

Science of Semiotic Usage in Advertisements and Consumer's Perception.

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Abstract

The modern consumer market has been developing as a web of symbols and signs in multidisciplinary approach to construct brand images in the consumer's perception. Simiology is an advanced subject in which enlightened the semiotics ideally. Marketing, advertising and communication are the inseparable interwoven major carriers in distinctive market – consumer behavioral world. Marketers are constructing and deconstructing the sign and symbols to make positive image and to bring them the satisfaction to motivate to purchase productions. Potential study of the semiotics shows that the language based media and the image based media are the fundamental and the pervasive medium for the human communication. The sign and symbols can be taxonomies as intrapersonal and interpersonal. Advertisement is capable of manipulating the perception and the behavior of the consumers. Each advertisement is a cultural document and has a cultural shadow which carries to readers to share and negotiate the cultural themes. These symbolic and the iconic conversation are ritualized enactments through the dimensions of cultural esteem. This helps to preserve the culture and help to read the cultural perception becoming natural.

Key words: Advertisements, Semiotics, Culture and Communication

Introduction

“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 man” (Boulding, Kenneth 1956, P 44). In the present world, signs and symbols are playing a major role and have fostered multiple viewpoints on symbolism and created paths for its province in the lives of the customers and the marketplaces. Semiotics or Semiology is a prominent subject and furthermore, considered as a movement, a philosophy or science which can be used in multidisciplinary approaches. Semiology is the advance subject to study not only the alphabet of symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals and religious symbols, but also the study of commercials, sit-coms, soap operas, bulleting boards and now the vast usage of internet and other media. In mainly, we are using, learning, reading and deconstructing signs and symbols, even though it is too difficult to studying Semiotics ideally. In our day-to-day life too, we are learning new signs, symbols and they involve continually with their meanings and significance all the time. Language and all the other signs systems are not simply channels, if they give form and meaning to think or experience instead of just naming what was already there, than there is nothing which exists before signs and media communicate thought and experience.

Not only the market system but also internet, new technologies and all the other human activities create new images, icons, symbols and metaphors to study for us to make sense on the cyberspace. Finding the meaning of the commercial world is essential and enigmatic. In this consumer and commercial world marketers have to continually seek strategically facilitate meanings that contribute positively to brand images, satisfaction, purchase likelihood and the like from product design and packaging to advertising and retailing. Consumers are continually acquiring, experiencing, sharing, substantial accordance with the meanings they attribute to products, purchase sites and so forth.

Mostly, North American researchers in the period of 1960s and 1970s pay their attention on gathering information on consumer behavior as socio-cognitive psychological perspectives, economic that dominated the marketing and consumer behavior. The marketing and advertising industry is processing the advantages of socio-psychological discipline into the symbolism to make the effective communication on the brand and the consumer items.

Theoretical and conceptual frame of semiotic

One of the main branches of the semiotics in the present world is “consumer or marketing semiotics.” The usages of semiotics as a whole in the marketing and consumer field (Noth 1990; pinson1988, 1993) have had two main dominant paradigms. Swiss Linguist Ferdinand De Saussure’s (1857-1913) paradigm which based on social psychology incorporates a two- component model of signifier or “sound image” and the signified or “concept”. The relationship between signifier and the signified is arbitrary.

Saussure believed that the language is made up of signs (like words) which communicate meanings and that all kinds of other things potentially be studied in the same way as linguistic signs. The same semiotic approach can be used to discuss language-based media and image-based media because in either case we find signs which carry meanings. Since language is the most fundamental and persuasive medium for human communication. Semiotics takes the way that language works as the model for all the other media of communication, all other sign systems.

Saussure's linguistic paradigm which has been based on social psychology has led to a focus attention on

- The role of the structure in communication, meaning and the nature of them.
- The role of the symbolism and its nature.
- The cultural relativity of communication and meaning.

According to Saussure, the relations, actions and interactions are important between words take over individual words when meaning is formed or derived. For instance, the piece on the chessboard makes relationship with all the other pieces on its. Numbers of pieces are vital on the board and their moving to one another or as a piece will alter all the pieces and their relations in the game. Relations, actions, interactions and all the moves and the positions of the pieces on the board are very important. So Language is the epitome of self-contained relational structural world. According to the Saussurean sense the paradigm is a set of signs and syntagm means signs chosen from several paradigms to form the message. Paradigmatic relation is most important in the message. These relations reveal the oppositions and contrast between signs in a set. Scenes and background setting forms are very vital factors to develop the key settings in the message that brings by the advertisement. These paradigmatic relations convey the meaning or a message through the differences between the sign which are selected and those not selected.

