Handbook of Brand Semiotics

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George Rossolatos

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

George Rossolatos

1.1 Memoirs of a long overdue project

This Handbook has been a wonderful journey all along; a journey into the vast self-looping fields of tautology. How else could someone speak of Brand Semiotics without at the same time being cognizant that at least one of these two words could be dropped without changing the intended meaning? Let me restart and rephrase: This is a Handbook of Signs' Signs. But is this repetition a typo? Or does it reveal an underlying difference within the self-sameness of the '*tauto*-' that precedes and conditions 'logos' in a *tauto*-logy? Is the repetition of the word Sign an unadulterated recurrence of 'its' first incidence? Peirce would assure us that this is far from the matter of *fact*. Or, that the fact as foregone incidence is always different from 'its' initial condition that spurred the second as re-marking of a presumed first. Resuming: This is a Handbook about *firsts* and *seconds*, about brands as signs as marks and re-marks in a Cultural (dis)Order where the Same may only be affirmed through infinite refractions. Brands are mirrors whereby selves are impossibly recuperated as seconds or refractions of the echoing first. And maybe a bit more…

The American Marketing Association assures us that a brand is "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". Surely there is nothing flawed about this definition. It is just that it is too functional for semiotics and far *two* removed from the actual role performed by brands in cultural economies that are regulated by a Stock Market of signifiers, signifieds, symbols, icons, expressive units, elements of the plane of content. Insisting that this definition includes the word ‘sign’, and hence is an attestation of the very semiotic foundation of branding would be a far *two* easy and simplistic comment in the face of how brands have been and may be conceptualized through clear and distinct semiotic perspectives, and, concomitantly, how they may be managed. This Handbook, then, is not a “reference point” for scholars interested in brand semiotic research (who may be said, *otherwise*, to constitute our primary target group), but a symbolic gesture for research to come, while retracing brands as repetitions of firsts that are bound to be absent from any second, third and so on Volume may be produced in an attempt to encapsulate them.

We, that is the contributing authors of this Volume, would like to think of this endeavor as a set of memoirs of a long overdue project, a project that has not been finalized precisely because it never kicked off as it should have: which explains, pretty much, why this Volume is not a reference point, but a retracing of foundations that have been laid long ago, yet which have not been recorded as such, and, hence, remain un-re-cognizable by a scholarly community. Our task, then, is to re-port on these foundations, that is on the semiotic foundations of branding research as re-marks of what has already been laid, yet not re-ported as such, with a view to forcing the *seconds* and *thirds*, that are bound to follow, to return to the suppressed re-marks *on* unreported foundations that make up this Volume.

1.2 The scope and aims of this Handbook by way of debunking 4 popular myths about brand semiotics

Against the background of these “pre-cursory re-marks”, then, it may be worthwhile to resume this Introduction by dispelling some popular myths about brand semiotics, thus positioning the Chapters that make up this Volume on a firmer ground with regard to their intended contributions.

Myth no.1: What can semiotics teach us about how brands work in an era of highly technologically advanced perspectives such as neuro-marketing?

Debunking myth no.1: First and foremost, questions in academic research are hardly ever framed in such generic terms. Second, I can hardly recall of any discipline (or, more aptly, perspective from a discipline) among the plethora that have made inroads to branding research (from cultural anthropology to symbolic interactionism) that has been burdened with the onerous task of providing answers in the face of ever more fanciful comparisons between as distant disciplines/perspectives as neuro-marketing and brand semiotics. Notwithstanding that the 'neuro' prefix has been attached to semiotics (inasmuch as anywhere), and without having the least intention in this Introduction to explore the robustness of such amorous attachments, suffice it to point out that the real problem in such comparisons is not the perspective with which semiotics has been 'chosen' to compare, but the treatment of semiotics as a uniform discipline, rather than a multivocal landscape with as many variegated and clearly differentiated perspectives as sociology, anthropology, politics, etc. The uncritical devaluation of semiotics lies precisely in its treatment as an over-loaded mass noun: that semiotics, and by extension brand semiotics, is one amorphous mass of concepts that merits being referred to as such. This is the myth that merits debunking behind the manifest expression as above formulated, and, subsequently, a key objective of this Handbook: to restore the conceptual richness of semiotic perspectives that have been proliferating since the beginning of the last century in the 'intentional horizons' of branding researchers, while justifying why such distinctive conceptual apparatuses are still relevant for various streams within the broader field of branding research.

Myth no.2: Semiotically informed research about brands may be undertaken regardless of relevant advances in the marketing discipline.

