of a multileveled communication. It is true also in the case of visual communication.

To analyze and understand in the right way visual representations is useful to take into consideration the denotation-connotation dichotomy introduced by Roland Barthes. Barthes referred to denoted or first-order meaning as the one that the viewer attaches to his first impression about the visual representation, what he is able to recognize looking at the representation the first time. Practically the denotation is the literary meaning of the subject in the representation. It is the first step of the signification, in which the signifier is constituted by the representation itself and the signified is the concept, the idea linked to that. The connotation or second-order meaning, instead, is linked to the interpretation of the image deriving from the cultural and social background of the viewer, and from the cultural meanings that are linked to some particular signs. Practically

the connotation uses the first-order signification, so the signifier and the signified, as a signifier and links to it a new meaning

Taking the example introduced by Pansa of a photography, the denotation stands in the subject photographed, while the connotation is related to the way in which the subjects has been photographed. It refers to the signs and symbolic messages that could be created with the use of photographers' techniques.

In visual semiotics are involved not only pictures, illustrations, images, diagram, drawings, but also movies, films, TV spots, TV advertisements and so on.

Christian Metz explained in which way the communication process comes in a film. It is articulated in two phases, montage, that put the objects in relation each other and determines the sequences and the composition of the scenes, and decoupage, that is relating to the recognition and understanding of the codes linked to images presented. Decoupage is linked to visual recognition, which is based on the capability to note some particular characteristics of the object that suggest a meaning, that are linked to a code. These characteristics make signs and symbols recognizable even if not looking the entire image. Tanks to experience and cultural background we are able to deconstruct the image and link some particular codes to the single object. In this way people can formulate hypothesis in order to come to the construction of a meaning.

Moreover Metz thought that connotation must be analyzed after denotation. Since denotation isn't an act of interpretation, but the pure presentation of reality and objects. He compared visual with literature, saying that while with the second people are able to imagine and create their visual image, in visual communication you can't.

Visual communication, and so movies, doesn't let to the viewer the possibility to interpret and invent, the images are already there.

In order to talk a particular language for example, people have first to learn their codes. In the same way, if we think about cinema, once we begin to understand cinema we will be able also to find its symbols and signs decoding the visual images.

In the same way people are so surrounded by media nowadays that they begin to learn the media codes. Images are present in advertising and television since the media communication is focused on the use of signs and symbols. While with verbal communication the message delivered is better understood because made comprehensible by who is carrying it, in the non-verbal communication the viewer has the task to interpret and understand the message. In this case the cultural, social and personal background is helpful.

Sometimes to cover the gap, represented by the misunderstanding of the message, is added to visual images also a verbal component, in order to vehicle in a certain way the comprehension of the signs behind communication.

3.2.1. Colors as a contribution to visual semiotics and advertising

Colors could be considered as signs if applied to psychological, physiological and physical contexts.

Since the sign is something standing for something else, the color could be considered as a sign when it is used to indicate something more than the simple color.

Colors as all the other sign depends on the context of use, within a text for example, and on the social and cultural environment. The spatial and historical collocation is fundamental to determine the meaning of the color, since as said before the code associated to a sign could change from culture to culture.

Applying the Peircean analysis to color, could be made the example of a dark-blue zone after the shore of the beach within a painting. The object will be the thing to which the sign stands for, in this case the sea. The representamen will be the substituting sign and so the dark-blue zone in the painting. Finally the interpretant will be the idea of sea conveyed by the painting, the depth of the sea.

It is important to understand, as said in the previous chapters, that the interpretant must not be confused with the interpreter. In this case the interpretant is a more complete sign that comes from the precedent sign.

The introduction of the interpreter as a fourth element to add to the triadic model was made by Charles Morris in his book *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938). In the idea of Morris the semiotic analysis was constituted by three levels: syntax, semantics, pragmatics. He introduced this distinction in his book of 1946 *Signs, Language, and Behavior*.

Pragmatics is referred to the relation between signs and interpreter, in particular to the effects that the sign has on the interpreter's analysis. These effects are linked to the cultural background in which the sign takes place. The interpretation is also influenced by sociological and psychological factors, as revealed in the works of, Dériberé, Hailman, Pretorius and Molnar.

Syntax takes under consideration the relation that exists among the signs themselves and their elementary units. For what regards colors, the syntactic level is represented by the laws determining the color scale, the identification and classification of colors, the possible combination of those like overlapping, juxtaposition and interiority, the various groups of colors with their harmonies and interactions.

Semantics refers to the relation between signs and the object denoted by those. In the semantic analysis we refer to the act of substitution, since the sign, and in this case the color, is used as a substitute of another thing. The color stands for something else basing on codes and rules determined also

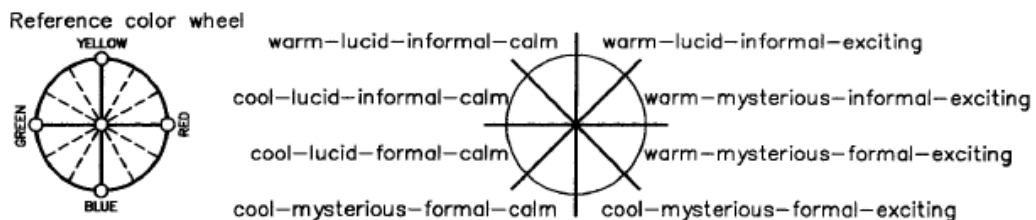
by the cultural context and social environment. As said earlier the importance of society and culture are determinant to understand the code linked to the color. About colors signification in the different parts of the world, Charles Taft, Lars Sivik and Anders Hard have conducted a study and developed a model in order to map the various codes and symbols attached colors around the various cultures and countries, and their stability.

