

CHAPTER 3

Narrativity approaches to branding

F. Xavier Ruiz Collantes and Mercè Oliva

3.1 Introduction

The concept of narrative is of paramount importance across various social sciences and humanities disciplines, including anthropology, psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, sociology and semiotics. The "linguistic turn" that took place in the 20th C. was succeeded, as noted by Fludernik (2009), by a "narrative turn". This Chapter is an attempt at a critical overview of some of the most relevant approaches to branding from narratological or narrative points of view. "Narratology is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that "tell a story" (Bal 1987: 3)" (Fludernik 2009: 105). The aim is to compare and contrast how narrative approaches have been imported in disciplines such as psychology and anthropology, and how they have made inroads into branding research, with a focus on semiotics.

In order to meet this demanding task, four perspectives on brand narrativity have been considered in this Chapter, viz. narratology, semiotics, archetypes and consumer storytelling. The selection criteria consist in their relevance, both for academic scholarship and branding practice.

We have divided this Chapter into five Sections. The first one deals with what today is widely known as the perspective of storytelling in its application to brands. The storytelling approach places narrative at the forefront of professional applications in brand communications. The second Section is devoted to semiotics, and especially structuralist and narrative semiotics. The third Section explains the archetypal models and approaches to branding that are based on anthropological and

psychoanalytical perspectives. The fourth Section is devoted to the study of consumers' narratives concerning their relationships with brands, with a focus on the disciplines of anthropology and cognitive psychology. 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. All along, we have tried to maintain a fruitful dialogue with multiple perspectives on the above research areas that have been voiced from marketing researchers, with view to enhancing the inter-disciplinary relevance of our readings, but also to highlight as yet untapped areas that constitute significant opportunities for marketing research going forward.

3.2 Storytelling in the context of branding

Storytelling is unquestionably a word that is very much in vogue today. In recent years, many authors in the field of advertising and marketing, but also in the fields of management, education and political communication, have been rather keen on exploring communication from the point of view of narrativity. As Fog et al. (2005: 15) contend in their *Storytelling: Branding in practice*, storytelling has become one of the key concepts in understanding how brands are built. As will be shown, storytelling can improve a brand's visibility and achieve higher levels of recall and emotional involvement among receivers.

According to Barthes (1977: 79), narrative is as old as mankind and has been present in all societies throughout the ages. Narrative is one of the main ways whereby we make sense of reality (Fiske 1987: 128) and there is a long academic history of studying and analysing it in semiotic studies of literature, film and television. However, the popularization of the term *storytelling* in these areas is indicative not only of a renewed interest in narrative as a concept, but of sweeping changes in communication strategies in many different areas, including advertising. Salmon (2008: 27-41), for example, refers to the

beginning of a new "narrative age" or "narrative turn" in which storytelling is colonizing areas other than fiction, while Prince (2004: 13) remarks that "narrative has become one of the most common hermeneutic grids of our time" (see also Bal [1987, 2004], and Herman [2005] for a comprehensive overview of classical narratological perspectives, and Nunning [2003] for a comprehensive account of post-classical trends in narrative/narratological research, including inter-disciplinary approaches).

More specifically, in the fields of advertising and branding, Salmon (2008: 38) defines storytelling as an "instrumental use of the story" to build a certain brand image, attribute values and create an emotional bond with the consumer. Salmon describes the birth of storytelling as one more step in the evolution of advertising communication from selling products to selling brands (see also Pérez Latorre 2013: 71; Semprini 1992); from informing about functional attributes to conveying emotions: "The physical product no longer makes the difference. The difference lies in the story, because the story is what drives the bond between the company and the consumer [...] Companies need to communicate based on values, and clearly illustrate how they make a difference" (Fog et al. 2005: 19–21). For Fog et al. there are two basic points of interest in storytelling: values and emotions. According to these authors, a solid brand is built on clearly defined values and an emotional connection with the consumer, while a narrative should communicate these values in a way that is understandable and emotionally appealing. Vincent (2002) also highlights the importance of values and emotions in brand narratives. Moreover, for Dahlen et al. (2010: 13) "the brand with the best story wins" and the main function of marketing communications should be to create and perpetuate deep meaning through narrative (Dahlen et al. 2010: 237).

As we shall see in this Section, storytelling developed in two principal ways. Firstly, manuals have been offered for experts in advertising and marketing in an attempt to provide "recipes"

for better strategic brand communication through stories (Vincent 2002; Fog et al. 2005; Mathews and Wacker 2007; Godin 2012; Dahlen et al. 2010). Secondly, in academic research, storytelling has been coupled with reception analysis in an attempt to determine how consumers read narrative advertising and its effects in terms of brand recall and emotional bonding (Escalas 2004; Woodside et al. 2008; Woodside 2010). In both cases, the main aim is to improve advertising effectiveness through storytelling.

Nevertheless, storytelling is not a perspective with its own methodology. Rather, it borrows concepts from narratology and semiotics. In this Section, we focus on approaches that are concerned with narrative structure, while postponing addressing perspectives in storytelling studies, such as archetypes (Jung 1981, 1989, 1997) and structuralist semiotics (Greimas 1970, 1986), for later Sections.

A key benefit that is constantly highlighted in the use of narrative in brand communications concerns the ability of storytelling to create emotional bonds between brands and consumers (Escalas 2004; Fog et al. 2005; Salmon 2008; Vincent 2002; Woodside et al. 2008; Woodside 2010). For example, Vincent kicks off his book *Legendary brands* by stating that legendary brands are based on narratives, which in turn is what allows them to generate empathy with the consumer (Vincent 2002: 8). Moreover, stories stir emotions and manipulate logical processing in such impactful ways as to elide rational argumentation (Vincent 2002: 28-32). According to Vincent (2002: 33-34), the principal reason for the success of brands like Kodak does not lie in technical superiority, but in a tradition of emotional advertising (for example, the *True colours* and *Kodak moment* campaigns). Godin (2012: 159) stresses that “a great story is believed and its lie is retold”. For Ramzy and Korten (2006: 172), storytelling has been used by heritage brands such as Chivas and VSM to reconnect with an alienated consumer base in an emotionally compelling way.

According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010: 21), who draw on the work of cognitive psychologists such as Bruner, the use of narrative in brand communications is an aid to memory, a way of making sense of reality, of strengthening emotional connections and of identifying with particular brands. The narrative form is effective in creating emotional relationships and/or extending and deepening brand recall, precisely because individuals think narratively (Woodside et al. 2008; see also Escalas 2004, and Dahlen et al. 2010: 247). Moreover, human memory itself is based on stories (Woodside 2010: 532). Thus, using narrative to convey a particular brand image is perceived as a way of adapting advertising communication to the way consumers actually process information. The storytelling perspective also emphasizes how brands are used by consumers to build and communicate a specific identity (Escalas 2004; Fog et al. 2005; Vincent 2002). At this point, the theory of storytelling converges with the analysis of consumers' narratives, as will be shown in greater detail in due course.

A principal objective of storytelling authors is to identify the "principles of a well-told story" and how to apply them to advertising and branding. For example, Fog et al. (2005: 28-45) identify four elements of good storytelling. The first is the message: all brand narratives should have a clearly defined message and should transmit the brand's core values. The second is conflict: "a good story always centres on the struggle to attain, defend or regain harmony" (Fog et al. 2005: 33), yet this conflict should not have an immediate or predictable solution. At the same time, a story should not have too many conflicts in order to avoid distracting or confusing the audience. The third is the characters, who should create an emotional bond with the audience. Finally, the fourth element is the plot (i.e., the narrative form and how the story is told), which is very important for the audience's experience. In a nutshell, for Fog et al. a good brand narrative should convey a brand's core values and at the same time it should be entertaining, accessible and emotive. Fog

et al. also recommend serial narratives, since they can create a long-term relationship with an audience, and stories with strong inter-textual references as a way of appealing to an audience's prior knowledge.

Vincent (2002) also identifies four key elements of storytelling: plot, characters, themes (values) and aesthetics. These four elements are very similar to those highlighted by Fog et al. Vincent (2002: 135) also stresses the importance of creating stories that maximize the emotional impact on an audience and their involvement. To this end, every narrative should have compelling characters who must overcome great obstacles in order to achieve something difficult but possible (Vincent 2002: 127). Moreover, every story should have a well-constructed plot and a satisfactory ending. Finally, the author encourages the generation of "original" narratives, albeit based on "universal plots" (Vincent 2002: 73) and genre codes (Vincent 2002: 138).