Debunking myth no.2: It should become very clear that claiming to be conducting branding related research regardless of advances in the marketing discipline (where this research field was born and has been steadily flourishing over more than 100 years) is like claiming to be conducting bio-semiotic research without knowledge of biology. This myth may be attributed to linguistically oriented research output against the background of interpretive excursions in advertising language that, for some reason, has been identified, overwhelmingly so, with branding. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that advertising is the most manifest interface between a brand and its audience, and, on the other hand, to a lack of literacy on behalf of researchers who have been propagating this unsubstantiated myth about the more or less clearly segregated research fields of advertising and branding in the marketing discipline. This does not imply that such silos pay heed to the actual relationship between branding and advertising, but that conflating these two research fields without having undergone a process of explicitly challenging why they should be viewed as being inter-dependent (which, occasionally, tends to be forgotten in published research), is an attestation of ignorance, rather than of correctly informed positioning of a research piece. In broad terms, when someone is laying claim to be conducting branding research within the marketing discipline, he is probably referring to areas such as brand image measurement, brand/corporate/employee equity, brand architecture, brand extensions, brand portfolio management, corporate branding, and a whole host of adjacent fields that may be gleaned by looking attentively into the pre-coded research categories in journals, such as the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*. In contrast (where, more pertinently, we should be talking about complementarity), when someone is laying claim to be conducting advertising research from within the marketing discipline, he is probably referring to fields such as moderating factors that may influence advertising effectiveness, different sorts of appeals of ad messages, differences among variably defined target-groups in responses to ad stimuli, experimental designs aiming at demonstrating the relative impact of creative/executional elements on salient response criteria (e.g., likeability, intention-to-buy, recommend, etc.), and many more that would require a book in their own right to detail. Does this imply that the branding related research fields are, in principle and in essence, cut off from advertising research fields? Not at all, and it would be absurd to make such a claim, both in theory and, even more so, in practice. The point of convergence between these two streams, anyway, is most notable in the by now recognized research field of Integrated Marketing Communications (Schultz et al. 1992; Schultz and Schultz 2004; Kitchen and De Pelsmacker 2005; Pickton and Broderick 2005; Kitchen and Schultz 2009). What is alarming, though, and, moreover, a key reason for perhaps considering semiotic perspectives as being 'antiquated' in the light of advances in as diverse and micro-segmented research fields as those indicatively referred to in the above, is the pretension of semiotic accounts to be offering nuanced accounts of branding-cum-advertising phenomena, where, in fact, they merely offer (far *two*) macroscopic accounts of very specific research areas that are constantly scrutinized from considerably microscopic perspectives within the marketing discipline. And this pretension is the outcome of ignorance which works to the detriment of brand semiotic research. This is a very sensitive point that can only be addressed superficially in this Introduction. At least, it should be rendered clear that if someone wishes to conduct robust brand semiotic research, then the active engagement with the extant marketing literature is inevitable. We have tried to incorporate this dual view on brand semiotics as extensively as possible in this Handbook, that is by engaging dialogically with the marketing literature, although, admittedly, there is still ample scope for semiotic concepts to gain a foothold in discrete branding (and consumer research) fields. Again, a key objective behind the collective endeavor at hand has been to provide extensive input to interested scholars about the state-of-the-art in specific brand semiotic fields, however premised on the more foundational objective of consolidating what has been thus far a considerably fragmented stream. Surely such a consolidation may not be accomplished in a single Volume, but requires ongoing effort and persistence by committed scholars who are eager to carve new research horizons, rather than ruminate/recycle basic concepts. It is precisely in such a forward-thinking and moving milieu that this Handbook is situated.

Myth no.3: Brand semiotics has been terminally squeezed ever since Floch's applications of Greimasian structuralism. Beyond a string of basic and substitutable (from other disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication theory, cultural studies) concepts bestowed to the marketing discipline from key structuralist thinkers and Peirce, there is not much left to contribute to branding research.