Moreover semantic analysis is related to the peircean distinction among icon, index and symbol.

Colors work as signifieds and signifiers, or using the definition of Hjelmslev as expression plane and content plane.

Comparing colors with words, while those act only as symbols basing on conventions and arbitrary rules, colors work also as icons. In this case a link is created by psychological connections and similarities among color and object. For example thinking about red, yellow and orange, those are linked because of their similarities in hue, moreover they are connected to fire, sun, heat, warmth.

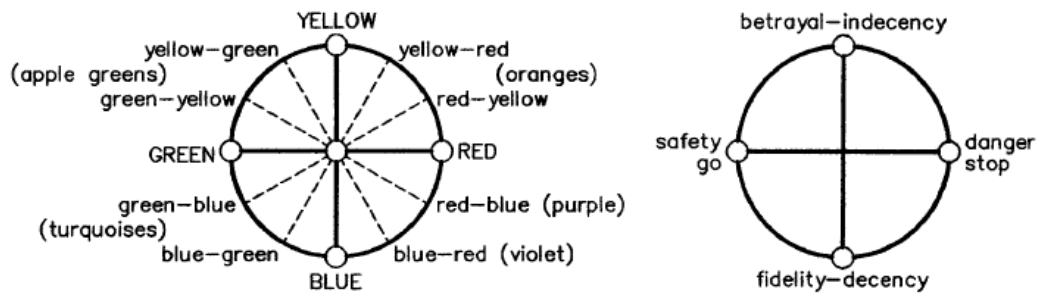
Figure 10: Jannello's psychological associations of color wheel



In the same way blues are associated to cold, and for example putting some individuals in a blue environment, they will feel a sense of coldness and the same is true in the case of “warm colors” . This phenomenon doesn’t depend on a real difference in temperatures given by colors, but as explain Déribéré because of a psychological effect generated by the association. This connection is given because of an iconic interpretation, but colors could be used also with a symbolic perspective. In this case the

association between colors and symbols is arbitrary and based on conventions. It is true that in some case colors works only because of their associated conventional rules, like for example the colors used in the semaphore, if those colors would abruptly change, people wouldn't be able to interpret it. In this example red is linked to the condition of danger and the act of stopping, yellow is a warning, green is the signal to go. Moreover in some cases colors have a particular meaning because of their contraposition with the others.

Figure 11: Color wheel with opposite hue sensation and opposite conventional meanings

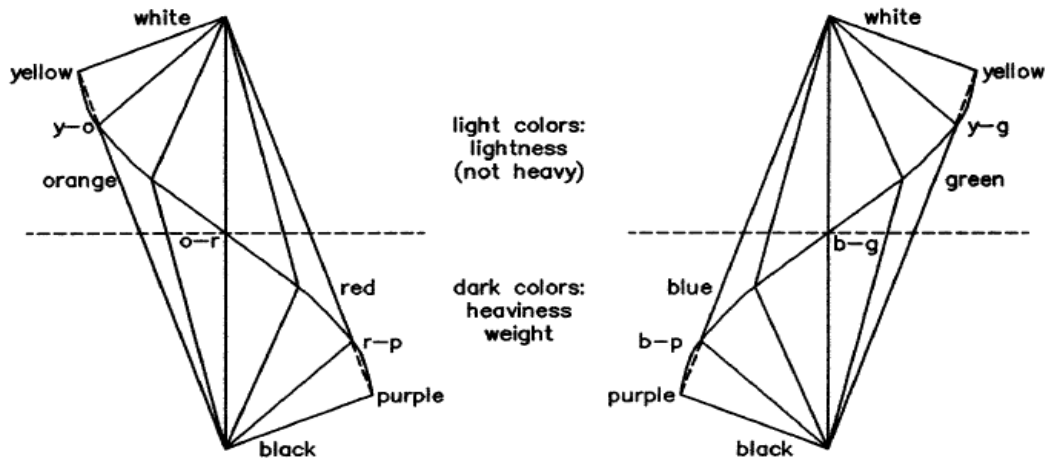


Conventions links colors to some particular things, using them as indicators of physical conditions, or for example in chemistry to indicate some particular chemical composition, or moreover as synonymous of emotions and feelings. For example red is usually linked to passion, black to death, green to envy and so on. In the same way as Peirce said, colors are also linked to sounds because of an iconic relation.

Symbolicity in colors strictly depends from the context in which those are applied. César Jannello, Rudolf Arnheim and Juan Ángel Magariños de Morentín analyzed in their works the way in which colors' relations are determined. For example the color red could mean passion or danger basing on the context.

Moreover Pope made a study on the way in which light colors are considered not heavy, and so linked to lightness, and dark colors are associated with the sensation of weight and heaviness.

Figure 12: Pope's Solid of Color - Heaviness VS Lightness



Also Déribéré analyzed how dark color materials and light color materials could affect the result of people's work and their level of problem solving.

John Hutchings made an international survey, *Colour In Folklore And Tradition*, with the aim of understanding the symbols linked to colors in the different countries and cultures. In particular he analyzed how some colors have been linked to particular aspects of foods, ceremonies, celebrations, decoration, clothing, fashion. For example for what regards the color of the bride's dress, in Japan and in western culture it is white, in Singapore is red and gold or pink and gold, in the Han tribe in China and in Hindu cultures is red, in the Dong tribe in China is black.