Vincent (2002: 55–57, 122, 135, 139-141), Fog et al. (2005: 43), Woodside et al. (2008: 101) and Woodside (2010: 534-536) recommend using the canonical narrative structure, which is quite representative of modern Hollywood films (see Bordwell 2006). Thus, for these authors, the creation of a "good story" usually involves the events being organized in a structure in three Aristotelian acts (situation, complication and resolution) which in turn progressively create a dramatic curve (see Campbell 1959). In the first act, the protagonist and the conflict are presented. Usually, an event disrupts the hero's world and forces him to embark on an adventure. The second act tells of the obstacles the hero faces in pursuit of his goals, while the helpers are also introduced. Finally, in the third act, the moment of greatest dramatic intensity (the climax) occurs, followed by the resolution of the conflict or ultimate failure. Papadatos (2006: 383) contends that this narrative structure can be understood as a "universal sequence of events", since it is not only present in

literature, film and advertising, but also used by consumers spontaneously to tell their stories involving brands.

In addition, storytelling authors understand stories as a transition from balance to imbalance, and then back to balance (Woodside 2010: 534-535). Although not mentioned explicitly, this is the model of minimal narrative as defined by Todorov (quoted in Fiske 1987: 138-139). In this context, desire is identified with the motivating force behind action (Woodside 2010; Vincent 2002: 135) and causality with the principle that adjoins the various events (Vincent 2002: 52).

Examples of campaigns based on storytelling that have achieved this emotional connection with their audience, in addition to getting across a clear message about the brand, include the famous "1984" Apple advertisement¹, in which the brand is presented as a rebel fighting against the establishment, thus linking the brand with the values of individuality and creativity. In this campaign, the aim of storytelling was to transmit the values or the "core story" (Fog et al. 2005) coherently and consistently via a brand's communications. For Vincent (2002: 14, 46-47), this advertising is an example of how narrative advertisements attain to grab viewers' attention in a media-saturated environment while instilling a heroic narrative in the minds of its audience. Ramzy and Korten (2006) highlight the case of Chivas in order to suggest that narrative brand communications should be based on the brand's own story.

As for the involvement of the audience/consumers, using narratives as a communicative strategy is seen as a way to encourage their participation. For example, Pérez Latorre (2013) addresses the ways whereby advertising narrative encourages a participatory response from the audience through three strategies: brand narratives oriented towards the creation of metaphors for universally common or daily matters (e.g., Levi's

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNy-7jv0XSc>

"Odyssey" advertisement²), intrigue narratives (e.g., Sony Playstation's "Mental Wealth"³) and narratives geared towards imaginative play (e.g., Martini and Red Bull advertisements).

Other researchers focus on how brands encourage consumers to create narratives. Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) show how consumers were inspired to create their own stories related to the concept of "real beauty" by *Dove's* "The Evolution" spot,⁴ which communicated the notion that "the idea of beauty created by the beauty industry is not real". For Singh and Sonnenburg (2012), what motivated consumers to take part in the brand's narrative was precisely the conflict conveyed in the advertisement, since conflict "makes us act". Fog et al. (2005: 173–193) also consider how, in the current context of digital media and participatory culture, many brands incorporate consumers' stories in their communication campaigns. For example, Starbucks organized a contest that invited couples to share their real stories about how they met at a Starbucks outlet. Virality is another effect of storytelling, since good stories incite repetition by an audience (Godin 2012: 159, see also Jenkins et al. 2013 and Gray 2010).

Despite a long academic tradition in this field, the proponents of the storytelling approach in branding do not base their texts on specific narratological theories. Instead, these authors borrow their concepts from popular screenwriting manuals such as McKee's (1997, cited in Vincent 2002: 28, 121-164, 307-308; Fog et al. 2005; Woodside et al. 2008: 98, 101, 105-107; Woodside 2010: 534-536) or Howard and Mabley's, (1993, cited in Vincent 2002: 135). These manuals' main aim is to teach would-be screenwriters the principles and conventions of storytelling. Moreover, they offer a simplified version of narratological concepts and theories in order to facilitate their application to screenwriting.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KofgtfivYfg>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDdNn0x7Y0Y>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U>

As noted above, there is a long theoretical tradition in narratology, spanning both literary and filmic narratives (Genette 1972; Ricoeur 1985; Bordwell 1986; Bal 1987; Chatman 1989; Casetti and Di Chio 1991; Kozloff 1992; Gaudreault and Jost 1995; Herman 2005; Fludernik 2009). A key distinction in classical narratology is the one between story (*fabula*) and plot (*sjuzet*). In short, this distinction concerns the difference between what is narrated on a story level (*fabula*) and how this story is emplotted (*sjuzet*) (cf. Chatman 1989: 19-20, and Herman et al. 2005). This distinction, which was popularized by the Russian formalists (e.g., Propp, Shklovsky), permeates the diverse landscape of narrative theories that have been put forward over the past fifty years (e.g., Genette's [1972] tripartite classification into discourse, narrative content and the act of narrative production; Bal's [1987] classification into *fabula*, story, text; or Bremond's [1973] distinction between *raconté* and *racontant*). Furthermore, concepts such as diegesis, focalization and narrative functions are instrumental in narrative analysis. However, the conceptually rich narratological tradition tends to be ignored by storytelling authors.

It is worth noting in passing that there is a group of authors such as Kozloff (1992) and Moreno Sánchez (2003) who, although not identifying themselves with the storytelling approach, have been approaching advertising narratively. Both Kozloff and Sánchez Moreno apply narratological terminology to advertisements to demonstrate that advertisements are also narratives that can be analyzed like any other narrative text. Nevertheless, they do not emphasize the implications for building brand image.

To conclude, although works by academic and commercial authors alike who follow the "storytelling" path in the field of branding and advertising have proliferated in recent years, they have largely concentrated on how certain emotional responses may be elicited from consumers, without addressing the expressive dimension in detail.

Using a simplified narratological approach constrains the possibility for understanding narrative advertising. From a storytelling point of view, it may seem that it is easy to understand what makes a good story, but there is nothing more difficult than actually creating one. As Bordwell (1986) has shown in the case of cinema, applying a full-fledged narratological model to narrative analysis can be very useful in understanding narrative meaning and the audience's experience and pleasures (see also Grodal 1999; Alwitt 2002; Herman 2003, 2005; Plantinga 2009). Furthermore, the rich terminology developed by narratology theorists not only enables a deep understanding of narratives' meanings; it can also function as a generative model for fostering creativity.

Finally, although storytelling authors suggest that the main aim of storytelling should be to convey and communicate a brand's core values effectively, they do not outline rules of transformation to explain the transition from story (plot, characters, conflict, etc.) to values. As will be shown in the next Section, this issue has been amply scrutinized in narrative semiotics.

3.3 Semiotics, narrative and brands

Within the semiotic discipline, structuralist semiotics has placed the greatest emphasis on brands from a narrative point of view. Peircean semiotics, on the other hand, has scrutinized the specifically narrative aspects of brand signification to a lesser extent.

By drawing on the inaugural and seminal work by Propp (1970), structuralist semiotics has been particularly concerned with studying narrative structures ever since its inception (Barthes 1966; Genette 1966; Todorov 1966; Metz 1968; Todorov 1969; Genette 1972; Bremond 1973). The scrutiny of brand narratology via structuralist semiotics is replete with significant complexities, since narrativity lies at the very core of structuralist semiotics (Greimas 1970; Greimas and Courtés 1979;

Courtés 1980; Greimas 1986). In fact, Greimasian semiotics may be considered to be a perspective based on the principle of pan-narrativity that postulates that all kinds of texts can be understood and analyzed as constructions of narrative signification. Thus, any approach to brand signification via Greimasian semiotics should be conceived as a narrative approach.

The Greimasian semiotic perspective is organized as a generative model (the “generative trajectory of meaning”), with different levels of depth and rules of semantic transformation, that describe how a level is generated from the previous one (Greimas and Courtés 1979). The generative trajectory of meaning comprises three inter-locking levels, the depth structural one, the middle or semio-narrative level and the surface or discursive level. These hierarchically ordered levels proceed from the manifest or surface text to its deeper organizational forms, from the particular to the general and from the concrete to the abstract (Bianchi 2011: 255), and vice versa.

At the deepest level of the trajectory, values (i.e., a brand’s values) or *semes* (as elementary units of meaning) are structured according to the logic of the semiotic square (Greimas and Courtés 1979), that is through the logical relations of contrariety, contradiction and implication (Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2).

