

The Semiotic Conception of Brand and the Traditional Marketing View



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to further develop the use of the semiotic resources in the field of brand management by exploring some key traditional marketing concepts against the backdrop of the semiotic theory of representation. Within the broad field of semiotics my option was for Charles Peirce's General Theory of Signs. By transposing his semiotic theory to the conceptualisation of brands I illustrate their dynamic nature and how they generate representations. With the help of this article, brand managers are able to obtain a holistic view about brands that encompass their signs and the perceptions that these create. Also, managers can gain an understanding concerning how the meaning of brands always results from co-creation between companies and stakeholders.

Key Words: Brands; semiotics; signs; marketing; meanings

INTRODUCTION

Brands can be regarded as mental constructions that evoke a wide array of meanings (Danesi, 2006; Semprini, 1995). Likewise, one can envisage the consumer world as a web of meanings among consumers and marketers woven from signs ensconced in their culture (Mick, 1986). These perspectives lead us towards semiotics, the discipline that studies signs and how one creates and transmits meanings (Eco, 1979).

A semiotic sign might be defined, in a simple way, as anything that represents something to someone (Peirce, 1893–1913). Within the broad semiotic field I will develop my research by using the resources made available by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. His General Theory of Signs is, most of all, a theory of knowledge (Santaella, 2000) and proposes a view of how human beings develop representations. Ultimately, a brand is something that resides in the minds of consumers (Keller, 1998) and this perceptual presence can be regarded as a mental representation (Franzen and Bouwman, 2001).

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I am following a call for research to deepen the use of the semiotic theory into the marketing and brand management domains. The purpose of this article is to establish a bridge between the semiotic theory and the marketing brand management domains, by exploring some traditional marketing concepts and placing them against the backdrop of Peirce's theory of representation. The originality of the research lies in the discussion of a semiotic view of brand with more traditional marketing concepts. Also, the concise way I will present the semiotic theory contributes to the originality of the approach, especially given that most of the existing work that integrates semiotics and marketing ends with little appeal to those who are not experts in the field (Mick, 1986).

To the extent of my knowledge there are no works that clearly relate core brand marketing concepts – like the ones of identity, communication, positioning and image – to Peirce's semiotic theory of representation. This was the gap I identified and, therefore, it is my belief that my approach is valuable since it adds new insights that brand managers can use to enrich their management practices. Mick et al. (2004) argue that more efforts to qualify and extend semiotic insights into the marketing domain are needed, and Thellefsen et al. (2007) state that very little work seems to exist that conceptualises brands according to a Peircean perspective. Semiotics may help managers to achieve a broad view about brands, and help them in the formulation of a marketing strategy and in the understanding of the processes that lead to the meanings consumers ascribe to brands (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1993).

APPROACH

The present research is exploratory and I will develop a discussion about a semiotic view of the brand phenomenon within a marketing framework. I will focus my study on the marketing concepts of identity, image, positioning and communication. The identity and image concepts seem to be generally accepted as crucial in the brand management domain (e.g. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998; Kapferer, 1994). Besides these two concepts, Kapferer (1994) highlights the communication and Aaker (1991) the positioning of a brand. More concepts could be presented but, due to the size constraints of the article, I decided to focus on these four key ones. I will begin the analysis of the literature by concisely presenting these marketing concepts and then I will explore the semiotic theory. Instead of extensively presenting the history of semiotics or delving into the complexities that can be derived from different paths of research within this broad field, I will focus on Peirce's theory of representation. Nevertheless, I will briefly present an overview of the origins of semiotics and of the two main paths that have led to what is called 'modern semiotics', justifying my emphasis on Peirce's theories. From the integration of the fields of marketing and semiotics I will develop a discussion about a view of brands as semiotic entities. I will end this article with a section of practical implications and also with suggestions of avenues for future research.

RELATED LITERATURE

Traditional Marketing Concepts of Brand Management*Identity*

The concept of identity emerges as a pivotal element in brand management (Aaker, 1991, 2002; Kapferer, 1994, 2003; Keller, 1998). Brand identity defines a brand's sense of direction, which is central to a strategic vision (Aaker, 2002).