Eco said that a sign is something that could be used to lie, in the same way Matthew Luckiesh said that a color could be used to occult or deceive something. He made the example of a person that make up his face with the color yellow, giving the impression to have an illness to people that doesn't know that his skin is simply colored. Here comes the concept of indexical

analysis. In this case of yellow painted face, there isn't indexical link between the yellow face and the illness condition, but since the interpreter doesn't know that it is a deception, he looks at the color as an index.

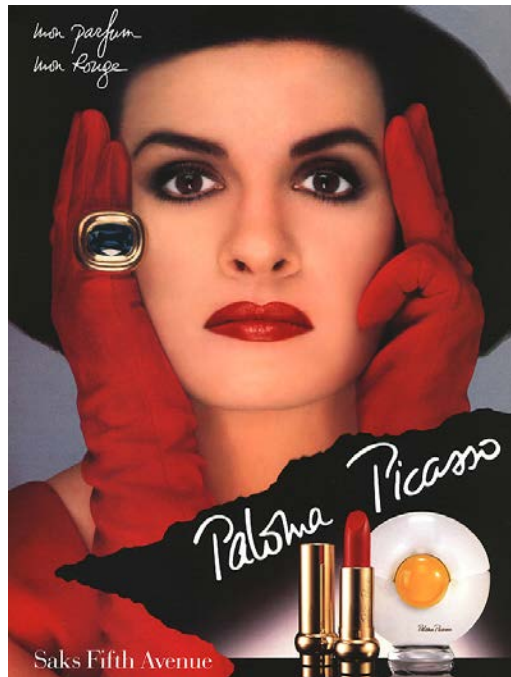
The use of colors is very useful also in brand strategy and marketing. They are used as an instrument to attract people or a particular consumer category, maybe showing desirable characteristics of the product offered. In particular in the fashion industry colors are fundamental, since are linked to collections and seasons. Leonhard Oberascher made a research in which he discovered that the change of colors in fashion follows a cyclical pattern. This cycle starts with a chromatic phase, followed to a darkening one, then there will be a brown phase, the fourth is a lighter phase with pastel colors and beiges, subsequently light colors will be desaturated until reaching an achromatic phase dominated by grays and white, after that achromatic will start to be used in combination with chromatic colors and then with purples, in the final phase achromatic colors are abandoned to live space only to chromatic one, and a new cycle begins again.

In the analysis of Hutchings mentioned before he discovered that the color triad, constituted by black, white and red, is at the center of all linguistics, archeological, anthropological and folkloristic traditions.

José Luis Caivano, president of the International Association of Visual Semiotics, and Mabel Lòpez in their research *The rhetoric of black, white and red: Reasonability and aesthetics to persuade with color* explain how those colors are used by brands in their advertising campaign. Those colors are used in order to persuade people and potential customers, because are seen as description of the qualities of the product. So red as synonymous of passion and liveliness, white as purity, black as symbol of sophistication and elegance are used as tools within the advertising campaign in order to manipulate the customers' perception. Moreover the color red is considered as a "declassifier", not linked to any kind of social status, so should be used by brand that produce products aimed at a mass consumption. It is also

linked to the loss of the sense of time and for this reason is often used in bars, discos, casinos and so on.

They also give a practical example looking at the advertising campaign of Paloma Picasso perfume. Here the use of this color triad is central and



suggests all the meanings to which those three colors are linked. The advertisement releases passion, seduction, intensity, aestheticism. The white skin, the red lips and gloves, the black hair and eyes. All those elements, added to the Spanish physiognomy of facial features, is a way to attract the potential customers that will identify their selves in the values of the advertisement.

The use of color in branding, marketing and advertising is paramount for a successful brand strategy. Some studies show that the color influences in a large way the judgments that consumers made about products. Moreover the color should fit with the perception of the values of the brand in order to have a stronger impact over people. Another study explains how people prefer to buy recognizable brand, so it is very important to create a strong

brand identity choosing a color that differentiates our product by the competitors' one.

Colors are also able to act as signs, in this way they give the perception of some feelings and emotions. It could be seen the *Color Emotion Guide* in which are listed a lot of brands basing on their logos' colors.

Figure 13: Color Emotion Guide



Source: <http://thelogocompany.net/blog/infographics/psychology-color-logo-design/>

In this guide the color blue is seen as synonymous of trustworthy, confidence, care, security, strength. It is given by the association of the color blue with the sea and the sky. It is used to relax people, stimulate them to act in a new way rethinking to their decision. For this reason it is used in marketing campaigns and in logos if the aim is to show values of reliability, loyalty and stability.

The counterpart of blue is the color red, associated with passion, excitement and fire, used to stimulate actions, generate desire and give a sense of exciting to the consumer.

Color purple was used in the Rome Empire as synonymous of royalty and it is still linked to nobility, magnificence, high status, luxury and high quality. It conveys the passion of red and the stability of blue.

The color orange is a synonymous of creativity, energy, friendship, socialization, happiness, enthusiasm and is used from businesses that want to appear affordable and risk-taker. The association with affordability is given by the similarity with the red color.

As orange also the color yellow is linked to happiness, but also to optimism, clarity and warmth because of its association with sun and sunshine. It is also linked to creativity and imagination, it is able to attract the attention of people.

The color green, because of the association with the nature, is synonymous of health, freshness, wealth, but is also associated with money color. It will be used by eco-friendly businesses or financial and investment ones.

Together with the color turquoise, green is also associated to peaceful, relax, calm, compassion and care.

Eco-friendly businesses use to adopt also the color brown as linked to the image of the Mother Earth. Brown is also a synonymous of reliability and stability.

Grey and silver are used as synonyms of creativity and authority and are largely used by consulting and technological industries. They are also linked to confidence and seriousness which make them ideals in the fields of finance, medicine and law.