This Saussurean fundamental paradigmatic relations theory has been developed and modified by Baudrillard, Barthes, Derrida, Griemas and Lacan. French researchers, Barthes (1967[1964]), Durand (1970), and Peninou (1972) have applied this paradigm in their marketing and consumer phenomena. This paradigm cross the Atlantic to begin influencing marketing scholars in North America and simultaneously traversed eastward into Asia.

In economic context the saussurean perspective of meaning through difference has been implicated as both the fuel of healthy market competition (Gardner and Levy 1955) and an institutionalized flaw of western cultures (Sahlins 1976).

Peirce's Anglo-Saxon frame work is the second dominant semiotic paradigm which strongly based on Philosophy and touch some extent Physical science (Peirce 1931 – 958). According to my view Peirce is the one who has so far delivered the broadest and most advanced theoretical frame work on the semiotics. The triadic and evolutionary semiotics of C.S. Peirce has a phenomenological angle that places signification, emotions and perceptions at the basis of his theory of how we create meaningful signs in cognitions and communication. Peirce is considered to be the co-founder of the semiotics along with the Saussure. He defines semiotics as the "doctrine" of signs stand for something else and that is understood or has some meaning for somebody. A sign is used as a substitute for

another thing in order to transmit a concept about it (Peirce1958). A *sign* serves to represent or substitute *something* which may not be present, to some system capable of interpreting such substitution. Peirce adopted John Lock’s vision of semiotics and set out from a logic-centered orientation. Peirce theory incorporates with a three part model.

- The representmen (sign proper)
- The object (to which the sign refers)
- The interpretant (interpretation or response with the observer/communicator).

To strengthen the Peirce’s paradigm has been included a sophisticated set of distinctions, labels and stages among the three components or objects of his model and further has made relations among the components. Like Saussure, pierce explained sign process in terms of relations. Saussure spoke the “dyadic” relations in his paradigm. But Peirce built up his paradigm on “triadic” relations (tri-relative influences) (Peirce1931-58. P.484).

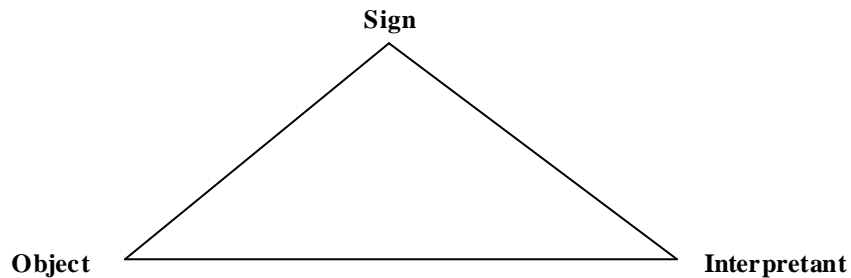


Figure 01: Triadic Semiosis Concept of Peirce

Peirce semiosis philosophy anchored in the real world which based on the people, social institution and culture. He determined the interpreter’s reaction into the signs which can be transmutation and transmitted through the social environment (Sebeok, 1976, P.07). A symbolic signs relates to its object in an entirely conventional manner, as such it requires the participative presence of an interpreter to create the signifying connection. One of the major focuses of Peirce semiosis was the relationship of sign and interpreter. He argued that the cognition is a process of knowledge and meaning generation through signs. This will be taken three forms: deduction, induction and abduction.

The scholars like Jakobson, morris and Sebeok among the others helped to spread Peirces theory into the international recognition. However Sausser’s and Peirces dominant paradigms and their applications in consumer research and marketing are noticeably varied due to the differing ontological and epistemological heritage on them. The Saussurian paradigm which mostly based on linguistics has been used in structural text interpretive analysis of meaning.

Shortly after Saussure and Peirce, Orden and Richards (1923) spurred the development of semiotics with their classic work. In the semiotic history, American semioticeans has been played an influential role up to present. Charles Morris who tried to develop a comprehensive science of signs in the social sciences, stressed that sign has a science and subdivided it mainly as semantics, syntactic and pragmatic.