The brand identity will clearly be defined as soon as the following issues have been resolved: what are the vision and specific objectives of the brand; what sets it apart; what is the need that is satisfied by the brand; what is its permanent nature; what are its values; and what are the signs that make it noticeable (Kapferer, 2003). We should form a perspective on the concept of identity in a comprehensive fashion. Besides the identifying elements (name, logotypes and other graphical elements) through which a brand can be identified, the identity also includes the total of its tangible and intangible features (Mozota, 2003). The identity mix of a brand can be defined according to four vectors: products/services, environments (locations where the offer/services are produced or sold), communication and behaviour (of the employees) (Olins, 2005).

Image

Brand image may be defined as how the identity materialises in the mind of different audiences. Neurobiologists have concluded that the best way to imagine the human memory is like an associative network, wherein everything is connected to everything else (Franzen and Bouwman, 2001). Memory is formed by millions of networks of neurons, whose functioning may be explained through theoretical models regarding cognitive processes (Franzen and Bouwman, 2001). These models are based upon the fact that representations in the long-term memory are organised in complex and interconnected terms called models of associative network. How they work can be understood through the theory of spreading activation, formulated by Quillian (Collins and Loftus, 1975). When the senses face a certain stimulus, a connection is activated in the brain, namely in groups of specific neurons that represent that stimulus in the memory.

The knowledge regarding a brand can be conceptualised as consistent with the model of an associative memory network (Keller, 1998) and it may be defined as the personal meanings about a brand stored in a consumer's memory, that is, all descriptive and evaluative brand-related information (Keller, 2003). The knowledge about the brand can be characterised along two components: brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1998). Awareness is related to the strength of the node of the brand in the memory, as reflected by the ability of consumers to identify the brand under different conditions. Brand image can be defined as the perceptions about a brand that result from the brand associations held in the memory (Keller, 1998). Thus, the image of a brand is composed of all the pieces of information that consumers gather in their memory.

Positioning

Determining a brand image involves positioning the brand (Keller, 1998). As the name implies, positioning involves finding a suitable location in the minds of a certain target segment, according to the strategy of the brand. The first step in the implementation of a brand identity is the affirmation of a positioning that specifies what part of the identity is to be communicated (Aaker, 2002). Positioning a brand also means to highlight the distinguishing features that set it aside from its competitors and make it appealing to the public (Kapferer, 2003). Positioning can be seen as something sought out and attained: it is the result that the company looks forward to obtaining in the mind of the consumer. In this sense, ultimately the consumers are those who will determine the positioning of the brands (Beckwith, 2002).

Communication

Marketing communication can be conceptualised in terms of 'contacts', like any information-bearing experience that the public has towards a brand (Schultz et al., 1993). Within the same perspective, one can consider that all 'touch points' between a brand and its consumers are message bearers (Katz, 1989). Any situation where a brand is communicating something to the market, from its facilities to how the after-sale service works, is a touch point of the brand. In the same line of thought, the design of a product and its price, the packaging, the posture of the seller and the decoration of the point of sale, among many other possible examples, communicate something to the buyers (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Each contact gives an impression of the brand.

Semiotics

The word 'semiotics' originally stems from the term 'semeiotics', arising from the Greek 'semeion', which meant 'mark' or 'sign' (Beasley et al., 2000). The term was used by the founder of Western medicine, Hippocrates, to point out the study of the symptoms, given that they were signs that represented different kinds of physical conditions (Danesi, 1998). The semiotic analysis generally consists of the same procedure: to link the physical forms of the signs to what these represent (Danesi, 1998).

At the end of nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, semiotics had a noticeable development, through the works of Peirce and Saussure. The Swiss linguist Saussure created the theoretical fundamentals of a science of signs. To him, semiotics was an extension of linguistics. A sign, linguistic or otherwise, can be regarded as a dyadic relation between a signifier (form, expression) and a signified (concept, content) (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1993). So, a sign is the relation between the signifier and signified. Saussure's works focus on communication via symbols organised into languages, e.g. food, clothing, furniture, myths and rituals (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1993).

Peirce establishes a semiotic triadic relationship, where a third element – the object – is articulated with the signifier and the signified. Although Saussure and Peirce worked in two different academic traditions (linguistics and philosophy respectively), both agreed on the importance of the sign to any semiotic approach (Fiske, 1990). Saussure used the term

'semiology' to designate his studies; however, despite still being used today, the word 'semiotics' became more usual. In spite of the shared purposes of both semiotics and semiology to become general theories of signs, the two theories differ in subject matter and method as well as in specific concepts and also in terms of epistemology (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1993).