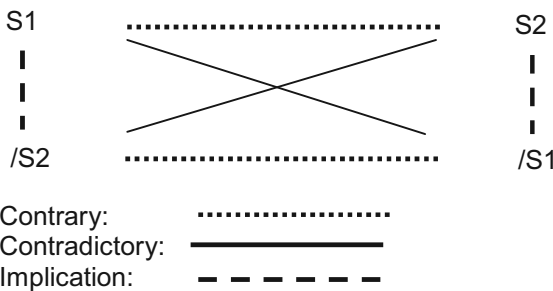


Figure 3.1: The semiotic square (adapted from Greimas 1970)

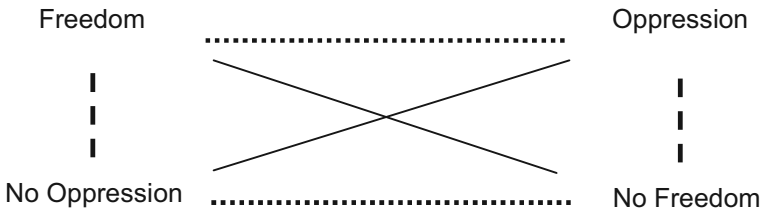


Figure 3.2: Semiotic square of the brand value “freedom”

On the middle level of the trajectory, a narrative syntax and a bespoke morphology of signs are posited; the syntax includes the actantial model and the canonical narrative schema, while the morphologically distinct signs consist of actants (Greimas 1970; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Courtés 1980; Greimas 1986).

The actantial model posits that every narrative revolves around a set of unchanging, universal syntactic positions occupied by actants (that should not be confused with manifest discursive actors). For example, a brand may assume different actantial positions, such as: Subject, the subject that performs a mission; Object, what is sought by performing the mission; Helper, the one that supports the Subject or makes its task easier; Opponent, the one that hinders the subject’s performance; Sender, the one that gives something to another actant, the latter being the Receiver (Fig. 3.3).

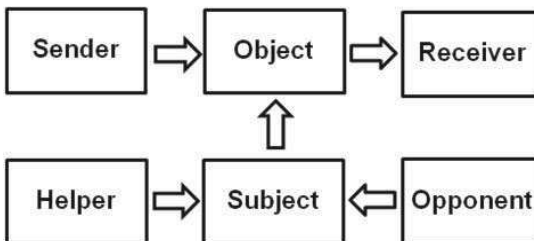


Figure 3.3: Greimas’s actantial model (adapted from Greimas 1986)

The characters in a manifest narrative (that is, at the surface or discursive level), whether they are figurative or abstract, individuals or groups, always have an actantial position at the semio-narrative level that gives them meaning and function within the narrative.

The actantial model is directly related to the canonical narrative schema. In its standard version (Greimas 1970; Courtés 1980; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Greimas 1986), the canonical schema suggests that a narrative in its entirety consists of four phases: contract, competence, performance and sanction. These phases are not ordered chronologically, but logically, since each phase involves the previous one. In the contract stage, the so-called "manipulation" involves a subject, the Sender, ordering another, the Receiver, to carry out a mission with view to acquiring a desired object (such as a brand value, benefit, attribute). During the competence phase, the Subject acquires and proves that he/she possesses the skills and motivation to carry out the mission he/she has undertaken. The performance phase refers to the undertaking of the mission that may end in success or failure, i.e., achievement in attaining the Object of desire or not. The sanction phase involves an assessment of the performance of the mission that was established in the first phase and a positive or negative acknowledgment of the subject who carried it out. In fact, the different actants are distributed throughout the phases of the narrative schema. Thus, the Sender and Receiver are positioned in the contract and sanction phases, whereas other actants such as the Subject, Object, Helper, Opponent and Anti-Subject take on meaning in the competence and performance phases (Greimas and Courtés 1979). Finally, at the discursive level, the narrative is further concretized by being inscribed in actors, actions, places and times.

In this generative model, the semio-narrative level is essential as it confers a structural organizational principle to all discourses by connecting the semantic values of the deep level with the discursive configurations of the surface level. It is,

therefore, the semio-narrative level that lends narrativity to brand communications.

It should be understood that narrativity, from a Greimasian standpoint, is an organizing principle that confers structural coherence to discourses, regardless of genre. As an organizing principle, narrativity should not be confused with how narratives or stories are often understood in an intuitive manner, that is as a succession of actions by a protagonist, causally and temporally ordered with a beginning and an end (at least not coincidentally with the deployment of a story at the surface discursive level). The principle of narrativity may be applied not only to a TV advertisement that "tells a story" about the life of a character in relation to a brand, but also to a logo, a visual symbol, a slogan, a vitrine or a row of shelves in a retail outlet. Any brand communication vehicle can be analyzed in semio-narrative terms.

Semprini (1992) offers a simplified version of Greimas's generative trajectory of meaning, applied to the study of brand identity. This model has three levels, in line with the original Greimasian conception, viz. (from the deepest to the surface) the axiological, the narrative and the surface or discursive levels (Fig.3.4 and Fig.3.5).

The axiological level, which can be roughly equated to Greimas's depth or elementary structure of signification, corresponds to a brand's core values. For example, in the case of Levi's (Fig. 3.5), the brand values are non-conformism, freedom and masculinity, which are encountered in all of Levi's communications.

The narrative level is equivalent to Greimas's semio-narrative level: narrative syntax, role attribution and narrativization. As above mentioned, this is the level that lends narrativity to a brand's communications. In the example of Levi's (Fig. 3.5), the narrative structure features confrontation with a dichotomous structure.

The surface or discursive level corresponds to the discursive level of the Greimasian model. This is the level where values and abstract narrative structures are concretized in characters (actors), times, spaces, as well as rhetorical and aesthetical resources. In the Levi's example offered by Semprini (Fig. 3.5), the brand's values and narrative structures, identified in the axiological and narrative levels, are embodied by laid-back men and characters with beautiful and sensual bodies (actors), who appear in advertisements that narrate stories of seduction (theme), set in the 1950s (time) in the American countryside (space).

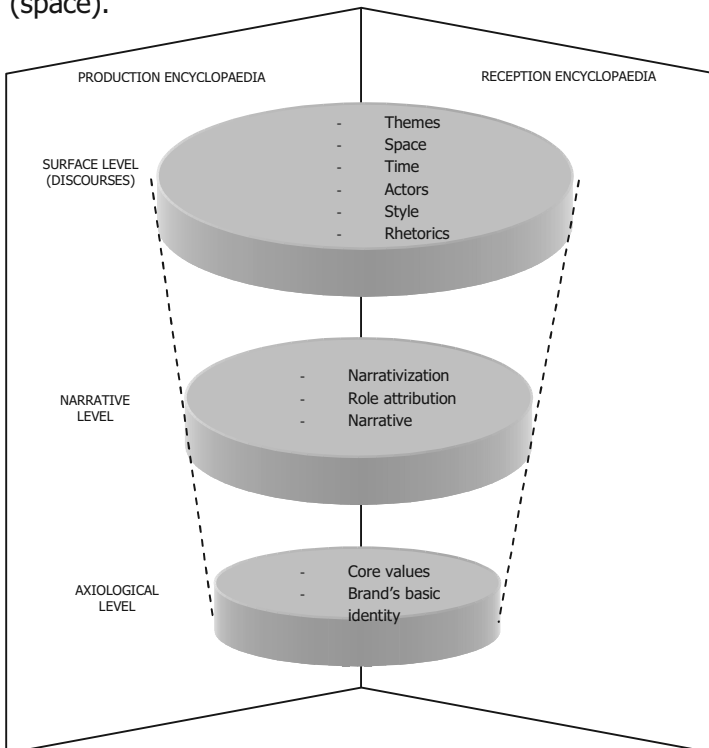


Figure 3.4: Brand identity system (adapted from Semprini 1992: 55)