Debunking myth no.3: Resuming the "pre-cursory remarks" and, thus, hopefully justifying what may have come across to some readers as a self-complacent and deconstructively inclined involutionary path to the silent and genealogically suppressed underpinnings of the meaning of 'brand', the fact that advances in specific semiotic schools have not been reflected in branding research simply points to the absence of re-cognition (on behalf of a scholarly community), and not to the subject matter that screams for re-cognition. It is not so much a case of not being blatantly obvious that a handful of gatekeepers have been, perhaps not intentionally, slowing down the rate whereby semiotic research might have been applicably reflected in a timely fashion in marketing research, as why marketing journals have been unwilling to catch up with such advances. This is far from a simple topic and by no means one that may be even scratched in this Introduction. Nevertheless, a topic that must be expressly stated as thoroughly as possible as it points causally not to inertia or unwillingness on behalf of researchers who may have flirted with brand semiotics, only to abandon the ship in the face of closed doors from major journals and blatantly biased and uninformed feedback, but to ‘social forces’ that have silently impeded such advances from being adequately reflected in marketing research. It is at least unacceptable that despite proclamations on behalf of marketing journal editors about openness to inter-disciplinary research, the majority of papers that have been appearing, even as scarcely as is the case, in marketing journals, are informed by second-hand adaptations of introductory semiotic concepts, while, in instances where innovative thinking has been evidently promoted in inter-disciplinary research between marketing and semiotics, editors’ feedback has tended to discredit such endeavors by recourse to empty signifiers such as ’jargon’ or ‘too technical for marketing researchers and not very relevant’. The ‘jargon’ *jargon* may be effortlessly rebutted by posing the following question to the concerned ‘citizen’: Could you fly an airplane by calling the engine Popeye and the cockpit billiard table (provided, of course, that such idiosyncratic antonomasias are in fact idiosyncratic and not shared by a social group)? In the most likely scenario that the ‘citizen’ will not affirm this probability, then it is equally evident that by refraining from renaming a biplanar approach to signification as strawberry fields forever one is merely safeguarding the integrity of an evoked perspective, rather than seeking to tell a bedtime story. Not only is this an utterly un-scientific attitude, but demonstrable of a state-of-affairs where a positivistic ‘wall of research’ has become an omni-devouring Leviathan that seeks to devalue the advances that are constantly being achieved in various semiotic perspectives by confining the acceptable scope of brand semiotic research to compulsory repetition. In short, it is not that semiotic schools have not been advancing, and that such advances are not relevant to branding research, but that such advances have been cunningly left un-recognized. This is another crucial area where this Handbook seeks to contribute, that is to re-ignite interest among scholars by drawing on standard concepts and applications in brand semiotics (for the sake of consolidation and historical continuity), however balanced against advances that have been taking place over the past thirty years, either as regards new semiotic schools of thinking, or new perspectives and concepts in existing semiotic schools of thinking, that have passed under the radar of the marketing discipline. This frail balance, as we progressively came to realize while composing this Volume, might be aggravated by shifting attention partially towards latest advances, while leaving groundwork terms relatively unaddressed. Again, the decision as to what level constitutes "groundwork" is highly dependent on each researcher's familiarity of and expertise in both discrete semiotic perspectives and branding ones (from a marketing point of view). Some readers may be aggravated because they would expect basic terms, such as 'sign' or 'commutation test', to be defined (anew), while others may experience grievances precisely because they would expect such terms to be common places among the readership. This is even further compounded by the fact that we are appealing to an inter-disciplinary audience, that is both to semioticians and to marketing researchers. Far from laying claim to having discovered this much craved golden mean (which may also be read as a flawed and not-that-golden positioning strategy of 'being stuck in the middle'), we made a conscious decision to, at least, refrain from re-stating very basic terms, in line with our fundamental belief, as per the above, that such ruminations should be avoided at all costs. Hence, the reader should not expect to find extensive expositions of basic terms and concepts, such as what is a sign, or what is denotation/connotation, for which there are ample introductory references.

In a similar fashion, significant semiotic advances and brand semiotic research that have been produced locally (where by 'localization' I am referring to research produced within specific state boundaries), in non (natively) English-speaking contexts, has largely passed unnoticed from the top 50 marketing journals. We strongly believe that bringing such advances to the limelight of attention will at least stimulate interested researchers to delve further into the massive conceptual armory that has been produced by distinctive semiotic schools of thinking over the past thirty years and which awaits its due fair-share in branding research.

Myth no.4 (and meta-branding mythopoeia comes to a preliminary close at this point): Brand semiotic research is applicable only in packaging, brand naming, logos and advertising design.

Debunking myth no.4: Again, this is the outcome of semiotic perspectives' enforced territorialization in strictly demarcated research fields in the broader marketing discipline. Semiotic perspectives are fully equipped with specific and mutually exclusive (hence meriting being called 'schools of thought') epistemological and ontological premises. Only a handful of basic concepts have been applied in branding research thus far, and in a very constrained fashion. In reality, conceptual models and constructs in all branding and advertising related fields may be edified purely on semiotic concepts. Even more encouragingly, semiotic schools of thinking have been edified on the core premise and promise of an inherently inter-disciplinary orientation, starting with Saussure's vision of semiology's constituting a branch of social psychology up to Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics that has been proven to be particularly well suited for inter-disciplinary applications in conjunction with variegated social sciences and humanities perspectives in addressing distinctive social practices.

We anticipate that by opening up the conceptual horizons of distinctive semiotic schools to branding related research fields in this Volume, scholars will be motivated to explore facets that not only have not been lying dormant all along, but, on the contrary, have been thriving in all sorts of disciplines, but marketing.

1.3 Chapters’ overview

Pursuant to the above re-marks as re-cognition of brand semiotics’ relative un-recognizability in the wider branding literature, let us proceed with an overview of the Chapters that comprise this foundational Volume.

In **Chapter 2**, Gianfranco Marrone and Dario Mangano recruit a wide gamut of largely structuralist concepts for analyzing the advertising language of brands in three product categories, that is cars, sports and sparkling water. Their analyses are premised on concepts and methods from structuralist semiotics, mainly of Greimasian persuasion, but also as developed by post-Greimasian (and contemporary to Greimas) scholars, such as Eric Landowski. It merits noticing that Landwoski, a student of Greimas, developed his own branch of sociosemiotics (cf. Landowski 1989) by drawing on Greimasian concepts (not to be confused with the sociosemiotic branch that grew from Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics) which constitutes one among many answers that have already been provided to critics of structuralist semiotics who have been drawing one—sidedly on strucuralism’s binarist reductionism, and regardless of the perspective’s far richer theoretical, methodological baggage and breadth and depth of applied research. The sociosemiotic extension of Greimasian structuralism is one among the various advances of which brand semioticians should be aware, highly under-rated due to the (recurrently relevant) lack of re-cognition by the brand semiotic community (which also holds in the case of the Anglo-Saxon branch of sociosemiotics as we shall see later on). Not only structuralist semiotics has spawned a sociosemiotic branch, but Anglo-Saxon sociosemiotics, contrary to popular misconceptions, shares fundamental epistemological assumptions with structuralism, most notably as regards their mutual constructivist orientation: “Language does not merely refer to pre-existent entities, but names things, thus construing them into categories; and then, typically, goes further and construes the categories into taxonomies to provide a theory of human experience" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2006: 29).