Among the existing research that integrates the semiotic theory into the marketing field, there have also been a number of different approaches. Whereas some authors use the semiotic theory of Saussure or Peirce, others use a mix of the two when developing research in marketing. Mick's (1986) article 'Consumer Research and Semiotics: Exploring the Morphology of Signs, Symbols, and Significance' and Holbrook and Hirschman's (1993) book *The Semiotics of Consumption* are two works that have influenced the use of semiotics in marketing theory. But even in the 1950s the seminal articles of Gardner and Levy (1955) and Levy (1959) presented insights that remain up-to-date and influential. Levy (1959) argued that the marketing mix variables place a firm's commercial offering within symbolic meanings that produce a complex set of 'symbols for sale'.

Different semiotic research paths have been followed in the marketing and consumption domains, such as brand and corporate communication (Danesi, 2002, 2006); signs used as brands (Floch, 2001); consumption (Baudrillard, 1998, 2005; Barthes, 1964; Mick, 1986; Holbrook et al., 1989; McCracken, 1990, 2005); symbolism in consumption (Barthes, 1964, 1993); corporate identity (Otubanjo and Melewar, 2007; Valentine, 2003); and consumer behaviour (Cherrier and Murray, 2004; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Grayson and Shulman, 2000). Also, brand meaning has been extensively studied with different approaches (Batey, 2008; Hardy-Vallee and Koenig, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and different methods of analysis inspired by the semiotic theory have been developed and used in marketing research (Valentine, 2002; Bitoun, 2006; Kessous and Elyette, 2008). Just to give two examples of these methods, Barthes (1964) presented a semiotic process based on Saussure's semiotic theory. The three stages refer to denotation, connotation and myth. On other hand, Chandler (2007) proposed a semiotic method to analyse how signs, such as the identity of companies, are interpreted to produce meanings. Other works have used semiotic approaches to specifically study, for example, product design (Kawama, 1989), packaging (Klapisch, 1995), advertising (Barthes, 1964; Langrehr and Caywood, 1995; Warlaumont, 1998; Danesi, 2008) and retail spaces (Sherry, 1998; Eco, 1979; Floch, 2001). Many other studies, besides the ones stated, have employed some kind of approach based on the semiotic theory into research in marketing and brands. A broad panorama on this matter can be analysed in the Mick et al. (2004) article 'Pursuing the Meaning of Meaning in the Commercial World: An International Review of Marketing and Consumer Research Founded on Semiotics'. This work presents an extensive analysis of the existing research that integrates semiotics in the marketing field.

My review of semiotics is not meant to be holistic but rather an exploration of some of the key elements of semiotic theory in order to discuss the parallel with the concepts of identity, communication, positioning and image. Within the broad semiotic theoretical domain I will opt for Charles Peirce's semiotic General Theory of Signs for my research, mainly due

to three reasons. Firstly, Peirce's theory seems to be better adjusted to the potential analysis of brands through the incorporation of the mediated action (semiosis), when compared to the Saussurean dyadic (signifier/signified) semiotics (Perez, 2007). Secondly, the theory of representation proposed by the Peircean semiotics presents the resources to understand how brands become represented in the minds of stakeholders. Finally, the already existing conceptualisation of brands with this semiotic view (Mollerup, 1997; Perez, 2004; Lencastre and Côte-Real, 2010) seems to allow a comprehensive notion of the brand concept and a holistic characterisation that encompasses its signs and their effects.

General Theory of Signs

As a philosopher, Peirce concerned himself with the understanding that we have of our experience and the surrounding world. Only gradually did he realise the importance that semiotics – the action of signifying – has within such context (Fiske, 1990). Peirce was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, attended Harvard University and became a professor in logic and philosophy at the same university. As Peirce (1931–1958: 1.339) proposes in his General Theory of Signs:

A sign stands *for* something *to* the idea which it produces, or modifies That for which it stands is called its *object*; that which it conveys, its *meaning*; and the idea to which it gives rise, its *interpretant* [emphasis in original].

This relation between signs, object and interpretant conceptualise the process of representation and how human beings accede to the knowledge about a given reality (Silverman, 1983).