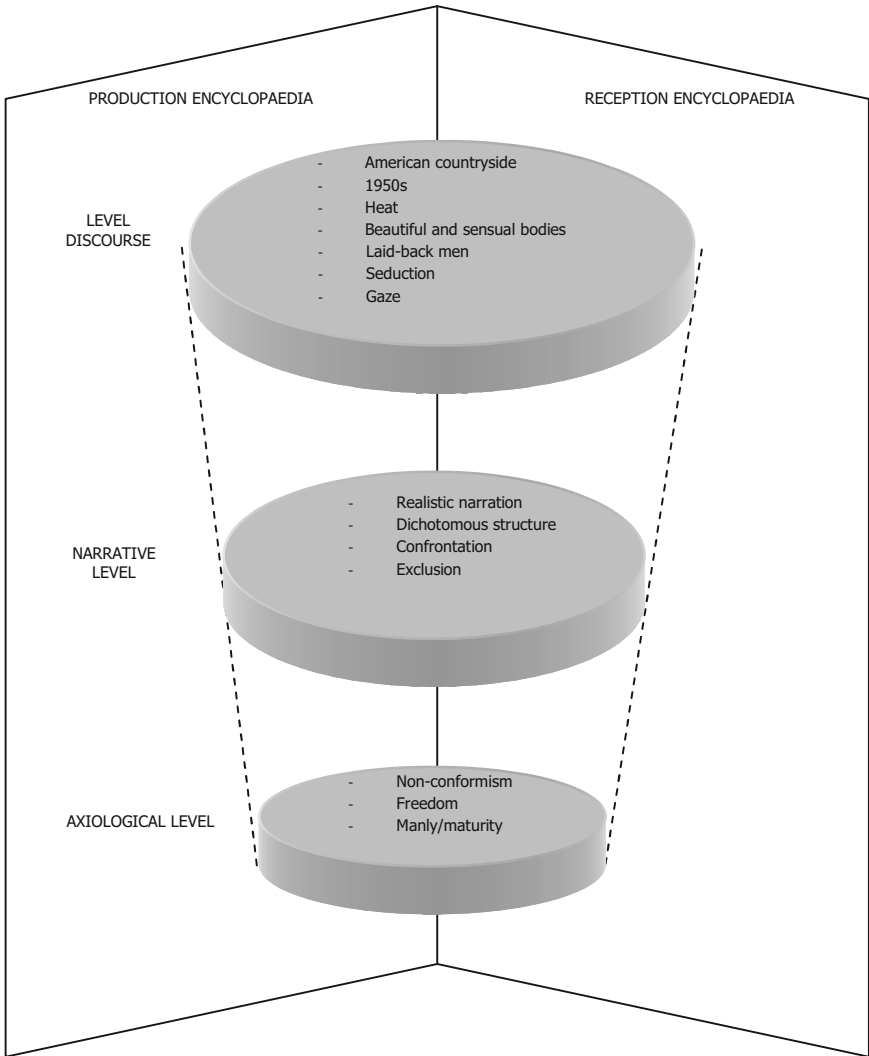


Figure 3.5: Levi's brand identity before 1990 (adapted from Semprini 1992: 59)

The component of the generative trajectory that has had the most lasting impact in semiotic analyses of brands and brand communications is the semiotic square. In this context, the square of consumption values proposed by Floch (1990) is an exemplary application. This square organizes the exemplary semantic universe of a brand's values into four types defined by logical relations of contrariety, contradiction and implication: utopian, practical, ludic and critical values (Fig. 3.6).

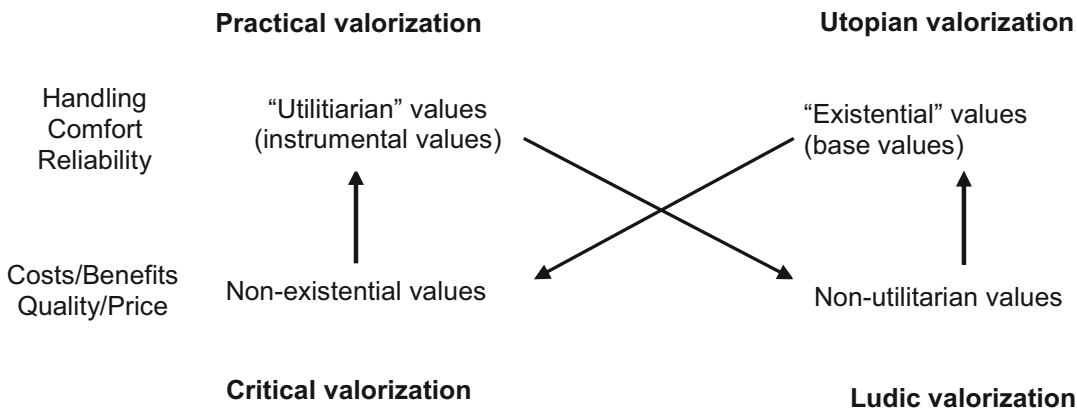


Figure 3.6: Square of consumer values (adapted from Floch 1993: 148)

The prevalence of the semiotic square in structuralist semiotic applications to brands reflects the fact that the core of a brand's meaning is identified in branding with a set of values that endow it with character and position it compared to other brands. This set of values can be interpreted, in a typical Greimasian vein, as an axiological semantic organization of positions in a semiotic square. The appeal of this model lies in the fact that it can be used intuitively by marketing professionals, thus enabling the

development of alternative positioning routes (Mick and Oswald 2006; Rossolatos 2014a). Furthermore, the popularity of Floch's semiotic square of consumption values is undoubtedly attributable to its all-encompassing character and to the reduction of all possible types of consumption values to four basic categories (regardless of the fact that it was developed against the background of a single brand's – i.e., Citroen – advertising communications).

The signification of brands is thus reduced to static models of values that are presented as place-holders awaiting to be occupied, regardless of the narrative actions that must be carried out in order to bring about axiological shifts. Nonetheless, narrativity is based on transformations from a state defined by a value to another state defined by a different, contrary or contradictory value. At this juncture, one must consider that a minimal narrative implies the transformation or movement between two successive, different states-of-being (Courtés 2003) that takes place not at the deep level of signification, but at the semio-narrative level. The logical relations between the values of the semiotic square at the axiological level is what makes the transformation at the semio-narrative and discursive levels possible and gives it meaning, since this transformation does not proceed from one value to another unrelated value, but between values that have a logical relationship. This transformation is reflected differently on each level, based on each level's unique morphology and syntax.

For example, a non-narrative semiotic model of a brand's deep meaning would posit that a particular brand is characterized by the value of "freedom" in a semiotic square where it is positioned in comparison to other values based on logical relationships ("oppression", "no freedom", "no oppression"). However, a semiotic model that takes into account narrativity also considers that the deep meaning of a brand is defined by the transformation between two states, for example by passing from one state defined by the value "oppression" to another state

defined by the value "freedom". In this case, the transformation is related to a story of "liberation" at the semio-narrative and discursive levels, rendered possible by the logical relationship between the semiotic square's values (Fig. 3.7). These axiological transformations occur at the semio-narrative level as transformations between states-of-being of subjects who perform actions.

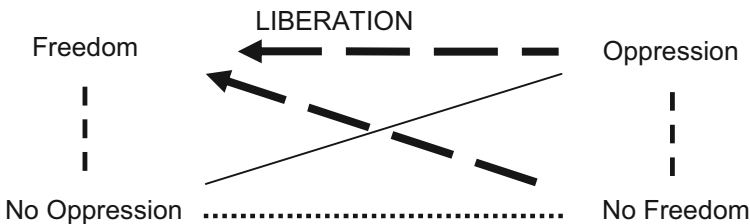


Figure 3.7: Liberation as the deep meaning of a brand

Although Bianchi (2011), Codeluppi (2013) and others (Mick et al. 2004; Mick and Oswald 2006) emphasize the aptness of Greimas's narrative semiotic approach for analyzing advertising discourse, the narrative dimension is unduly focused upon. It is the semiotic square (which corresponds to the axiological level) that has been mostly used by analysts, at the expense of the principle of narrativity.

In this regard, the study by Dano et al. (2003) on cosmetics brands for men is noteworthy, as it compares consumers' perceptions about the use of these brands alongside their communication strategies. Similar analyses have been conducted by Kessous and Roux (2008) on brands related to the concept of nostalgia, by Anido Freire (2014) with regard to luxury brands and by Rossolatos (2012b) with regard to the invariable semantic universe of Johnnie Walker throughout different advertising executions. In the same vein, it is worth looking at the analysis by Ourahmoune et al. (2014) on how brands have

appropriated the discourse of sustainability, as well as how this discourse is related to gender stereotypes in their advertising communications. These authors use the semiotic analysis of colours, shapes, postures, movements, sounds and verbal language as expressive ground, then identify "recurring themes and narratives", and eventually construct a semiotic square that enables them to distinguish between two main types of discourse on sustainability: narratives of "control" linked to traditional masculine values, and narratives of "co-operation" based on traditionally feminine values. Other interesting studies are those by Veg and Nyeck (2007) and Ourahmoune (2008) on the representation of masculinity in advertising, as well as by Oswald (2003) on representing the family. These works examine the dialogue between social values and advertising (see also Codeluppi 2008).