Moreover silver is also associated with elegance, luxury, sophistication, formality, prestige and it is the same for the color black. It is also a

synonym of authority, strength and boldness. Black is often used to luxury brands in order to attract a specific high-end segment.

The color white is sometimes used in association with the black. White is related to peace, cleanliness, perfection, calm, purity. It helps in the decision making process and, as said previously, is often used by spa, salon, health care and technological businesses.

Thinking now at the colors of luxury and fashion brands, it will be immediate the association with what they symbolize. And in this way we are able to analyze the black and white of Chanel, Saint Laurent, Dolce E Gabbana, Audemars Piguet and Boucheron, the yellow of Fendi, the red of Valentino, Diesel, Cartier, Salvatore Ferragamo, Prada, the blue of Bulgari, the green of Rolex, the turquoise of Tiffany, the orange of Hermès and Tod's.

3.2.2. *Print advertisements*

In the analysis of advertising have to be taken into consideration not only the social and cultural context and the colors used, but also the modality in which those are used, the gaze, the compositional axes, the framing, the perspective, the power and camera angles, the narrative vectors.

Kress and Van Leeuwen in their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Advertising* published in 1996, developed a system of analysis with the aim of explain the basics of visual semiotics focusing on a syntactic vision of that. It represents a point of break regarding the previous application of paradigmatic analysis of visual semiotics. The authors want to specify that the use of a grammar linguistic model in the analysis of visual advertisements doesn't mean a dependency of visual from the linguistic.

There are two order of pattern linked to the elements of an image, a conceptual and a presentational. In the conceptual pattern the elements are

represented in function of their more general and timeless essence. It shows things as what they really represent with a didactic aim. There isn't a hidden story behind figures, but they are static, there are no actions, they are represented because of their being and not of their doing some actions.

In the presentational pattern instead the elements are characterized by actions and reactions that determine the construction of a story. A narrative process is determined depending on the participants and the vectors.

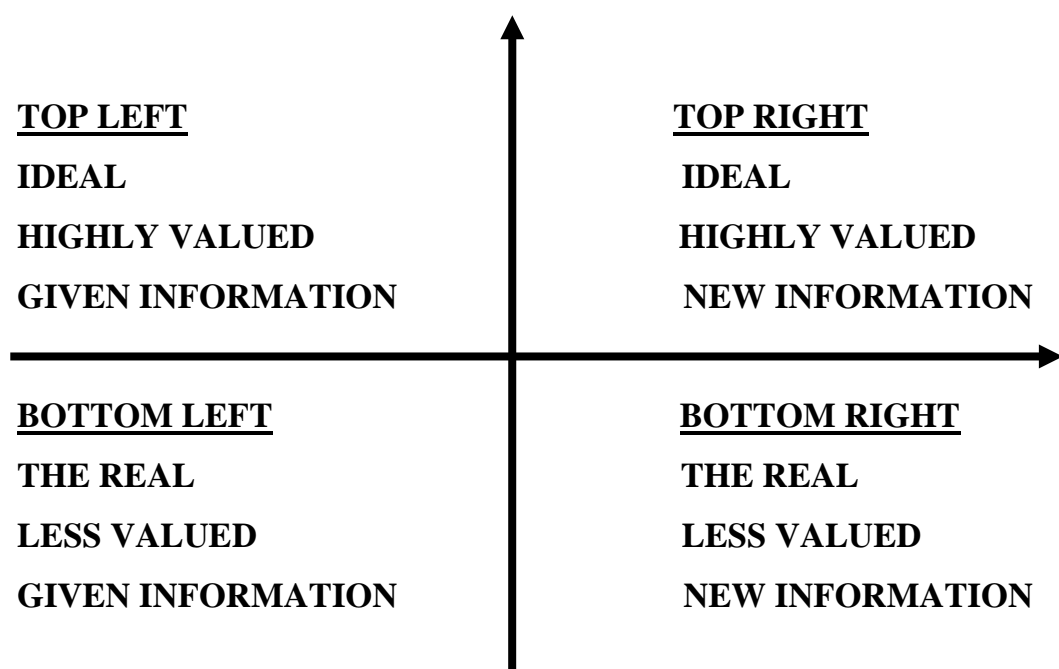
The narrative vectors are lines that propose a directions to the participants, which are the elements within the visual representation, and create a link among them. Jewitt and Oyama (2001) suggested that in the narrative representation the participants are linked by what they do in the evolution of the events and the actions that have to be taken. This relation is represented by the vector and the participants from which this depart are the actors of the representation, instead the point of arrive is the goal. Those linkages generate meanings, that are called transactions or action, but also the vector itself is a source of meaning. Moreover is the vector move in a double way, there will be an interactive transaction or interaction. Callow explained that vectors could be represented by lines, objects or part of those, like for example legs, harms, a pointing finger, the side of a building, a pole, a protrusion and so on, or they could be an invisible line as for example the direction of the eye's gaze. Practically the vectors are the track followed by our eyes when we look at a visual representation. If there is a lack of specific vectors there could be a misunderstanding or ambiguity or moreover a total lack will lead to an obligated paradigmatic reading.

Another important thing to be considered is the social distance, represented by the degree of familiarity with the elements within the visual representation that is determined by their size or their distance from the viewer. This will allow a sensation of familiarity in the viewer that will look at the participant in a friendly way, or instead generating a sensation of diversity compared to them. Kress and Van Leeuwen explained that it is

related to the role of camera factors like medium shot, close up and long shot, which determines the distance of the depicted image. In the same way a shot of the head of participants will be related to intimate distance, head and shoulders will denote a close personal distance, instead an half-length figure a far personal one. Moreover a whole figure will represent a close social distance, instead a group of people in a whole figure will denote a far social one.