The semiotic object or referent (we will use these terms interchangeably) which the sign stands for doesn't have to be physical; in fact it can be intangible, real or imaginary, shared or even idiosyncratic (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1993). Through signs an interpretant can be developed. Peirce thought of an interpretant as a psychological event in the mind of an interpreter (Eco, 1979). For some authors (e.g. Danesi, 1998, 2002, 2008; Merrell, 2001; Mick, 1986) the interpretant is essentially a meaning about the object that is accomplished through signs. Other authors, like Eco (1979), state that the interpretant can be a response to the semiotic object.

I consider the understanding of how signs lead to the development of a response as something critical. Signs have a self-generating ability (Santaella, 2000) in the sense that they bear a potential effect about the semiotic object. Nonetheless, a response will only be created when the effect of the sign is integrated in the mental structures of the person who processes it. Hence, the meaning or response is not contained within the sign itself, arising only in its interpretation (Chandler, 2007). Peirce's semiotics allows the understanding that the meaning or knowledge carried by the signs is not universal and the processes that lead to a response are conditioned by the lifestyle, way of thinking, values and opinions and the pre-existing ideas, tastes, life projects and all idiosyncrasies that make up each person's sense of self (Fournier and Mick, 1999; Semprini, 1995). The interpretation is thus

conditioned by the already existing knowledge and personal background and also by the specific social, cultural and historical contexts.

Peirce defended the idea that we have no direct experience, but merely an indirect knowledge of reality (Silverman, 1983). The philosopher argued that all experience is mediated by signs (Chandler, 2007). From a semiotic view the whole of the human experience is an interpretative structure mediated and sustained by signs (Deely, 1990). Semioticians regard 'reality' as a social construction, based on systems of signs.

Representation, in the formal terms of Peirce's theory, is the general relationship that is established between the three semiotic elements: sign, object and interpretant. A representation relationship is triadic, so it should not be confused with the signs themselves, although the whole process of representation can be named as a sign (Santaella, 2000). At the same time a sign – a sign in the strict sense or a *representamen* – is one of the elements that are part of the process of representation. So, and with the purpose of presenting Peirce's theory in a simple way for those who are not familiar with semiotic concepts, we will use the term 'sign' as the concept in the strict sense.

In his extensive work Peirce developed multiple classifications and reviews about the types of signs and their qualifications, but we believe that such detail is outside the scope of this study. The qualifications of signs in relation to the object – icon, index and symbol – are among the most widespread. The main feature of icons, indexes and symbols is based on their resemblance, contiguity and convention with the object, respectively. An icon is a sign that resembles, in some way, the object. In the index there is a connection between the sign and the object and, finally, a symbol doesn't have a connection or similarity with the object, the relationship happens by social convention. Within Peirce's theoretical frame a symbol is just one of the classifications of signs. We will not analyse the symbolic character of brands, nor will we present a detailed description of the possible classifications of signs, but rather simply use a broad concept of the sign as an element of Peirce's process of representation.

Representations can be partially implicit (Franzen and Bouwman, 2001) and human beings interpret things as signs mostly in an unconscious way (Chandler, 2007). Semiotics thus proposes that meanings or responses can be developed without awareness.

The General Theory of Signs Applied to the Brand Conceptualisation

The semiotic school of thought established by Peirce can be used to conceptualise a brand. Mollerup (1997) was, as far as we know, the first to specifically apply Peirce's semiotic model to the definition of brands. He presented such views in his book *Marks of Excellence* (Mollerup, 1997), where he gives the example of a pen of the brand Montblanc. The symbol on the top of the pen can be considered a sign of the brand; the sign refers to the semiotic object of the brand, the company that produces it. Finally, the interpretant is the effect that the sign can create in the mind.

Regarding the brand's signs, Lencastre and Côte-Real (2010) argue that the name of the brand is, by legal definition, a sign. Besides this sign, other elements like the logotype, the symbols, the slogans and even the packages and the jingles can also be considered as

being composed of signs. Lencastre and Côte-Real (2010) call these elements an identity mix of the brand.

The products or services and the organisation that manages the brand are, in the opinion of Lencastre and Côte-Real (2010), the semiotic object of the brand. Perez (2004) considers that the object element takes into account all the complexity of the organisation – its mission, its vision, its relationship with society, its leaders – amplifying the immediate course of reference reduced to the tangible product.

Regarding the effects of the semiotic signs of the brands, Lencastre and Côte-Real (2010) use the term 'response' as the way to name them. So, the interpretant is the response that a brand receives from a specific individual and, by extension, from a particular market. The authors clarify that the response comprehends the sum of different cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Franzen and Bouwman (2001) state that a response to a brand refers to the totality of associations, meanings, emotions, attitudes and behavioural tendencies that a brand evokes.