Each part of Marrone and Mangano's analyses focuses on a specific concept and method of analysis. In a bottom-up reading, they draw on almost a century's worth of advertising materials from the two dominant players in the Italian sparkling water market (Ferrarelle and Lete) in order to show how Floch's universal axiological map may be applied, in continuation of Floch's (1990) seminal reading of car advertising. Importantly, in terms of a most insightfully contributing territory for structuralist brand semiotics, the authors highlight how the concerned brands become valorized communicatively through the narratives they employ in different parts of their history. The diachronic evolution of the valorization of these two brand discourses, then, is plotted on a set of interlocking axiological squares.

In their reading of sports shoes brands advertising, they still dwell on brand axiology, while shifting perspective. Instead of looking into the diachronic evolution of brand axiology through multiple ad executions on an intra-brand level, they adopt an inter-brand viewpoint. This perspective culminates in plotting the distinctive axiology espoused by each of the four key brand players in the concerned category on the respective four territories of the universal axiological map.

Finally, by adopting a trans-media storytelling approach, they examine how different ad texts in different media (print, TV ads) complement each other in the deployment of different phases of Renault Clio's narrative. Most remarkably, the fresh and vibrant interpretive procedure they follow, in a sense simulates the abductive hypotheses that consumers tend to form while synthesizing stimuli (or, more aptly, expessive units) both from the same, as well as across ad texts, thus, in a way, responding to Eco's call for abandoning the standard communication model proposed by information theorists, insofar as "what one calls "message" is usually a *text,* that is, a network of different messages depending on different codes and working at different levels of signification” (Eco 1979), while latently assuming a reader-response theoretic, and far from linear decoding, approach to “message” elaboration that “highlights the role of the recipient as a co-creator of meaning” (Stern 1994: 10).

The trans-medial synthesis of this expressive inventory, coupled with the progressive abductive elimination of hypotheses about their semantic content, eventually shapes up the brand’s discursive universe. Indeed, it is like Marrone and Mangano play the role of ‘talking heads’ where they are ‘overhearing’ consumers’ inner stream of consciousness as it stretches over a noematic horizon.

Chapter 3, by Xavier Ruiz Collantes and Mercè Oliva, constitutes the most varied and multi-disciplinary contribution to this Volume, by virtue of the sheer complexity and the disciplines involved in the subject matter it tackles, that is narrativity approaches to branding. The Chapter is divided into five Sections, starting with an overview of storytelling perspectives on brand communications that have been largely developed from within the marketing discipline. The authors critically discuss these perspectives based on the degree to which they have sufficiently incorporated and operationalized the rich and multifarious heritage of narratology. The second Section dwells on the narratological, so to speak, prong of Greimasian structuralist semiotics, while emphasizing the role that the mid-level (semio-narrative) stratum performs in the generative trajectory of meaning, alongside integral components such as the actantial model and the canonical narrative schema. The implications of the structuralist semiotic approach to narrativity for the construal of brand identity are extensively addressed in the face of relevant studies from Greimas’s time until today. In this context, a critical eye is cast against piece-meal adaptations of the Greimasian trajectory, which mitigates the possibility of reaping full benefits from its full-fledged adoption as a blueprint for managing holistically brand meaning, rather than a toolbox with ‘apps’ on demand. Moreover, the authors consider the as yet unexplored in a branding context concept of ‘passion’ that was developed in Greimas and Fontanille’s *Semiotics of Passions* (1991), which is not reducible to either the ‘emotional’ side of a brand structure (e.g., emotional benefits) or to emotive appeals of ad messages. It should also be noted that developments in structuralist semiotics have been made in directions that address issues of discursive grammar, such as Fontanille’s *Semiotics of Discourse* (2006) and his generative trajectory of the plane of expression (cf. Fontanille 2007, 2010), which have not gained as much popularity as other developments in the discourse analytic research stream. Again, such advances in structuralist semiotics have hardly been reflected in brand semiotic research and constitute significant untapped opportunities going forward.

It merits noticing at this juncture that narrativity, according to Greimas, is primarily a mode of organizing and accounting for human action, a fundamental tenet that reflects the sociosemiotic orientation of Greimasian structuralism. And Greimas (1989), but also Courtés (1991), have illustrated amply how social practices as varied as the preparation of a basil soup based on a recipe and a funeral oration, may be organized in a chain of narrative programs that manifest a latent canonical structure which permeates invariably literary texts inasmuch as ordinary practices (whence stems the adoption of a pan-textualist approach in social theorizing).