Another way to analyze a visual representation is looking at its compositional axes. Elements may be disposed along those two axes, so also their position within the image could be linked to a particular meaning. The horizontal axis separates the ideal, on the upper side, from the real, in the lower side. The real side gives information more practical and specific, instead the ideal is linked to a downward or a forward vision of something that could be a wish, a desire, a dream. The vertical axis divides the given side, on the left, by the new one, on the right. The given side is the one that is recognizable by the viewer because of its experience and contains elements already known. The new side instead contains new elements not yet known that are focus point of the advertising message.

Figure 14: Visual space in advertising



The division in left side and right side and the meaning attached to each part is probably related to the western convention of reading from left to the right.

“For something to be given means that it is presented as something the viewer already knows, as a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the message. For something to be new means that it is presented as something which is not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer, hence as something to which the viewer must pay special attention” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 187).

So looking at the image, the eyes of the viewer will look first at the left side and so at the recognizable things already known, and then at the right side with its new characteristics and information about the product, on which the viewer will focus a major attention.

Moreover images are also affected by their position in relation to the center and the margins. In the centre is located the nucleus of the message that wants to be delivered, instead the margins are the “ancillary zones”. The product is usually posed in the center of the image and has the function of the intermediary between left and right side, so between the given and the new.

Another thing affecting the interpretation of an image is the perspective, which shows the power relation basing on the camera angles. The vertical angles will determine a subjective point of view adopted by the viewer, instead the horizontal angles an objective one. The power relations among viewer and image are defined by the vertical angles. In a low angle shot the viewer look up to the participants, so those are in a more powerful position. Scollon and Scollon (2003) explained that a participants viewed from below would result more powerful in the mind of the viewer. Instead in a high angle shot the participants are seen from the above by the viewer that is in

a position of power. Moreover horizontal angles will determine an involvement of the viewer that has an oblique or frontal point of view.

As said in previous chapters color is one of the most important element carrying a meaning within a visual representation, but is important to take into consideration also the modality of the colors used. The modality is the reliability of the image, the degree of credibility of it. The default modality of the western culture is without doubt the naturalistic representation, which can be seen by a naked eye. So it is linked to realism and truth. Since people could interpret and see things in different ways, the modality is a form of factuality that reminds to realism. Kress and Van Leeuwen identifies some indicators of modality such as contextualization, depth, illumination, detail, quality of material, shade, brightness, texture, color saturation, modulation and differentiation. There are different levels of modality basing on the degree of credibility of the image, from the least to the most credible.

“Visual modality rests on culturally and historically determined standards of what is real and what is not, and not of the objective correspondence of the visual image to a reality defined in some ways independently of it” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 168).

In this way the world of the desires, unreal, fantasy and real could be a part of the image in combination with the other signs. For example in areas of architectural and technological design the modality is represented by the use of blueprints. Moreover in food advertisements the modality is linked to the use of bright colors. In fashion and luxury the modality is in the use of colors that suggest allure, charme, desire and so on.

So the symbolic meaning of an image is affected by colors used but also by modality, framing, weight and position that the various elements take within the image.

3.2.3. *The semiotics of luxury and fashion advertising*

The advertisement are mainly created in order to persuade viewer to buy products, as Cook said, and maybe in adding to that could be shared in the image also the values of the brand. Judith Williamson stated that advertising campaign are used in order to distract people from the social distance among them, it is a way to make all the viewer on the same level, independently from the social class of belonging. Obviously the bought of some product could be afforded only by particular social classes, but the fact is that advertisement campaigns are present everywhere and could be seen by everyone.

Durant and Lambrou saw advertising also as a mean used to convey information about the product offered to the potential consumers.

As seen in the previous chapters, in order to analyze advertisements in important to take into consideration the cultural and social environment and all the elements of analysis introduced by Kress and Van Leeuwen.

Dyer explains that advertising campaign that advantage from the external codes that are part of the society, in order to create meanings and ideological representation within the image.

“The semiotic analysis of ads assumes that the meanings of ads are designed to move out from the page or screen on which they are carried, to shape and lend significance to our experience of reality” (Saren et al., 1007, 31).

As Williamson observed, advertisements have the power to stimulate the viewer to act and view himself and the world surrounding him in an ideological way. Advertising campaign tries to involve the viewer that will recognize for example itself in the participants of the ads and in this way he will fell himself as the ideal consumer of the product offered. In the same way he will see the product mentioned above as ideal for its necessities and

desires. The aim of advertisement is to ensure that potential consumers will perceive the product or service offered as targeted to them. Moreover semiotics could help advertisers to produce products that are targeted on their consumer categories and match perfectly their needs and necessities.

“We are encouraged to see ourselves, the products or services which are advertised, and aspects of our social worlds, in terms of the mythic meaning which ads drawn on and help to promote” (Saren et al., 2007, 31).

As said previously, visual semiotics and advertising use the cultural codes and myths as tools to attract people and confer particular meanings to images. In particular modern advertisements are devoted to the direct involvement of the viewer in the interpretation of the meaning and codes behind the representation. It engages the viewer in the analysis of the codes, myths and symbols hidden behind the images, generating a direct participation in the meaning structure of the advertisements.

The first practical example of that was given by Roland Barthes that analyzed the front cover of the magazine *Paris-Match*. In the cover there was a black man wearing a French uniform and saluting the French flag. Barthes wanted to show how symbols, myths and codes are used to make appear the French colonial rules as natural things. The cover stressed the ideological belief that colonialism was a natural, normal and uncontroversial thing.