Among the narratological aspects of the Greimasian semiotic perspective, the actantial model is undoubtedly the most extensively applied one (Greimas and Courtés 1979). Among the earliest studies that analyzed advertising narratives via the Greimasian actantial model is *The language of advertising* by Vestergaard and Schrøder (1985). These authors contend that in advertising messages the advertised product does not always perform the role of the Object, but usually functions as a Helper and Object-Sender, whereas the consumer usually assumes the position of Subject and Object-Receiver. The Object is a positively connoted value that can be related to the product. For example, in an advertisement for Sanatogen Multivitamin, the Object to which the Subject (consumer) aspires is "good health", while the product is the one who will help the Subject in achieving this goal.

Other authors, such as Bertrand (1988) and Floch (1990), have adopted a piecemeal outlook towards the generative trajectory of meaning in their analyses of advertising messages. Bertrand (1988), in his analysis of an advertising campaign for Black & White whisky, concludes that the two basic values

conveyed by the campaign are conciliation and complicity. Firstly, all of the elements of the campaign refer to the idea of reconciling opposites, for example by assigning positive values to "black and white" (perfection) and "neither black nor white" (life), while refusing absolute values ("black or white"). In other words, according to Bertrand, the campaign emphasizes the "&" in Black & White, focusing the consumer's attention on the name of the brand and its semantic richness. Secondly, the campaign manages to create consumer complicity through irony, by using double meanings and by leveraging consumers' recognition of the semiotic sophistication of the messages (Bertrand 1988: 287). However, although the author discusses the discursive and axiological levels in some detail, he eschews the narrative dimension of the campaign and hence the semio-narrative level. Rather, the author merely states that some images from the campaign represent states, whereas others represent actions (playing on reconciling the identified pairs of opposites).

Other studies display a greater sensitivity towards the narrative dimension of brand communications. This is the case with the analysis of Google's advertising by Scolari (2008). Scolari highlights the narrative potential of any brand in the context of possible worlds. In his analysis, he concludes that Google constructs its image from values (axiological level) such as simplicity, speed and usability which are related to certain features of its browser's design (discursive level). Finally, for Scolari, Google is constructed as a brand via the user's experience, which can be understood (and analyzed) as a narrative: Google places consumers at the centre of the interaction process, assigning them the role of hero (Subject), while Google assumes the role of Helper (semio-narrative level).

Ruiz Collantes developed a methodological framework based on narrative semiotics in order to analyze the discursive and semio-narrative levels in concert, while identifying systematic attributions of actantial roles to social groups in large samples of texts (see, for example, Ruiz Collantes et al. 2011). In the field of

advertising, he applied this framework to institutional advertising in Spain so as to identify what type of image is constructed of the Spanish State, as a brand, and of its citizens (Ruiz Collantes 2009a, 2009b; Ruiz Collantes et al. 2009). In this study, the actantial positions that were identified consist of the State as Sender who assigns missions to citizens, and the citizens as Receivers who must comply with what has been assigned to them. A hierarchical reversal is thus created: it is not the State that must carry out the tasks that the citizens democratically decide, but the opposite—it is the State that decides and the citizens who perform. Moreover, in the few cases where the State carries out the missions, it prescribes these missions for itself and always demonstrates that it is competent and achieves positive results, while it is recognized as a hero in the sanction phase. On the other hand, when the citizens assume the role of Subject, their skills are questioned and they never receive recognition as heroes who have succeeded in their mission.

Ruiz Collantes (2011) also suggests that a brand's deep meaning is constructed through a narrative framework, that is a core narrative in which the brand and the consumer are assigned roles. Thus, this narrative framework is generative in the sense that new stories can be created from it.

Last, but not least, there are studies where Greimas's actantial model has been extensively applied to advertising. Pineda et al. (2013) examine the role assigned to the product in 72 examples of corporate advertisement, such as BMW's *The Hire*⁵ or Mercedes' *Drive&Seek*.⁶ Sánchez Corral (1997), in a comprehensive and exhaustive work, analyzes the discursive and semio-narrative levels to identify consumers' and brands' narrative roles in advertising.

In addition to applications of the actantial model in analysing advertising discourse, other branding aspects, such as

⁵ <http://www.bmwblog.com/2009/08/25/video-collection-bmw-films-the-hire/>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nf75iUZVn7Y&noredirect=1>

packaging, have also been addressed (also see Ventura, this Volume). For example, Bobrie (2008) uses the Greimasian narrative model to analyze the signification of packaging and shopping areas. Bobrie explains that packaging usually conveys a very specific narrative: (1) The brand presents itself as a credible Sender, in order to give credibility to the packaging's narrative; (2) The product's qualities are demonstrated in the images and texts that show the product in action; (3) The consumer is also portrayed, as well as the benefits the product offers them; (4) The packaging narrative represents the consumer's satisfaction as a result of the product benefits.

Ruiz Collantes (1999) analyzes the Nike swoosh logo alongside plastic, formal, compositional and chromatic dimensions to define the narrative communicated via this symbol-logo. In this narrative, the characteristics are defined for the Subject/hero, the Object/goal and the transformation/action to be carried out by the Subject to achieve the Object. Based on the adopted perspective, Nike's graphic logo-symbol is a communication device expressing a story with a minimal narrative structure that can be applied to other forms of brand communications.

Since in structuralist semiotics the brand is understood as a structure of levels from the deepest to the surface, a fundamental theoretical and methodological concern for some authors has been to establish models that explain how the transition from one level to another is brought about, from the points of view of analysis, of the construction of brands, and of their communication. These models also aim to ensure discursive coherence and communicative consistency amongst the different levels of a brand's trajectory, as well as throughout its communicative manifestations.

Floch (1990) and Semprini (1992, 2006) highlight that a brand's meaning is structured and constructed through different levels of depth and analyze some of the interactions between these levels. Rossolatos (2014a, 2014b) addresses the issues of

brand coherence and communicative consistency between the levels in his model of the brand trajectory of signification, by drawing on the Greimasian generative trajectory as a blueprint, which is subsequently revised to incorporate advances in post-Greimasian textual semiotics, rhetorical semiotics and advertising rhetoric, among other fields. The author outlines a methodological framework comprising nine steps for ensuring semantic coherence among the levels of the trajectory, while connecting brand values with the textual manifestations of a brand's advertising communication. The framework explicitly challenges the binarist rationale that underpinned the original Greimasian generativist model in favour of a connectionist approach, using associative networks that work both synchronically and diachronically and, moreover, in a competitive setting, rather than resting at the level of single brand communications.

As regards more peripheral, yet still crucial applications of structuralist semiotics in branding research, a limited number of studies have been devoted to the analysis of passions in advertising narratives, as well as to the implications of corporeal, tensive, and aesthetic elements (Melchiorri 2002; Reza and Nassim 2010; Bianchi 2011; Boutaud and Bertin 2012). In the context of narrative semiotics, "passions" should not be confused with "emotions", from the point of view of psychological theories as applied in marketing research. In a narrative semiotic framework, passions should be considered as a fundamental element of the narrative logic since they affect characters and the story's development (Greimas and Fontanille 1991). Characters not only perform actions, but also feel passions such as love, envy, desire, ambition, happiness, and so on.

The opposition between actions and passions is based on the opposition between *actions (doing)* and *states (being)*, and their modal configurations. Passions refer to an actor's *being* or *state*. They should be understood as "effects of meaning" and not as psychological states of empirical subjects. These meanings are

not universal, since they take form and are manifested discursively within culture-specific settings.

In this context, semiotic states (*being, doing and having*) that are modalized by *wanting-to, having-to, being-able-to, knowing-how-to*, can be related to certain passions. For example, modal positions such as *wanting to be, knowing not being able to be* or *believing not to be* will produce *frustration* and *bitterness*. From a structuralist semiotic point of view, passions should be understood as syntagmatic articulations of different phases, which conform to pathemic schemes. For example, Fig. 3.8 displays Greimas's syntagmatic articulation of *anger*. Moreover, passions and actions are interrelated in a narrative: for example, an action can cause a passion and a passion can trigger an action.



Figure 3.8: Anger sequence (adapted from Greimas 1983: 226)

In the branding scholarship, the semiotics of passion is a considerably under-researched area that merits further investigation, since it enables us to analyze a significant element of brands' narratives: consumers' and brands' passions, which influence their actions in the narratives where they appear as characters.