DISCUSSION

Peirce's semiotic theory allows one to regard brands as entities composed of inter-dependent elements of different natures that match the process of representation. Within this frame a sign is a core concept and has two basic features: it stands for a referent and it has the ability to create an effect in the mind. Consumers live surrounded by signs of brands and all these can be apprehended by the stakeholders' senses at any given moment. Signs establish a connection between the brand they stand for and the stakeholder's mind. Whenever an interpretation of signs occurs new relations are established and brands are thus dynamic entities that are always able to evolve.

Communication may be seen as a process of sign sending (Bergman, 2009) and in this sense the communication of a brand can be regarded as being composed of layers of signs. The identity of a brand encompasses not only the means of communication of a brand and identifying elements such as the logotype and other graphical elements, but also the total of its tangible and intangible features, namely its products and services, its environments and the behaviours of its employees. The identity is composed by signs that stand for the brand and have the ability to trigger responses in consumers' minds about that brand. The act of consumption of a product is also a situation that stands for the brand and thus generates signs about it. So, all the elements that compose the identity of a brand can be regarded as signs. Nonetheless, there are also semiotic signs in situations that are not conceived and controlled by the brand managers as the identity of a brand. When a consumer wears clothes of a given brand he is generating signs about that brand whenever he walks down the street and has contact with other consumers. The use that consumers put the products of a brand to is an example of a situation that can generate signs and thus stand for the brand.

I propose that any situation that generates signs can be regarded as having some referential nature. I thus suggest that besides the products and services, the company and its marketing activities, the semiotic object of a brand may be any physical situation that

represents it and has the ability to generate signs. The three kinds of elements that compose the process of representation don't have a fixed semiotic definition. Something can be a semiotic object in one moment and become a sign in another context or situation (Santaella, 2000). I believe that this view can be transposed to regard brands. Referents and signs of a brand have a close nature. A catalogue of a brand is a means of communication and can be regarded as being a referent of a brand, but at the same time one can envisage the catalogue as belonging to the identity of the brand, by presenting layers of signs that consumers can use.

Although Lencastre and Côte-Real (2010) suggest that the semiotic response to a brand comprehends different cognitive, affective and behavioural responses, I believe it is important to clarify this matter. I propose that the interpretant is essentially a response, perceptual and possibly behavioural, that is created through the mix of the potential effects of signs with an interpretative act. In my view a response to the signs of a brand begins by being perceptual and can remain just perceptual – similar to what happens with many of the brands one knows. When a behavioural response happens it results from the perceptual processing of information. The marketing concept of the image of a brand can be regarded as being similar to a semiotic view of perceptual responses to signs. Consumers develop responses to a brand through its signs. This perceptual response is subjected to continuous updates. The concept of semiotic response, just like the one of image, synthesises the end part of the process of representation. In a simple way both concepts encompass all the information that consumers gather about a brand.

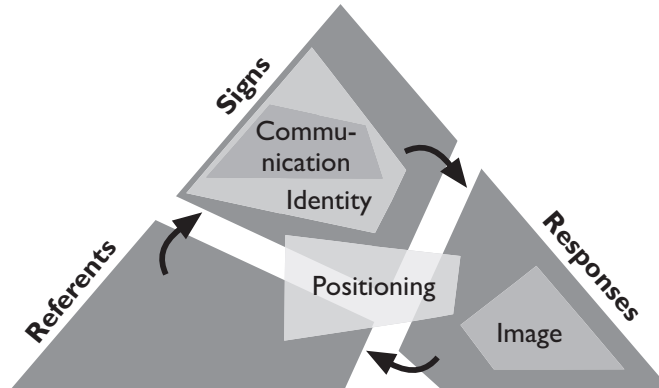
I propose that behavioural responses of consumers have the ability to impact the referents of a brand, namely the sale and use of its products and services. Hence, one can regard the relationship between the referents, signs and responses as truly dynamic with the different elements impacting each other in a cyclical manner. The perceptual responses created through signs about the referents can impact those or other referents and thus continuously influence new processes of representation.

Regarding the positioning of a brand I consider that it is defined by the brand's referents and by the different responses of the consumers. One can envisage positioning as a concept that bridges the company and the market and that is related to the three semiotic elements. Its essence can be seen as nearer to the semiotic concept of interpretant or to the concept of object, but also as an element that is located between both, being also present in the identity and signs of a brand.