As mentioned earlier, despite *en masse* proclamations about the abandonment of structuralism across diverse disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences, largely due to a disillusionment with the perspective’s proclivity for binarist reductionist readings of social/textual phenomena, and in the light of post-structuralist advances, it has survived and mutated both in semiotics, but also in marketing. For example, as noted in Rossolatos (2014), Keller’s cognitivist model of brand knowledge structures has inherited basic assumptions of structuralism, such as the formation of brand-related memory as varying layers of abstraction amongst hierarchically structured components, albeit ‘structured’ in different to binarist modes, such as according to the popular (in branding research) associationist rationale of connectionism (see Rossolatos, Chapter 12, this Volume). Thus, it is not a matter of structuralism’s abandonment, but of a change of rhetorical locus by dint of a shift in researchers’ focus from textual structures to structures of the mind (cf. Rastier 2006) which is not really a disjunction, and even less a paradigmatic shift, but an instance of re-framing and re-contextualization. As noted by Stephen Brown in *Postmodern Marketing 2* (1998: 154): “Let’s be honest…marketing is a structuralist academic discipline, or semi-structuralist at least”. What are the implications of this shift from structures of the text to structures of the mind? Some of them are described in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Differences between semiotics and marketing in the light of the shift from structures of the text to structures of the mind

	Semiotics	**Marketing**
Minimal units of analysis	Elements of the expression/content planes, abstracted from any sensory substratum	Stimuli as sensory manifold
Memory formation	Concept formation is not the outcome of mental processes, but of habituation in social/cultural practices in distinctive domains that endow perception with meaning. The subject is the outcome of discursive practices	Cognitive psychological paradigm emphasizing mental processes (attention, selection, perception, concept formation [brand associations])

	and not discourse the outcome of a cognizing subject.	
Interaction among units of analysis	Gestaltic: the interaction among expressive units produces a meaning effect in excess of the additive impact of individual modes/semiotic resources	Atomistic-additive: decomposable into individual units whose relative additive impact on memory formation and brand aasociations may be measured and accounted for through cognitive processing mechanisms
How meaning is produced in the face of the interaction among modes	Through embeddeness in textual structures, demonstrable with the aid of tools such as system network maps that combine the planes of expression with content	Through the spreading activation of nodes/links in the mind/brain
Other epistemological assumptions	Meaning is produced through the interaction of social actors in situated social settings; dependence of the individual on group	Meaning is produced through the distributed processing of stimuli in the brain- the individual is an

	meaning-making practices; signs over signals (stimuli)	information processing unit; signals (stimuli over signs)
	Interpretive outlook that seeks to account for ad hoc meaning structures, not necessarily replicable; highly context dependent semantization	Explanatory outlook that presumes the replicability of quantitative findings

The differences highlighted in Table 1.1 are far from sufficiently nuanced as regards specific semiotic schools of thought and marketing research strands. Rather, they are intended as thought-triggers regarding fundamental issues that are bound to emerge while translating terms from one discipline into those of a dominant perspective of the other (i.e., cognitive psychology), in which instances (e.g., McQuarrie and Mick 1999: 40) assumptions about a latent isomorphism between sensory stimuli and expressive units should be placed under the epistemological microscope and approached with caution prior to incorporating them uncritically in experimental research designs (whose output may still turn out to be validating ill-formed assumptions). It is precisely such subtle details that should be attended to while opening new conceptual and empirical horizons in brand semiotic research, rather than regurgitating basic concepts that are reflective of a very small portion of the prolific output of key semiotic thinkers such as Greimas. And this call for attention to conceptual detail is also made by Ruiz Collantes and Oliva in their attempt to highlight that the Greimasian conceptualization of narrativity is far richer both in conceptual terms and as regards the scope of potential applications in branding research than has been realized until now.

In the third Section, Ruiz Collantes and Oliva scrutinize the psychoanalytical and anthropological origins of archetypical and mythic perspectives in branding research respectively. Myths and archetypes constitute an integral aspect of cultural branding (cf. Holt 2004), and, hence, are bound to attract increasing attention as this research stream grows. By pursuing a grass-roots approach that features not just a discussion of brand storytelling models that have been edified on the Jungian psychoanalytical model of archetypes, but, most importantly, of aspects of the Jungian theory that have eschewed the attention of researchers, they open up new horizons in the theory's applicability to brand identity and personality creation. At the same time, the occasionally uncritical perpetuation of the innatist aura that surrounds archetypes (inasmuch as any myth of origin) in the marketing literature, is critically addressed with reference to the Jungian theoretical contours. This should be extended to any endeavors that set out to reify metaphorical constructs, such as the unconscious, and to transform them from heuristic principles and rhetorical topographical mechanisms, into innatist and localizable canonical structures.

In the fourth Section, the authors extend their focus to encompass how consumers employ narratives while building their relationships with brands, by drawing on the disciplines of anthropology and cognitive psychology. In this context, they discuss the popular strategy of anthropomorphism, while explaining how the narratively mediated consumer understanding of their relationship with brands has resulted in the common place that advertising that tells stories is highly effective. "As cultural constructions, these stories are full of mythic archetypes; they make use of culturally familiar symbols and carry along mythic meanings reflective of cultural values" (Kniazeva and Belk 2014: 46). The final Section engages in a critical comparison between the various approaches that were laid out throughout this Chapter, with an emphasis on the relative merits of narratively informed semiotic research.