In general, studies of brand narratives tend to focus on the level of the enunciated, at the expense of the study of enunciative structures. The concept of enunciation refers to the act of using (any kind of) language to produce an *énoncé* (the end-product of an enunciation) in a particular spatio-temporal setting (see Benveniste 1966; Genette 1972; Benveniste 1974; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Gaudreault and Jost 1995). In every discourse, the subject of the enunciation (the subject who communicates) portrays him or herself as enunciator of the

enunciated discourse, as well as the subject who is addressed in this communicative act. Thus, the communicative exchange is represented in the subject's discourse itself. In other words, the subjects that take part in the communicative act (*enunciator* and *enunciatee*), as well as the spatial and temporal coordinates in which the communication takes place, are all represented in the discourse (marks of enunciation). *Enunciator* and *enunciatee* are textual roles that should not be confused with the empirical author and receptor of a message. The *enunciator*, or implicit author, can be embodied by different subjects that narrate, communicate or participate as characters in the story, who have knowledge, beliefs, passions and who are situated in a specific time and space that may be represented through *deictics* (designating words, expressions or visual elements whose meaning depends on the context in which they are used, for example pronouns such as *I* or *this*; see Benveniste 1966, 1974; Pericot 2002). A story can also be narrated by many voices and viewpoints (enunciative polyphony). These implicit or explicit enunciators address their stories to another subject, the enunciatee. The enunciatee is also represented in the text as a subject with a specific identity and with knowledge, opinions, viewpoints, passions (see Bally 1965; Benveniste 1966; Genette 1972; Benveniste 1974; Greimas and Courtés 1979; Ducrot 1984; Nadal 1990; Cervoni 1987; Gaudreault and Jost 1995; Filinich 1998; Culioli 1999).

An enunciative structure can be identified in every story. This level does not correspond to the story that is narrated, but to the narration act itself, in which *enunciator* and *enunciatee* establish a communicative relationship. When an empirical author creates a narrative, not only he or she creates a story (in which characters act in order to achieve some goal), but he or she also creates an enunciative structure, circumscribing the relationship between enunciator and enunciatee.

Several authors have analyzed the enunciation of advertising discourses (Pérez Tornero 1983; Gavard-Perret and

Moscarola 1998; Steffens de Castro 2004; López Díaz 2006; Sánchez Corral 2006; Skibicki, 2007; Garrido Lora et al. 2009; Karamifar 2009). In contrast, little work has been done regarding the implications of enunciative structures for branding, although they play a significant role in building a brand's identity and personality. In brand communication, the brand itself is portrayed as the enunciator of the advertising message—an enunciator with specific traits. Thus, from a narrative viewpoint, a brand should be understood not only as a character in an advertisement's narrative, but also as a subject that narrates (whether it is represented implicitly or explicitly, as an invisible storyteller or personified as a character, as a single enunciator or as multiple voices) and in its narration portrays itself and consumers as enunciator and enunciatees respectively. The brand as enunciator should be understood as a central element of a brand's identity.

Semprini (1992) examines the enunciative structures of brand communications and how the brand and the consumer are represented in terms of encyclopaedias of production and reception (Fig. 3.9). Following Eco (1981), the concept of "encyclopaedia" does not refer to a dictionary, but to individual subjects' organized networks of knowledge and information about both real and possible worlds (for example, those of fiction). The concept of "encyclopaedia" also refers to the interpretative competences of a text's model author and model reader. Both model author and model reader are not empirical subjects, but enunciative subjects, textual figures whose traits can be inferred from a text. Every text presupposes that its author and reader possess a certain encyclopaedia and, at the same time, every text may equip its reader with new competences and knowledge. If a reader does not possess the competences presupposed by a text, he or she will not be able to actualize and reconstruct its meaning. In this sense, a text's author has to keep in mind the reader's encyclopaedia when creating a text and a text's reader has to keep in mind the author's encyclopaedia when interpreting a text.

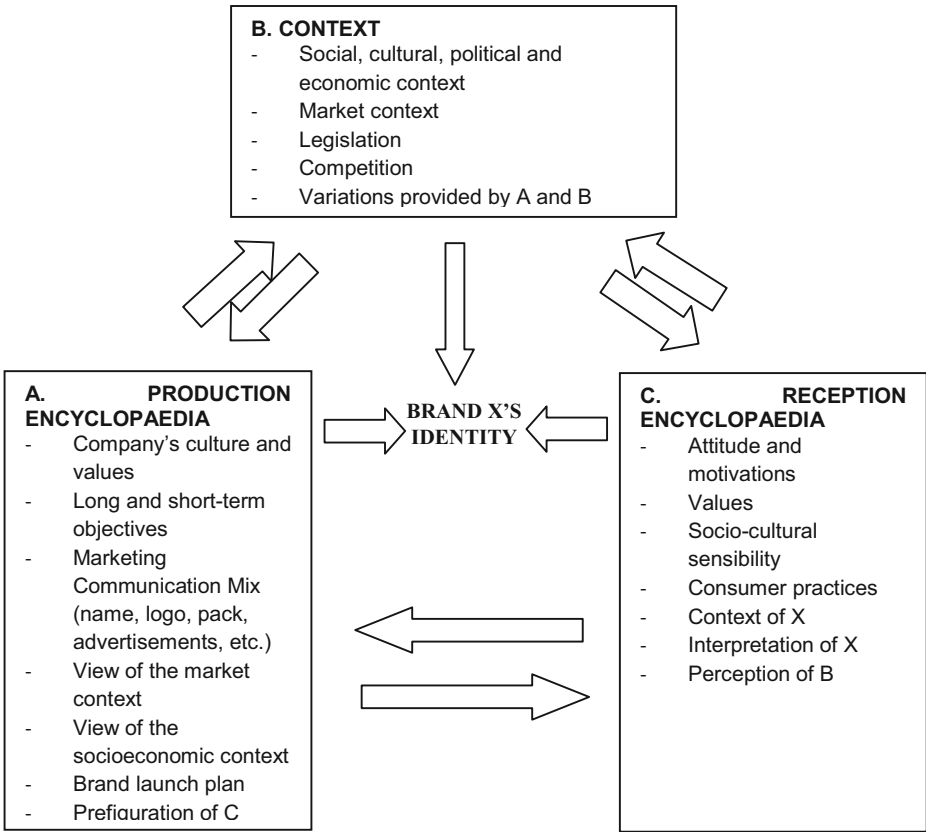


Figure 3.9: Brand identity creation (adapted from Semprini 1992: 41)

Finally, some fundamental questions have been raised about the applicability of the standard approach of structuralist semiotics to the analysis and construction of brands. Rossolatos (2012b, 2014b) presents a crucial issue while questioning whether the Greimasian canonical narrative schema and actantial model are directly applicable to brands as structures of signification and to

brand communications. In this respect, the author points to the fact that the canonical narrative schema has been defined based on an analysis of literary texts, which is a very different genre from brand communications. Rossolatos argues that when analyzing and structuring brands one should take into account how the elements of the planes of expression and content may be correlated with a view to furnishing differential benefits and competitive advantages to brand owners which is not a central concern in literary narrative analyses.

However, it should be noted that the standard narrative model of structuralist semiotics—in terms of the actantial model and, above all, with respect to the canonical narrative schema—refers to narrativity as a universal structure in so far as it relates to fundamental structures of action. Narratives can be used in different communicative contexts and can pursue different aims. Nonetheless, narratives at their deepest level correspond to fundamental structures of action that are deployed following a narrative logic (Courtés 1980: 5-25). There is a common logic in all kinds of actions, whether they are co-operative or competitive in nature: a subject aims to transform a state-of-being by performing an action to achieve an objective; this subject must be competent in order to achieve its objective; while performing the action it can also acquire assistance or encounter hurdles. Hence, since narrative is based on transformations triggered by actions, structuralist semiotics' narrative model has pretensions of universality and can be used for studying any kind of text.

In this sense, narrativity as a fundamental principle responsible for articulating brand signification should be closely linked to the idea that the brand is a character and agent capable of undertaking actions and, therefore, capable of being a character within different types of stories, whether these are brand-owned stories or stories by consumers who narrate their relationships with brands (as we shall see in due course).

3.4 Myths and archetypes

One of the most relevant lines of reasoning for the strategic development of brand image draws on so-called "archetypes". The use of archetypes in branding has been evinced mainly in types of characters or personalities. Each of these types has specific characteristics that enable them to function as the source of different types of stories. In this sense, identifying a brand with an archetype implies projecting it onto a certain narrative universe. An archetype is a narrative anchor for each brand that identifies with it. One could argue that archetypes are proto-narrative contexts.