It is evident that images and advertising could be used to force in a certain way the ideas of people, giving a vision of the reality that is not completely true. As said in precedence, signs find often their meaning because of a negative valence. As Eco said, a sign is everything that could be used as a substitute for another thing. Since semiotics is everything that could be used to lie, signs could be used to hide something focusing the attention on other things or maybe showing things as natural when instead they are not, as in

the case of the colonialism. Advertising is used in order to normalize in a certain way some myths, showing those as natural things while in reality they are not true or even considered as taboo.

As Bignell said, advertising has been largely criticized because of its ability to naturalize ideologies that are dominant in our society.

So while some signs are used in advertisement in order to be deciphered by the viewer, other signs are hidden in the ads in order to persuade people to buy products and services.

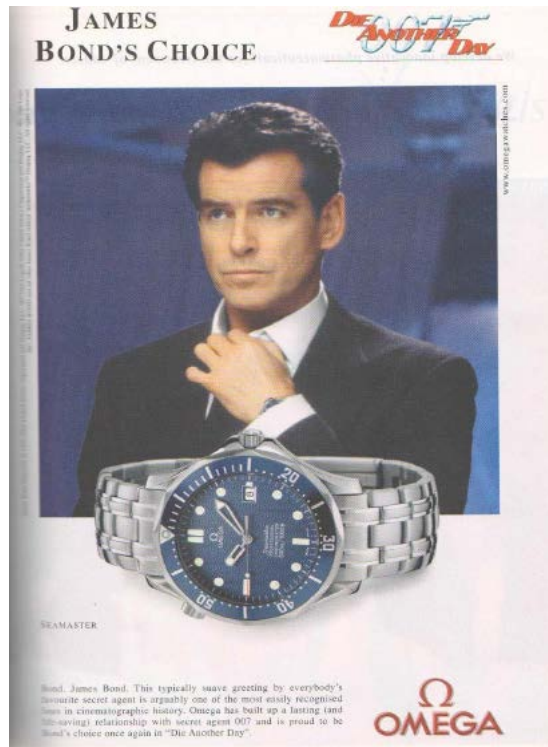
McLuhan explained how advertisements are able to manipulate people minds using their basic values as an instrument to capitalize.

Henri Lefebvre said that, since we are part of a consumer culture, the value the thing we purchase is largely given by the advertisements to which we are exposed. Obviously it is not true when we talk about luxury products, in which the value assigned to product is mainly given by the preciousness and scarcity of the materials used.

Maryam Najafian and Saeed Ketabi gave a practical example of some print advertisements of Omega analyzed taking into consideration all the elements suggested in the study of Kress and Van Leeuwen. All the advertisements are taken by the *Time* magazine.

The first advertising campaign analyzed is the one of the Omega Seamaster, presented as the watch used by James Bond.

Jefkins said that the first thing that has to be taken into consideration in the analysis of an advertisement is the headline. Also Rowse and Fish explained that the headline is the most used and most relevant tool that has to be used in order to attract attention and arouse interest within an advertising campaign. Usually the headline is used to highlight the product's function and characteristics. The presence of an attractive and effective headline could be fundamental to attract the attention of viewers. In this particular example, the headline *James Bond's Choices* is a



fundamental part of the advertisement since it is in perfect correlation with the rest of the image.

According to Najafian and Ketabi in this advertising are used some linguistic features, like disjunctive syntax, modality and cohesion. There is a disjunctive syntax when is used a phrase without subject and verbs, or when the grammatical elements are at maximum two. We can see the use of the disjunctive syntax in the headline of this advertisement.

In the bottom part of the advertisement there is a statement: “Bond, James Bond. This typically suave greeting by everybody’s favorite secret agent is arguably one of the most easily recognized figures in cinematographic history. Omega has built up a lasting (and life-saving) relationship with secret agent 007 and is proud to be Bond’s choice once again in ‘Die Another Day’” (Omega advertisement on Time magazine, 2000).

The use of positive adjectives, symbols of success and high quality, represents a lexical cohesion. The use of a promotional vocabulary and a lexical cohesion helps to stress the success achieved by the brand, but also

by the product offered. Jefkins and Cook explained that to use words with a positive meaning within the headline is very important. Moreover the repetition of the brand name in the headline is one of the most important copyright rules of advertising.

For what concerns the modality, explained also in the previous chapter, it is linked to the degree of reality and truth that characterize the meaning of the representation. In this advertisement is present a high level of modality represented by the frequent use of the verb “is”.

From a semiotical point of view, taking as example the tools of analysis elaborated by Kress and Van Leeuwen, could be done a deeper analysis of the representation.

The first thing to analyze is the elements within the representation. In this case are used both visual and written signs, which equally remind to the figure of James Bond. Even if in the image there is the actor Pierce Brosnan, he doesn't represent himself, but his character in the 007 movies. A lot of brands today take advantage from the use of brand ambassadors, especially in the case of high-end products and services. René Girard introduced the concept of “mimetic desire” explaining the endorsements phenomenon. He said that people try to imitate the one who endorse the product, because seeing something used by a famous person will generate a sense of desire in people. Also Hall and Whannel explained that in ads devoted to the upper class the images must generate a sense of luxury, high status and desire. Also Beasley and Danesi were of the idea that the use of celebrities as endorsers could give more reliability to the product and the advertisement. In this way the endorser become more important than the object itself, which in this particular case has the task, as the endorser, to represent the reality of the advertisement.