In **Chapter 4** Carlos A. Scolari explores the challenges that lie ahead for branding research in the light of advances in the burgeoning field of transmedia storytelling. The concept of transmedia, in broad terms, surely is everything but alien to branding. The concept and the philosophy of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) that constitutes the (marketing discipline's) antecedent- at least in outline- of what became widely known (in the media studies 'sister' discipline) as transmedia storytelling, was put forward in 1992 by Schultz et al., and, ever since has become entrenched in the marketing vernacular as standard research currency (cf. Kitchen and Schultz 2009; Rossolatos 2013). The fundamental hypothesis of IMC is that the maximization of the synergistic effects among media in an integrated brand communications plan will lead to enhanced bottom-line results. This simple hypothesis is coupled with considerable levels of complexity in practice that are over and above media planning considerations. IMC is a 'holistic' (that is more comprehensive than usual) and iterative brand planning methodology that is particularly relevant in a fragmented mediascape characterized by proliferating and decentralized communicative touch-points across various technological platforms. The major difference and at the same time area of indispensable 'synergy' between transmedia and IMC is that whereas the latter considers mostly media budgeting, buying and performance monitoring aspects under the rubric of 'integration' (with message performing a recognized, yet operationally more peripheral role), the former considers media and message structure as equally important (albeit not considering media from a marketing-related media planning point of view). Moreover, transmedia storytelling, by virtue of integrating theoretical components from disciplines such as semiotics and narratology for managing the transformations of the narrative 'fate' of TV series, cinematic films, or advertising personae, is by definition more minutely attuned to the exigencies of what is called in IMC lingo message integration.

Another critical area of complementarity concerns the increased consumer empowerment in a participatory media cultural setting, in which context, as noted by Scolari, consumers have become prosumers, while actively participating in a narrative process by providing new texts that expand the transmedia narrative world. In these terms, we are not concerned merely with maximal integration in a brand-controlled environment where media have been planned a priori to work in a synergistic fashion, but with integrating potentially dissonant narrative elements (compared to brand intentions) in a non brand-controlled environment where prosumers' imaginary dictates the potential meaning directions towards which an initial story or set of stimuli (expressive units) may be channeled.

By imagining the market as a symbolic space where each company tries to establish its own storytelling and values, Scolari envisions transmedia storytelling as a useful tool for positioning a brand and retaining customers by offering a set of shared values. In this context, new brand communications vehicles emerge, while existing ones are redefined. The transmedia perspective actively urges brand management to think 'message' first, in terms of the inter-textual embeddednes of brand messages. This perhaps dissonant with IMC's priorities radical shift in perspective (at least as we know it) turns out to be a most potent resource for invigorating and re-thinking bottom-up how specific brandcomms vehicles work. A remarkable example in this direction is reverse product placement as a commercial form of paratextuality, as discussed by Scolari. This notable shift becomes a full-fledged U-turn if we consider, from a transmedia point of view, that whereas in traditional communicative vehicles, such as product placement, brands appear in films, for example, in strategically pre-planned arrangements, in a media convergent culture films *are* the brand. In other words, the transmedia storytelling perspective urges brand planners to shift attention from what associations consumers form of a brand to how a brand culture is situated and constantly transformed in a wider cultural milieu that is populated by artefacts that inform its narrative universe and which are no more directly controllable by a centralized team. The above are illustrated by recourse to vivid case-studies from *Lost* to *Harry Potter* and from *Batman* to the *Matrix*.

A peripheral field in (marketing) branding research, but of paramount importance for what has been considered until now as brand semiotics, is the area of logos design. In **Chapter 5**, Francesco Mangiapane explores facets of logo design from various structuralist semiotic angles. The Chapter kicks off by situating brand identity and logos as expressive manifestations of brand identities in a wider textuality paradigm. As against a conservative, sign-orientated perspective according to which "logos are examples of legi-signs or symbols [...] agreed, general typifications" (Lury 2004: 65), a textuality-orientated perspective views logos as integral cultural artefacts of a brand's evolving narrative in inter-textual relationships that are multi-layered and deeply articulated in a cultural software. The pursued analytical path is aligned with the general mission of this Handbook, that is to consolidate the state-of-the-art and to move forward by considering more recent advances. Hence, the analytic draws on and extends Floch's insights from his seminal book *Visual identities*, by examining the figurative constitution of competitive brands, such as Apple vs. IBM, McDonald's vs. Burger King, McDonald's vs. Slow Food. The offered analyses indicate that in order to unearth the design rationale of logos we must first understand the competitive dynamics and the language system that makes up each product category. Thus, the analysis of the first competitive pair demonstrates that the two leading computer manufacturers built their logos through a reversal of their plastic traits. By adopting a more expansive angle, the analysis shows that the logos of the largely oppositionally placed in both design and axiological terms McDonald's vs. Slow Food reflect two opposing *forms of life,* fast versus slow food that are, in turn, reflected in the wider retail environment of the competitive food chains. This mandate for semiotic coherence as a prerequisite for building and maintaining brand identity urges us to consider logos as synaesthetic machines that translate different aspects of a brand's aesthetic identity from one sensorial mode to another. Post-Flochian advances are extensively reflected in Mangiapane's design roadmap, while considering the 'sensorial turn' that has been taking place in structuralist semiotics ever since the release of the *Semiotics of Passions* (1991) in the analysis of the sensory appeals of Apple's different logos by following the emotional relational paths prescribed in Boutaud's communication model.