Syntactic pave the way for the signs and sign relations. Semantics in the study of the signs and object relations and pragmatics role is to study the signs and its interpretation relations. However the trichotomy of syntactic, semiotics and paradigmatic is the most enduring aspect of the Morris's semantic paradigm (Holbrook1978).

According to his classification the quality of semiotics as a whole or each of these can be pure (pure semiotics elaborate a language to talk about signs), descriptive (study actual signs) and applied (utilizes knowledge about signs for the fulfillment of various purpose ad tasks of the people and society).

According to the pre semiotic approach signs can be taxonomies as intrapersonal and interpersonal. Gift can be considered as a symbol. The gift- giving literature in consumer behavior stressed that the gift giving is a reward for various consumers' indulgence of the self for past behavior. These intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors have been measured by the social, personal and economic behaviors. Gift are also an icon and can be taxonomies as aesthetic, educational, utilitarian and so on. Mostly advertisements subjected to the descriptive semiotics (Fiske 1982, Leymore 1975). Applied semiotics is very vital when using the sings in specific context of acquisition, consumption and disposition. For an instance, advertising and information consumption. Most probably Morris strived to understand the linkage between Saussure and Peirce's semiotics and the semiotics in North America. Among the many other disciplines philosophers like Cassier, Langer, Anthropologists (Douglas,Levi-Strauss, Singer) Sociologists(Warner) have argued that the semiotics probably are in the symbolic dimension. In addition, Field theorists (Lewin), symbolic interactionists (Blumer) ethno methodologists (Garfinkel) structuralists (Levi-Strauss) socialization theorists (Ervin Goffman) have shared their field with the semiotics. They had responsible for bringing this inter disciplinary doctrine with vast range of topics into the public light.

Semiotic in Marketing Advertisements

Marketing, Advertising and communication are the inseparable, three major concepts in the distinctive market – consumer behavioral world. Specially, advertisements mainly bring the language, photo graphics, colors, and other symbols for its own usage to make consciousness on the production and its grandeur on the customers and out side. In the present world advertising is a large scale business and is a part of the national economy in the many countries.

Advertisements construct, form and manipulate the perception and the behavior of its consumers and the out side. All the symbols are paying an immeasurable service of presenting and apprehending the culture and the world. Theoretical back ground clearly immerge the interdisciplinary doctrine with vast range of topics to make consciousness on the academics and public on this purpose.

One of the most prominent theories, Mick's schema theory has blended semiotics and showed the viewers its capability of specialization of the social structure, processing and involving attitudes, memory and cognition as well as written and spoken text (Brewer and Nakamura 1984, Hastie1981, Thondyke and Yekovich 1980). Goal, knowledge and text schemata are the three genres of schema theory of Mick proposed into marketing communication research. The goal and knowledge schemata are vital factors and probably make the relations with both marketers and consumers. According to Mick, the

text schemata mainly involves in the linguistic messages in marketing communication. This schema theory has the ability to enrich the marketing communication research.

Some scholars like Sherry points that the advertising is a cultural document, a way of presenting and apprehending the world (Sherry 1985, P.1). Each and every advertisement is included cultural shadow and let the readers to negotiate and share the cultural theme. Symbols are man made and man making. These symbols constructed the world and made the net work of social relations in much the same way as religion, science and arts. Religion can form a religious world. Science and arts construct the scientific and aesthetic world. Symbolic action and symbolic interaction indulge in the social stream to construct the shadows of the distinctive behaviors of human.

The symbolic and iconic conversation and conventions in the advertisements transports its audience via ritualized enactments through the dimensions of experiences the cultural esteems (Fox 1984). This repetitive ritual will help to preserve the culture by reducing the variance in the cultural behavior and probably help to lead the cultural perceptions to become natural perceptions. Advertisements construct the definitive reality in the perception. This make the product therapy (Henry 1959) in the competitive marketing world, communicate powerfully and leads to the over consumption world.

Colors as a contribution to visual semiotic

Color may function as a sign for a physical phenomenon, for a psychological mechanism or for a psychological association. Color can represent s different things. Mostly, we can realize, can remember and can identify something through color. It's seems that generally colors imprint on memory in vivid manner. Colors are effectively functioning as signs and colors signify different things. It allows us to differentiate objects. Colors construct a visual world and perform highly informative functions. Colors functions as aesthetically and have the ability of duplicating the universe.