The theoretical basis for applying archetypes to branding is the psychoanalytic work of Carl Gustav Jung, which revolves around the concepts of the collective unconscious (Jung 1981, 1989, 1997) and myth. These two concepts aid in the elucidation of some fundamental characteristics of archetypal brands. In order to understand the relationship between myth and archetype, we shall look into two perspectives that converge on various grounds. The first perspective stems from anthropology, for which myth is a fundamental research area. The second perspective is based on Jung's psychoanalysis, for whom universal myths constitute the proof of the existence of unconscious archetypes that are also universal.

The study of myths and archetypes in branding stems from the fact that brands in contemporary societies have been occasionally appealing to the realm of the sacred and the magical (Twitcell 1996; Kottack 2010; Dufour 2011). Through brands, objects become amulets, relics, fetishes, etc. Brands have enabled a re-enchantment of the world (Belk et al. 1989), a new encounter with the sacred, the magical, mysterious and inexplicable, in contradistinction to the programmatic rationality of historical modernity.

Myths are cultural constructions based on a narrative backdrop. They are dynamic narrative models whose primary function is to provide humans with models to understand the

sacred, the magical and anything they do not understand and which exceeds their ability to make sense of the reality they are experiencing in life (Durand 1993a, 2000). Myths are stories that explain the origins of the universe, life, peoples, nations, their evolution and their ends. Although mythical narrative may hark back to a moment in time, it does provide a discourse whose meaning is timeless and eternal. The same myths appear in different cultures under various guises in stories about gods, heroes, magicians, saints, legendary characters, etc. For this reason, according to relevant anthropological schools of thought, myths tend to be universal and related to aspects of the unconscious (Eliade 1978, 1988, 1991; Durand 1993a, 1993b; Eliade 2001, 2014). Furthermore, myths have their own profound logic and this logic is based on the union of opposites. Myths are stories which, at their core, tend to resolve contradictions that are intractable outside the myth itself, while unifying opposites such as life and death, good and evil, the ephemeral and the eternal, the human and the animal (Lévi-Strauss 2003). This logic of myth may also be applied to the consumption of brands (Levy 1981).

The analysis of myths is fundamental to the study of brands (Randazzo 1996; Levy 1981; Holt 2003, 2004; Arnould and Thompson 2005). Brands reproduce mythical narrative models and become fundamental myths themselves in our consumption culture. For example, while analysing femininity myths in advertising, León (2001) culminates in the following fundamental archetypical figures: the victim, who relates to the myths of vulnerable goddesses; the female dominator of men, based on figures such as Artemis, Athena, Aphrodite, the sirens and the sphinx; the female angel such as Dante's Beatrice; and the great mother, originally represented by the great Palaeolithic goddesses with their opulent shapes.

The use of myths and models of mythical narratives are presented as a method for constructing brands, since a brand can

be built socially as a projection of universal myths (Mathieu et al. 2014).

For Jung, the universality of myths constitutes unshakeable proof that above culture-specific manifestations, they originate in some aspect of human nature that resides in the unconscious, while, given their universality, they form a collective unconscious. Archetypes are the contents of the collective unconscious: deep, primordial images reflected in myths, religions, literature, art, film and all forms of culture, be they elitist or popular. Archetypes are innate in the human mind. They answer to primary, symbolic instincts and this is why they have fascinated, dominated and persuaded human beings of all times and places. Nevertheless, the idea that archetypes are innate in the human mind has been repeatedly contested and Jung has been accused of Lamarckianism. Jung claims that archetypes are innate structures, inherited and incorporated into the collective unconscious as a consequence of cultural practices and learning. This idea contradicts the Darwinist evolutionary model (Neher 1996; Haule 2006; Merchant 2009; Goodwyn 2010; Rensma 2013).

From a branding standpoint, there is considerable appeal in exercising the strategic option of using archetypes to construct brands that are powerful, emblematic and mythical. Positioning a brand in line with an archetype ensures its universal impact and presence in consumers' unconscious. For this reason, assuming that the theoretical apparatus on which archetypes are based is valid, archetypes have become a relevant instrument in constructing brand meaning.

In this vein, the typology offered by Mark and Pearson (2001) constitutes a fundamental reference in the theory of archetypes for brand assessment and the delineation of communication strategies. The twelve archetypes that are included in this work are caregiver, creator, explorer, hero, innocent, jester, lover, magician, outlaw, regular guy, ruler and sage. Each of these archetypes corresponds to a specific

character that can be transferred to brands. Each character instantiates certain qualities, goals, motivations, capabilities and relationships with others. In this sense, as mentioned above, each archetype acts as the core for narrative development, in terms of a proto-narrative structure.

For example, “the creator” is an archetype that corresponds to brands that generate something new and of lasting value for consumers, that stimulate originality and aid in creativity. Apple is a good example of this type of brand. “The innocent” is the archetype of brands that offer consumers purity, simplicity and goodness. It stands for a return to innocence and for a calm life with no complications or immorality. Examples of this type of brand are Coca-Cola and Johnson & Johnson (Mark and Pearson 2001). “The hero” is the archetype of brands that symbolize the rewards to be reaped by those who act with determination, energy and discipline, who confront difficulties and try to overcome their own limits. Examples of this type of brand are Nike and BMW (Mark and Pearson 2001).

The model offered by Mark and Pearson (2001) suggests twelve archetypes based on two axes. The vertical axis consists of the opposing values of mastery/stability; the horizontal axis of the opposites belonging/independence. At the pole of Mastery the archetypes of the magician, hero and outlaw are located. At the Stability pole we encounter the archetypes of the creator, ruler and caregiver. At the pole of Belonging we encounter the archetypes of the lover, regular guy and jester. At the pole of Independence, the archetypes of the innocent, explorer and sage are located.

This model has simplified considerably the work of Jung, rendering it easily applicable, thus boosting the popularity of archetypes in branding. However, this simplification and perhaps vulgarization of Jung’s work has led to an impoverishment of the scope of applications of the psychoanalyst’s theories in branding research. The application of the theory of archetypes to branding (see, for example, Connan and Sarantoulas 2013), based on the

work of Mark and Pearson (2001), does not take into account the complexity and wealth of Jung's work. According to Jung, the collective unconscious is an inexhaustible source of archetypes that is impossible to reduce to a round number like 11. Moreover, for Jung, the archetypes can be combined and synthesized, thus giving rise to countless possibilities. Archetypes can refer to characters, but also to spaces, situations, routes, transformations. There are archetypes that do not correspond to characters, but to desired or feared states such as paradise lost, the creation of the world, the apocalypse, unified duality, etc. Finally, Jung's fundamental archetypes usually are not taken into consideration due to their complexity. For example, the archetypes of *anima* and *animus* that correspond to the feminine side in men and the masculine side in women. The *anima* can take on positive or negative values and appear as a maiden, goddess or witch. Another fundamental Jungian archetype is "the shadow", which refers to what the conscious mind ignores about itself and which is made up of hidden and repressed aspects. The figure of the "hero" represents domination and positive assimilation of one's own shadow.

Wertime (2002) also proposed a typology of twelve archetypes that can be applied to brands. Wertime's list is largely similar to that put forward by Mark and Pearson (2001), although some figures differ: the hero, the antihero, the enigma, the siren, the creator, the change master, the power broker, the wise old man, the loyalist, the mother of goodness, the ultimate strength and the little trickster.

In addition to characters with an anthropomorphic figure, other archetypal projections have been used in studying brands. For example, animal archetypes (Lloyd and Woodside 2013), the cosmological elements of earth, fire, air, water (Soares de Moura Guedes and Nicolau 2009) and the Greek gods and goddesses. The theoretical model of archetypes has, thus, been used profusely to analyze brand communications through design and

advertising (Maso-Fleischman 1997; Caldwell et al. 2010; Connan and Sarantoulis 2013; Moraru 2014).

The success of the archetype formula is based on the assumptions that archetypes establish a privileged relationship with consumers' unconscious and that these consumers project archetypal myths onto brands in their day-to-day lives, thus investing their existence with a deep, gratifying and transcendental meaning. Hence, consumers enact myths and archetypes via experiences with brands (Hirschman 2000; Woodside and Chebat 2001; Wertime 2002; Holt 2003; Holt and Thompson 2004; Tsai 2006; Woodside et al. 2008).