Chapter 6 deploys alongside a similar structuralist semiotic path, while Ilaria Ventura considers packaging design issues, as an essential complement to the analysis of logos design that preceded it. The expository path follows a similar rationale to Chapter 5, by applying and vividly discussing semiotic concepts in various areas of packaging design through specific case-studies. The main line of thought that permeates the entire Chapter is that packaging, over and above the functional tasks it is summoned to accomplish, performs an indispensable communicative function. Thus, packaging merits being considered a brand communications vehicle in its own right. Packaging does not simply envelope objects, but translates products in different expressive substances that furnish a communicative contract with consumers, a meaning proposal that is embedded in value-based exchanges. By situating the role of packaging design for brand identity within a wider context of cultural signification, Ventura recruits time-hallowed concepts, such as Greimasian semi-symbolic structures, in order to demonstrate how salient design categories at the plane of expression, such as typeface, graphics, colors, texture, shapes, that have been classified under the ubiquitously applicable tripartite schema of chromatic, eidetic, topological categories, are variably drawn upon by competitors, often in markedly oppositional manners (as also shown in the case of logos, in Chapter 5) with view to carving a distinctive identity. The interpretive methodological framework adopted by Ventura features three categories from Greimasian semiotics for analyzing objects of value, viz. *configurative, taxic and functional*. Moreover, the relative benefits of employing the evoked semiotic perspective are highlighted in terms of managing diachronically the communicative function of packaging, rather than obtaining an isolated snapshot of how design variables interact syncretically in the communication of the intended brand values. The way brand values, in turn, are communicated through brand packaging, or their mode of valorization, is illustrated by drawing on Floch's universal axiological map, as already shown in Chapter 2.

Chapters 7-9 address in different ways and by engaging with various perspectives the subject of multimodality that has become a priority research area in social semiotics, but also in discourse analytic strands over the past years.

In **Chapter 7** John A. Bateman ventures into a thorough comparative re-reading of Floch's seminal case-study of the NEWS cigarette print ad from three semiotic angles, that is from the original structuralist one, from a Peircean point of view, and from a sociosemiotic one. The main objective behind this re-reading lies with highlighting the comparative advantage of adopting a sociosemiotic perspective, inspired by Hallidayan SFL, in addressing methodological issues that are identified in the other two semiotic schools of thought. By offering thought provoking analyses of the concerned ad, Bateman issues a plea for enhancing the robustness of traditionally interpretive semiotic analyses by bringing to the forefront of attention methodological issues of reliability and replicability. According to the avowed sociosemiotic perspective, what is identified as lacking from Floch's otherwise most insightful analyses is a methodical roadmap for analyzing and building brand communications. Thus, although it is recognized that a structuralist perspective does address issues of multimodal interaction and semantic coherence among the expressive units of NEWS' verbo-visual structure, these considerations are not grounded in a robust methodological framework. Due to the absence of such a framework issues of replicability and reliability that plague semiotic analyses are bound to remain unresolved. Consequently, Bateman outlines a framework for addressing artefacts (including brand discourses) in variable and inter-locking levels of abstraction, comprising issues of genre, media, metafunctions and modes.

Still within a sociosemiotic/multimodality terrain, but with a different thematic orientation, Kay L. O'Halloran, Peter Wignell and Sabine Tan in **Chapter 8** furnish an in-depth analysis of the diachronic evolution of Curtin University's brand identity, involving various rebranding attempts and addressing distinctive student segments, as fleshed out in different web-site designs. The offered multi-semiotic analysis adopts a methodological framework that is underpinned by the authors' multimodal analytics software. By segmenting the verbal and visual resources utilized on the university's successively revised websites into navigation zones, with a focus on the landing page and on key pages that are hyperlinked either visually or verbally with the landing page, the authors scrutinize how different meanings are afforded alongside the four main sociosemiotic metafunctions for distinctive student segments. This particularly nuanced analytical approach is informed both by traditional systemic functional linguistic concepts (e.g., Halliday 1978; White and Martin 2005), as well as by their multimodal extensions (e.g., the various ways whereby the web-site visitors' gaze is engaged through distinctive spatial arrangements of key visual elements, *pace* Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). In addition to the university's web-site as integral brand identity multi-semiotic resource, the authors furnish an in-depth analysis of the university's logo, again from a diachronic point of view, while highlighting how different meanings are afforded before and after a rebranding process.