Color plays a major role as an instrument in the marketing and consumer world. It makes the relations with values, prestige, durability and utility. The relationship between signs and objects are through and effective. According to the semantic dimensions of the semiosis, classes can be known as Icon, Index and Symbol.

The main purpose of the color is to construct the perception in the human mind. It has the ability of making identity of the object in which depicted in the advertisement and brings the information about the external world. For an example, somebody can make up ones face in yellow in order to feign an illness but ideal he / she does not suffer from. This deceived by the trick, thinks as it does. The addresser tries to produce the deception by the color on the skin, as an icon in order to look like ill person. The receptor believes that the illness really exists. (Indexical relation in color) color is mostly used with the purpose of deceiving, occulting, feigning and camouflage the people (M. Luckiesh, 1965). In this sense colors are used in commercial transactions and specifications in industry where small piece, drop or a clot of the colors stands to indicate the appearance of the whole product. Magarinos" subdivide of indexical signs shows three categories as signals clues and symptoms.

Signals: - Signals is a sign that appears before its objects. For a example, when a pedestrian sees the green figure on the traffic light and understand all the vehicle stop and let him to cross the road. (T.V.ad - Sri Lanka)

Clue: - Clue is a sign that remain after its object has caused it. For an instance, dark mud spot remains for a certain time on the cloth is a clue to what happened. (T.V.ad - Sri Lanka)

Symptom: - Symptom is a sign that happens simultaneously with the event that constitutes its object. All these types of indexical signs, colors usually perform a primary role not does only in the consumer and marketing world.

Symbolicity in color is another effective illustrative factor in the world. Color symbolism can remarks and enclose various psychics, physics and other social and behavioral factors of the entire world. For instance, red = danger, stop; Yellow = warning; Green = safety, go ;(color association in the traffic light).In the football match a yellow card means admonition. Red card means stop playing. But in the industrial architecture green = safety, association with the triangular shape. Yellow = precaution, associated with the triangular shape. Red = prohibition, stop, association with circular shape or fire prevention materials.(Jannello) Signs do not belong definitively to one or another but vary according to the context. Sign yellow may be a signal in one context but may be a symbol in another.

In western countries, mostly, white and black associated birth and death (R.Arnhem, 1978, P.299). Color purple illustrates the royalty in the Rome Empire. Only the Generals, Senators, Victorious are allowed to wear purple color. But this indexical color association has been disappeared today. But this color coveys the meaning of nobility, dignity, elevated position and magnificence. Most probably opposite concepts are constructed coincidentally with opposite hues. For instance, we can compare the relative position of hues and the color arrangements with the meanings assigned to each one in this chromatic circle.