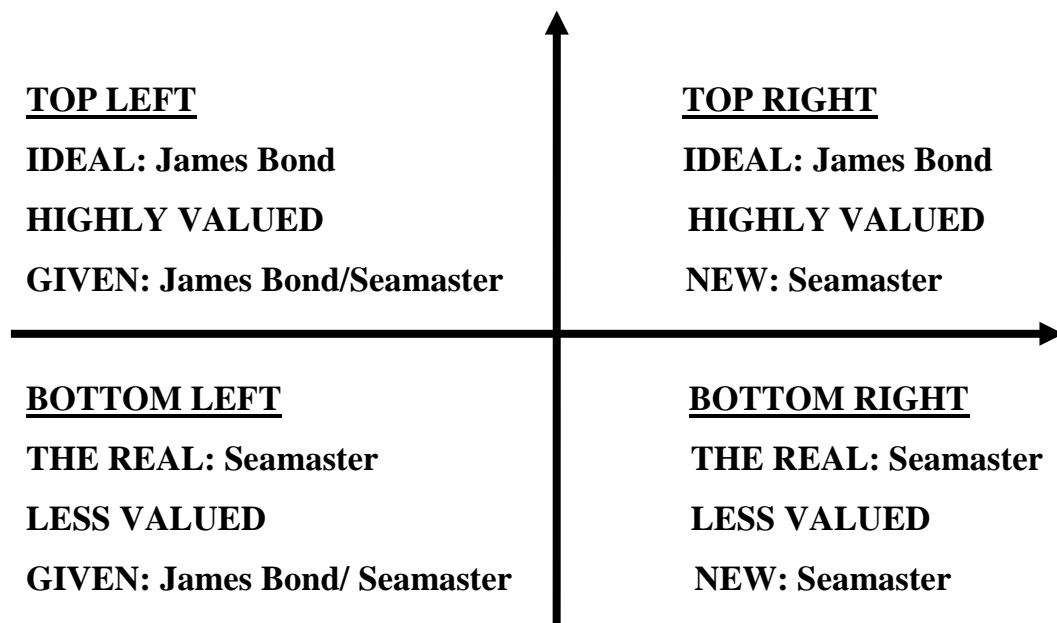
For what concerns the position of the elements within the representation, in this case the endorser is in the center and occupied the large part of the image, so all the attention is focused on him. Also the watch is at the center,

above the endorser, and it represents the relationship between the product offered and the man that can use it. Instead the written part is very small compared to the rest of the elements.

Regarding the new side and the given side of the image, the given in this case is represented by the figure of James Bond that is the recognizable and already known elements. Instead the new would be the watch in the case in which it wouldn't be known by the viewer, but since in the advertisement is specified the name of this particular watch, also the watch is given.

For what concerns the distinction among real and ideal, the upper part of the advertisement is the ideal one and is occupied by the person of James Bond, which is a figure of dreams and aspirations for people. The real side is in the bottom of the figure and is represented by the watch.

Figure 15: Visual Space in Seamaster Advertising



Moreover talking about framing and social distance, in this advertisement there isn't separation between the two images given by the use of framings. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen the absence of those is took in order to highlight the identity of the group. The connection

among elements within the space of the representation will stress the complementarity of those figures, in this case of the man and the watch, creating an harmonized relation between the real and the ideal. About the social distance, in this case the image is depicted by the camera with a close up shot, which means that the distance among the viewer and the elements in the advertisement is very little, and so they are in an intimate relation. Moreover for what concerns power and camera angles, the image in this case is taken with a low angle shot since we look up to the watch that is more powerful than the viewer.

One of the most important tools in semiotic analysis is the use of colors. In this advertisement the predominant color is blue and it gives a sort of coherence at the entire representation since also the color of the Seamaster in the image is blue. The blue reinforce the idea of the watch presented to the viewer. Another color present in the image is the red used in the statement in which is present the name of the 007 film "*Die Another Day*". As seen in previous chapters the color red is the counterpart of the blue. While the first, associated to passion and excitement, is used to stimulate actions and generate desire, the color blue is used to relax people. Moreover the color blue is used in advertising campaigns because shows values of reliability, loyalty and stability.

The other example of Maryam Najafian and Saeed Ketabi regards the advertisement of the Omega Constellation. Even in this advertising campaign is used a brand ambassador, Cindy Crawford, as endorser of the product. Again we have the headline in the upper part of the representation, with the statement "Cindy Crawford's choice". We can notice as in the previous example the use of disjunctive function in the absence of subjects and verbs. The fact that in the headline is present the name of the endorser is a mean to enforce her presence in the representation and the linkage that she have with the product. Moreover in the bottom part of the image there is another statement saying "The Omega Constellation is a rare blend of style



and elegance, a superb example of watchmaker's art. This is no wonder, since Cindy Crawford assisted Omega in its design, creating only watch she is proud to wear" (Omega advertisement on Time magazine, 2002). Here the lexical cohesion is revealed by the use of positive adjectives to describe the product and the linkage that it has with Cindy Crawford. The statement is also used to stress the fact that she has an active participation in the ideation and creation of the product, which makes it more desirable by the viewer.

Doing a semiotic analysis of the advertisement could be seen a lot of similarities with the previous example, but the first thing that differs from that is the gaze. While in the previous advertisement Peirce Brosnan wasn't watching the viewer, here the gaze of Cindy Crawford is oriented to who is looking at the representation.