By opening up the boundaries of multimodal semiotic research to critical discourse analysis (CDA), Per Ledin and David Machin, in **Chapter 9**, examine at length the fascinating case of the Orebro University rebranding. In line with the mission and the fundamental premises of CDA, that is to demonstrate how sociocultural practices are shaped through discursive practices and how the latter are inscribed in textual practices (Fairclough 1993: 98) with an ulterior motive to unearth institutional chains through textual chains and how power relationships work in sustaining such institutional/textual chains, multimodal discourse analysis (MCDA) examines multimodal textual structures with view to unearthing the latent discourses that undergird their coherence and cohesion. MCDA is informed by CDA, which by now has been firmly entrenched in discourse analytic approaches to organization studies (Fairhusrt and Putnam 2004), inasmuch as by sociosemiotics, and particularly by Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design. Ledin and Machin delve extensively and intensively into a wide gamut of multimodal texts that were designed in the context of the university's rebranding, for both internal and external stakeholders, such as the Vision brochure, the university magazine, strategic planning documents. By casting a critical eye on the employed semiotic resources in the selected texts, they lay bare how the intended changes in the identities and roles of the academic staff are represented and re-imagined. In this process of 're-imagining', which the authors call re-contextualization, where MCDA's contribution shines forth at its most conspicuous, massive gaps open up between actual and feasible social practices and how they are envisioned through discourses that tend to level off inequalities and irreducible differences, primarily of qualitative nature. The selection of visuals and particular expressions, their specific modes of arrangement and co-ordination, their presentation in varying degrees of modality (from realistic to technical), are shown to constitute a multimodal rhetoric that communicates directly management objectives in such a fashion as to render these objectives shareable among all stakeholders within the examined organization. Ultimately, the adopted MCDA perspective presents a unique and quite compellingly so take on how a university as brand is shaped in terms of goals, objectives and how such objectives are reflected in internal branding documents that may and may not be aligned with actual perceptions and practices within the represented organization. These gaps are critically brought to the surface by the MCDA perspective.

Semiotic cultural analysis constitutes the focus of **Chapter 10** by Jennie Mazur. By adopting an inter-cultural perspective on brand communications, Mazur demonstrates lucidly how IKEA managed to take by storm its intended target-audience in the German market by leveraging its concept of "not really" Swedish swedishness. While drawing on Sonesson's model of Ego, Alter and Alius culture and on an extensive list of analytical categories for dissecting ad texts, she demonstrates how the company's indubitably clever advertising strategy built on embedded cultural mores, but also invented a notion of swedishness. It is this invented notion of swedishness, along with a set of novel stereotypes that was subsequently recognized, and most effectively so, by the brand's intended audience in Germany, and through which it attained to become entrenched in the existing consumer ethos through a humorous and occasionally self-ironic discourse. An intensive analysis of 48 IKEA commercials are reduced to three communicative territories that correspond to different phases of the deployment of the brand's communication strategy in the German market. The analysis highlights, most interestingly, how the invented stereotypes in IKEA's ad films not only managed to catapult the brand to a leadership position in the German DIY market, but to create a whole new ethos, including the adoption of the cultural practice of throwing Christmas trees off windows during St. Knut's day.

Chapter 11 is still situated in the broader cultural branding territory, while seeking to disentangle the concept of brand image from a non-semiotically informed spider's web. In this Chapter, George Rossolatos draws on the multifariously defined and operationalized concept of iconicity while addressing critically definitions of brand image that have been offered by marketing scholars. This cultural bend, in conjunction with the concept's semiotic contextualization, are aimed at dispelling terminological confusions in the either inter-changeable or nebulously differentiated employment of such terms as brand image, symbol, icon, as well as at addressing the function of brand image at a deeper level than a mere construct that is operationalized in quantitative studies of purchase drivers. This shift in focus is dovetailed with a critical turn from the cogito-centric view of the consuming subject through the cognitivist lens of the AI metaphor as decision-making centre at the origin of largely conscious meaning-making, in favor of a psychoanalytically informed approach that considers figurativity as an essential process whereby brand image is formed. In these terms, brand image is intimately linked to brand images as figurative multimodal expressive units and rhetorical tropes, as figurative syntax, that are responsible for shaping an idiolectal brand language, as well as to distinctive levels of iconicity as textual condition of possibility of a brand language. In order to understand the role of iconicity as fundamental condition of brand textuality, rather than just a procedure for spawning brand images, the discussion is contextualized in a wider framework involving the culturally situated source of brand images, how they become correlated with brand image concepts and how correlations between brand images and brand image result in brand knowledge structures (Keller 1998). This opening up of the discussion on iconicity is enacted against the background of the Brand Imaginarium which involves: (i) a critical engagement with the dominant cognitivist perspective in branding research that prioritizes individual memory in brand knowledge formation, through a cultural branding lens that involves two additional types of memory, viz. communicative and cultural (ii) a critical engagement with the cognitivist perspective on brand knowledge formation that prioritizes conscious processing of stimuli (as 'brute facts', rather than as already semiotized expressive units) in a cognitive mechanism from which the faculty of imagination has been expelled, by restoring the importance of imagination in brand knowledge formation, and, concomitantly, by showing that the highly figurative language of brands may not be researched thoroughly unless imagination is posited anew as processing correlate (iii) the adoption of an expansionist approach to the role of the imaginary in brand knowledge formation, from cognitive (or psychic) faculty, to a more sociologically inclined process of inter-subjective mirroring, and concomitantly as imaginary social significations (Castoriades 1985) that are shared by culturally conditioned and habituated subjects that engage in meaningful cultural practices, rather than individual processing monads. Brakus (2008) contends that despite interpretivist consumer researchers' recognition of cognitivism's limitations in the application of a mechanistic step-by-step view of the information-processing paradigm, they have not provided viable alternatives that might explain marketing phenomena. The generalist orientation of this counter-critique notwithstanding, the Brand Imaginarium is intended as an outline in lieu of a more comprehensively formulated 'viable alternative', while taking on board Levitt's dictum that imagination is the starting point of success in marketing (cf. Brown and Patterson 2000: 7).

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