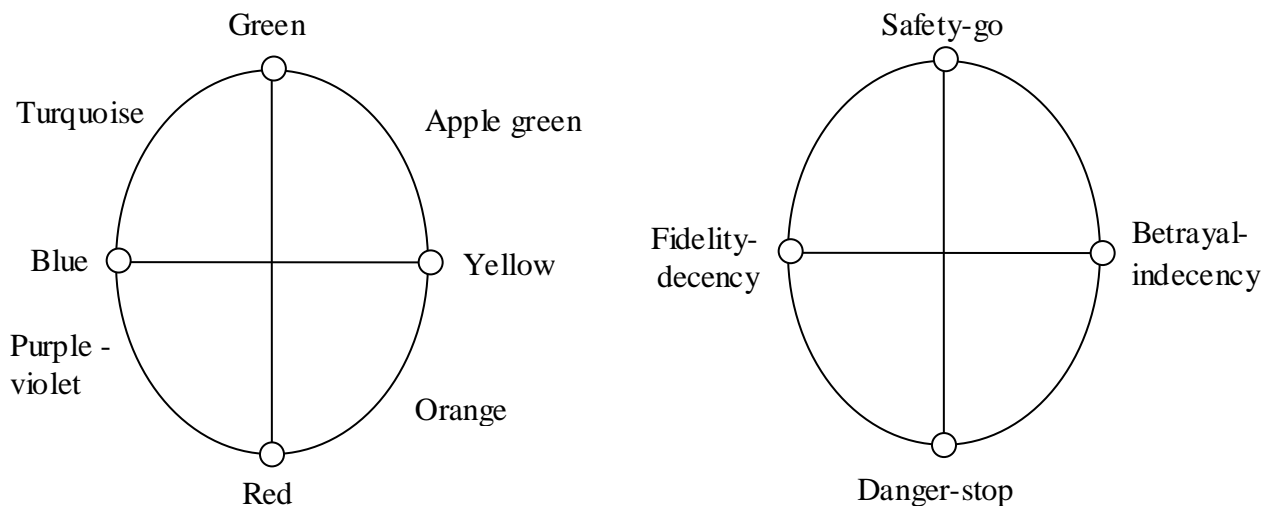


Figure 02: Colors with Conventional Meanings

Yellow as a symbol of betrayal and indecency as opposed to blue, blue is a symbol of fidelity and decency. Green is considered as go or safety as oppose to red. Red means danger or stop.

One of the main surveys was the John Hutchings who surveyed the different cultures and traditions with purpose of studying the color symbolism they use for their clothing, foods, decorations, certain ceremonies and all the other actions in day to day life. Colors can make important symbolic patterns to shape and illustrate the texture and have the ability to make the collective consciousness (J. Hutchings, 1989, P.54. /1993, PP.153 – 157). Mass consciousness and perception of the advertiser on the socio cultural, color and aesthetical existing of the world would bring prosper to brands to master along with the mechanics products placement. Colors construct the attractive perception on the brand and help to make the creative marketing, which can shape people's gut reaction to brands without being explicitly recalled. In present commercial world marketized advertisements too and has used this as a profitable business.

Semiotic and brand strategy

Brand strategy researchers have emphasized that the importance of brand communication in building up and maintain the brand equity and brand identity (Sherry 1987). Verbal, audio and visual signs powerfully symbolize and represent its capability and strength to capture the hearts and minds of the consumers. Advertisements are the main instrument for building awareness, positive associations and long-term customer loyalty on the brand. The brand is the process of the signs and symbols, which cause of imposing tangible value to a product offering. Thus, semiotics is great asserted in advertising, packing and brand logo for communication and to ties consumption to the form of brand and its production. The logo, McDonald's is one of the effective and prominent ads in the marketing and advertising industry.

Laura R Oswarld (Associate professor of advertising and consumer behavior at the University Illinois and director of marketing semiotics) has illustrated the McDonald's logo according to the following signifying elements.

- * Material - A visual icon
- * Structural - Brand name imposed on the arches in white and squared front elegantly. Arches moved to the left and logo moved off to the right. Logo highlighted the suggesting movement. Arches are golden in the red back ground.
- * Codified - Structural ground and the color scheme signify the company and the brand. This tells the consumers McDonald's is not far away.
- * Contextual - For example, US markets treat McDonald as cheap, unhealthy fast food. But in China and Sri Lanka, McDonald's represent highly in social class and considered as special treatment. This logo indicates the time and place as the subjective connotation.
- * Performative - This logo engage in the highly performance with the consumers, spectators and calling them to building up the action towards it.

The present advertising is considered not only as an occasional conduit of product information but as also an omnipresent communication arena in which making the human perception creative and ambitious. This cannot be considered as solitary subject and persuade the people to judge the brands and make consciousness on them. Consumers understanding and all the clarifications on these occurred within the boundaries of the ads signs structure and denoted content and the consumers' history (past, current and projected) and socio – cultural milieu. Advertising is quasi – fictional, culturally constituted system of symbols in which products are strategically synchronized with scenes, props, people and action (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979, Mick, 1986).

Mostly consumers interpret advertisements as a principle way to understanding their world and themselves and finally they become the arbitrators of the advertising meaning. (McCracken, 1986,) Advertisement is a symbolic resource. It brings new ideas and better concrete versions of old ideas with which to advance their projects and defining, coordinating, planning and manipulating individuals and the society.

Conclusion

Advertising, Communication and marketing are cultural products which are inseparable from consumer's perception in this technological world. This tripod enlightens the production in the consumer's world and makes the product therapy to grasp the production through the powerful communication. Thus advertisement contextualizes the ideological and the fashionable world - via preferred styles, body aesthetics or social identifications and it interpreted the anti-fashion and self directed orientation. Consumer world expresses the system of values, self direction, progressive improvement or self development, social mobility and modernity, generally optimistic out look on the future. Thus modern advertising system has been leading for the hegemonic fashionable culture. Advertising culture mediated in the macro societal structure but meaningful them in a micro practices of every day life.

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