From the perspective that brands are defined by a set of relationships between different kinds of elements that are transposed from the semiotic process of representation, I have developed Figure 1. The purpose of the figure is to illustrate the parallel between a semiotic view of brands and what I call traditional marketing concepts.

Figure 1 frames the marketing concepts of communication, identity, image and positioning against the backdrop of the semiotic process of representation. The consumers' responses continuously result from processes of interpretation of the brand's signs. This response can sustain the consumers' behaviours, namely towards the product and services, and thus impact the referents of a brand. With the arrows in the figure I am trying to

Figure 1: Parallels between a Semiotic View of Brands and Traditional Marketing Concepts



illustrate how this dynamic nature of the different semiotic elements upon a brand can be envisaged. The semiotic signs of brands encompass the communication generated in the company and, in a broader way, its identity. Signs stand for the physical manifestations of a brand – its referents – and have the power to create responses. These perceptual and behavioural responses enfold the marketing concept of image. In turn the positioning is defined by the three semiotic elements. I thus propose that a semiotic view of brands can accommodate the marketing concepts of communication, identity, image and positioning.

CONCLUSIONS

Brands are present in the markets not only with their products and services but also with a myriad of signs that mediate their physical reality and the perceptual spaces of consumers. Their semiotic nature is evident in the ability to continuously generate meanings through signs. The use of Peirce's semiotic theory to conceptualise brands allows not only a broad view about how consumers are influenced by the brands' signs but also illustrates their dynamic nature. A brand is thus defined by a net of signs and physical and perceptual elements that compose permanent processes of representation. One can match this semiotic view with the analysed marketing concepts and envisage the identity of a brand and its communication as presenting signs that continuously generate and update the image consumers develop about that brand. This article shows that a semiotic view about brands may be analysed as essentially similar to the presented marketing concepts of identity, communication, image and positioning. This fact does not diminish the relevance of the use of semiotics in the research of brands but, on the contrary, it adds interest and sustains the field of work for the researchers who integrate these domains.

Practical Implications

Semiotic theory allows us to regard brands as a complex and dynamic network of elements. How these different elements are interdependent and compose representations is an

important view for brand management practice. Peirce's works provide the resources to understand how brands become represented in the minds of consumers and thus gain a perceptual existence. A semiotic approach also illustrates the dynamic nature of brands and how their signs are able to continuously influence consumers in never-ending processes of representation. With a semiotic approach managers can obtain a holistic view of how brands are entities endowed with signs that continuously spread in the markets and have the power to create meanings and responses.

The semiotic characterisation of a response as the result of the mix of potential meanings of signs with personal interpretative acts is also a core perspective that managers should take into account. The signs generated in the company will be subject to personal interpretations and that's why different consumers can develop different responses to the same stimuli. Managers can thus understand that they don't determine the meaning of brands but rather can only try to co-create it through the signs they generate. Also, there are signs that are generated outside the company's scope of action which nevertheless have the power to influence consumers. Hence, it is from the wholeness of the signs of brands and by the multiple personal interpretations that the meaning of brands is continuously defined.

Managers should be permanently focused on the consumers' use of the signs of their brands. They should try to generate signs that efficiently impact consumers' perceptions and analyse which other signs are influencing them. This task requires a permanent devotion to the understanding of what is happening in the market. Only with this posture will managers be able to influence in the best way the processes of representation in order to accomplish the objectives defined for the brand.

Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this article lies in the fact that it was developed on an exclusively theoretical frame. Within the broad field of semiotics, as previously explained, only the path established by Charles Peirce was analysed and this was done in very general terms, addressing some main concepts in order to clearly present them.

I suggest the further development of the line of comparison between semiotic theory and the brand management field. This path of research will allow us to bring these theoretical fields together and create views that can be useful not only to the marketing theory but also to the practice of brand management.

Studying how brands are able to continuously generate processes of representation is an avenue of research that I consider full of potential. Also, the features of the action of signs of brands and the possible unconscious, personal and context-dependent use are aspects that I deem important to analyse. How previous consumer knowledge affects the creation of the meanings of brands is an important path of research as well. Finally, the study of the nature of the possible gaps between the meanings that managers intend to create for their brands and the ones that consumers, in fact, ascribe to them is another path of research that is relevant.

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