The similarities are in the position of the watch at the center of the image, above Cindy Crawford which occupies the three-quarters of the representation. This kind of disposition creates a direct relationship between

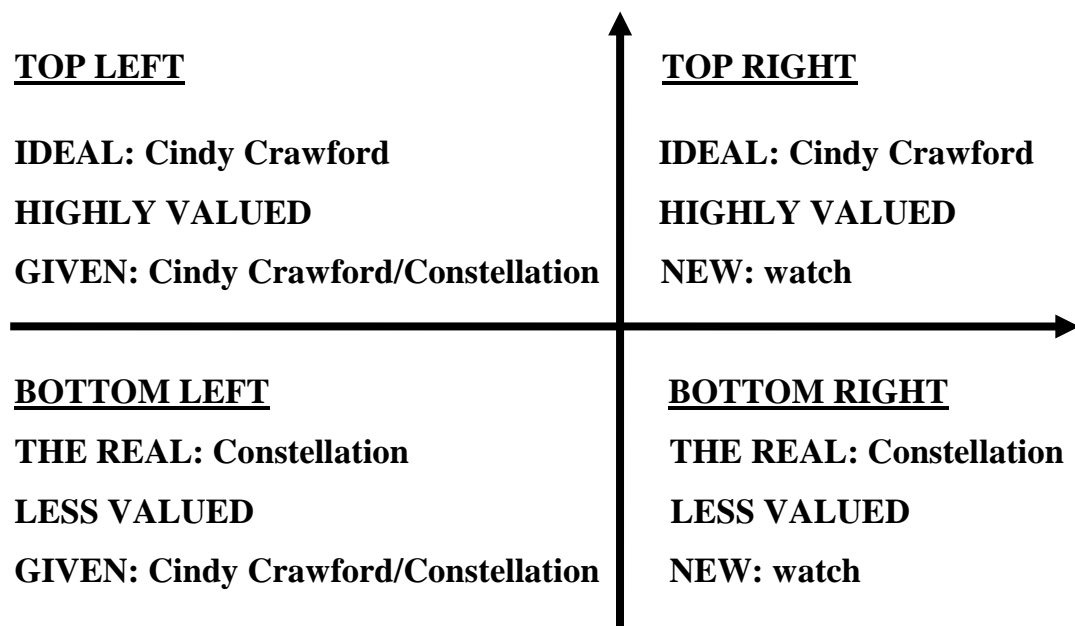
the ambassador and the product. The attention is focused on her suggesting the desire and aspiration of the viewer, while the watch has the function to give a connection to the reality. A very small space is left to written statements that are located at the margins of the advertisement.

The use of a supermodel like Cindy Crawford is also linked to the myth of the feminine beauty, she works as a signifier of it. Since in western cultures some physical characteristics are linked to the concept of feminine beauty, the use of Cindy Crawford will create a link between this watch and that concept.

Using the elements of analysis suggested by Kress and Van Leeuwen it could be seen that as in the previous example the endorser, in this case Cindy Crawford, is the given, while the new is represented by the watch in the case in which it is not recognizable, but since the name of it is specified in the advertisement, also the watch will be a given.

Moreover the bottom part is linked to the real one, so in this case the Constellation, instead in the upper part we will find the ideal, so the image of Cindy Crawford as example of aspiration and desire.

Figure 16: Visual Space in Constellation Advertising



For what regards framing and social distance, there are no frame dividing the watch from Cindy Crawford, as in the case of James Bond, which creates a situation of harmony between the two figures, between the real and the ideal. As in the previous example also here the image is depicted by the camera with a close up shot, which means that the social distance among the viewer and the elements in the advertisement is very little, and so they are in an intimate relation. Also for what concerns power and camera angles the case is the same of the previous example of advertising, the image is taken with a low angle shot since we look up to the watch that has a symbolic power over the viewer. Moreover since Cindy Crawford is looking down on the viewer that determines an intimate relationship of communication with him.

For what regards the use of colors, the golden is the principal color used in this representation, which is the color of the product offered. The gold color is synonym of luxury, prestige, quality, sophistication and elegance. In addition is used also the color black in order to enhance the elegance of the golden and of the entire image. The color black is usually adopted in advertisements since it represents exclusivity and class.

Conclusion

The aim of the thesis is to explain how the semiotics could be useful in brand strategies and in particular in marketing and advertising. As shown the development of an effective advertising campaign could be very profitable for the company and the brand in terms of brand loyalty and brand awareness. The gaining of a strong brand identity and brand equity is the principal element of differentiation from competitors and competing products. In this context the contribution of semiotics is very useful since it helps to build analysis that could be used to improve and develop brand strategy. Semiotics could be used to communicate brand values and generate brand awareness and brand loyalty. Moreover it helps to understand in which way people perceive the product, giving information useful in order to change and innovate. Semiotics is helpful in understanding which could be the best name for a product, the best colors for the logo, which one will fit better with the values of the brand and so on. As seen in the research, semiotics is also used in order to find, understand and stress symbols and signs linked to myths and cultural and social environment, with the aim of attract people and generate a sense of desire about the product offered, or moreover to create a new culture around a product or a brand. Additionally semiotics has a very important role in advertising, since it is a system of symbols in which there is a direct link between products, people, place and action. The use of semiotics in advertising is linked to the understanding of the myths and the ideologies hidden behind the consumerist culture, in order to take advantage from and use those to bring an effective advertising campaign. Advertising is used to persuade people, with verbal and non-verbal means, to the purchasing of a particular object. Images used in advertisements exploit all the aspects of

consumers' cultural environment in order to make an object desirable. In the case of print advertisement the understanding of the use of colors and the disposition of the elements within the representation is fundamental to discover the real meaning that the advertisement wants to deliver. As seen in the practical example given, colors, gaze, modality, framing, perspective, power and camera angles, narrative vectors and compositional axes, are the instrument used to make the advertising campaign effective and deliver to the viewer all the values of the brand and the characteristics about the product. We can conclude that a good semiotics analysis could make the difference in the creation of an effective advertisement and in this way enforce the brand identity and brand equity.

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