Finally, consumers gain gratification by telling stories about episodes of their lives, and brands that are included in these episodes. As may be gathered from the study of archetypes, telling stories about episodes of their lives enables consumers to organize the meaning of their experiences and to consciously (but mainly unconsciously) feel that they themselves instantiate, at some point, an archetype, whether it is the hero, the magician, the creator, the rebel, etc. (Holt 2003, 2004; Holt and Thompson 2004; Woodside et al. 2008).

3.5 Consumer narratives

Consumers produce stories about their relationships with products and brands in their everyday life. In recent decades, the study of these stories has been approached from different perspectives as a fundamental way of understanding the meaning of brands in consumers' lives.

In this Section, we shall first consider how individuals understand their life, themselves and their relationship with brands in narrative terms. Secondly, we shall discuss how consumers understand their stories related to brands as if the brands were people, projecting anthropomorphic models onto them. Thirdly, we shall deal with the types of relationships that consumers establish with brands and which they explain in their narratives. Fourthly, we shall point out certain general

characteristics in the relationships with brands narrated by consumers. Finally, we shall examine 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.

A fundamental tenet that is shared among different theoretical perspectives—from cognitivism to hermeneutics—is that humans tend to understand life, its phases and episodes via narrative configurations. These autobiographical narratives are concerned with the interpretation, memorization and story-telling of what we do and what happens to us (Schank and Abelson 1977; Bruner 1990; Schank 1990). From the points of view of psychology and psychoanalysis in particular, one can understand the construction of personal narratives as ways of projecting a coherent representation of the self (Spence 1982; Sarbin 1986; Polkinghorne 1988). Self-identity is constructed through storytelling that is generated by oneself and by others, so that the self emerges as a collective construct of an intersubjective nature (Ricoeur 1981, 1996).

Consumers' relationships with brands are part of their lives and make up specific episodes. These episodes are narratively interpreted by consumers who give them meaning, while making sense of the brand and of oneself. The consumer creates stories in which (s)he and the brand become the main characters and their relationships are the core of the narrative plots.

Consumer relationships with the products that they own, use and consume and which are the centre of their stories about brands, can be considered to be relationships between subjects and objects. However, the brand's mediation entails that the interactions tend to be interpreted as relationships between people, between subjects. Consumers view brands as people (Levy 1985; Plummer 1985); they interact with them as if they were human, and their interpretation is that brands perform activities intentionally that are driven by specific goals and

motivations. This suggests that consumers think narratively about brands, about the events and the episodes in which they are involved.

The fact that consumers think about brands as if they were persons has given rise to the concept of "brand personality" (Aaker 1997; McEnally and de Chernatony 1999), a concept that became essential in researching brands and in managing brand image. Additionally, the fact that consumers see brands as if they were people and act towards them accordingly constitutes the phenomenon of anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism designates the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities, such that these entities are considered to have consciousness, intentions, desires, emotions, motivations (Epley et al. 2007; Puzakova et al. 2009; Waytz et al. 2010). As will be shown in this Section, anthropomorphism has been found to be of central importance to the relationship between brands and consumers and to the narrative interpretation that consumers make of these relationships.

Although any brand can be considered by consumers as if it were a person, there are strategies that facilitate and emphasize brands' anthropomorphic nature. One strategy is to represent the brand via human characters or anthropomorphized cartoon animals. In this regard, Rossolatos (2012a) analyzes Kellogg's anthropomorphization of Tony the Tiger from a semiotic and psychoanalytic perspective. Some brands are identified with celebrities who act as their spokespersons in the media or with their business owners, such as, formerly, Steve Jobs for Apple and Richard Branson for Virgin (McCracken 1989). Products with physical characteristics similar to the human physiognomy are more likely to be anthropomorphized. Aggarwal and McGill (2007) showed that a car that looks like a smiling face was more clearly anthropomorphized than other products which did not look like human faces. Over and above physical appearance, Kim and McGill (2011) show how objects whose behaviour can be likened to human behavioural patterns can be anthropomorphized. In

this sense, there is a strong tendency to lend human qualities to products that demonstrate technological intelligence (Turkle 1984; Mick and Fournier 1998).

The anthropomorphism of brands and the narrative worlds that this phenomenon generates serve specific purposes for consumers. People in general tend to anthropomorphize products to increase the level of intelligibility and predictability in their dealings with them (Dawes and Mulford 1996). This is part of a strategy that aims at imposing controls on one's surroundings (Harter 1978). The recital of autobiographical stories involving brands helps consumers structure and give meaning to their experience. It also serves to clarify one's own thoughts about what happened at some point. Another function is the gratification stemming from reliving what happened and even experience the gratification of embodying myths and archetypes (Woodside et al. 2008). Furthermore, consumers' emotions and personality, and the nature of their social relationships, may be contributing factors to the anthropomorphization of brands (Epley et al. 2008; Kim and McGill 2011). Although brand anthropomorphism is relevant in understanding the relationships that consumers establish with brands, anthropomorphic projection is not necessary to the establishment of such relationships (Aaker et al. 2004; Aggarwal 2004).

Consumers construct stories based on their relationships with brands. These stories are based on non-human person-to-entity relationships or person-to-person relationships that are established through anthropomorphic projections. In any case, what is relevant is that consumers construct stories that are very important in understanding the relationships they establish with brands and in analyzing the image they have of such brands.

Beyond consumers' tendency to tell stories, for example verbally, face-to-face or through blogs, researchers often encourage consumers to tell stories with the aim of studying consumer-brand relationships. One such fundamental relationship

of consumers with brands concerns the construal of self-identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; Askegaard et al. 2002; Holt 2002). The construal of identity involves the social presentation of the self in everyday life (Goffman 1959) and a narrative interpretation of that presentation. The importance of brands should be considered in this context. Belk (1988) develops the idea of an extended self which includes products-objects that an individual creates or possesses. In this context, the used and consumed brands form part of the self, while consumers subordinate them to construction strategies concerning self-presentation in everyday life scenarios.

The relationships between consumer and brand identity can be quite complex. On the one hand, these relationships can be established by using symbolic, iconic or indexical connections and, on the other hand, consumers can use several brands to express different aspects of their character (Schembri et al. 2010). Thus, a consumer explains that she uses Toyota because it connects with her hard and secure side, Lancôme with her sensual side, and Dove with her soft and tender side (Schembri et al. 2010). Fournier (2009) criticizes the assumption that identity related considerations are the only ones relevant to brand consumption, while explaining that in various cases consumers seek purely functional and economically beneficial relationships with "invisible brands" (Coupland 2005).

In a much-quoted paper, Fournier (1998) analyzes consumers' stories and discovers that they establish different types of personal relationships with brands that are similar to the types of relationships that consumers establish with other people throughout their life. Fournier identifies these relationships as arranged marriages, casual friends/buddies, marriages of convenience, committed partnerships, compartmentalized friendships, kinships, rebounds/avoidance-driven relationships, childhood friendships, courtships, dependencies, flings, enmities, secret affairs. For example, the "marriage of convenience" refers to a relationship type that is enduring with satisfactory rules,

created via a commitment that is influenced by circumstances and that is neither clearly thought nor desired; the “fling” relationship implies a short relationship and a lack of commitment, but with high emotional gratification.

Other authors have argued that consumer relationships with brands are governed by the same rules as different types of relationships with other people (Aggarwal 2004; Aggarwal and Law 2005). Relationships of matrimony and love affairs have been studied (Shimp and Madden 1988; Fournier and Yao 1997; Oliver 1999; Thomson et al. 2005; Albert et al. 2008; Alvarez and Fournier 2012; Batra et al. 2012), inasmuch as negative relationships where brands play a dominant role over the consumer (Hill 1994; Paharia et al. 2011; Miller et al. 2012).

Escalas (2004) suggests that consumers use brands for different purposes: to construct and grow their self-concept and express it publicly or privately, for their social integration, to connect with the past, to symbolize their personal fulfilment, to increase their self-esteem, to differentiate themselves, to help in the transitional life-stages.

Fournier and Alvarez (2012) analyze relationships of affection, capabilities, identifications that are nurtured between consumers and brands. In addition, Fournier (2009) defines a set of key features in the relationship between consumers and brands that evolves in the stories about their interaction. Firstly, consumers relate to brands with a purpose. Relationships with brands are used instrumentally by consumers to help them live their lives. Secondly, consumer relationships with brands are multi-faceted phenomena, since they move in various dimensions and take many forms. For example, the multidimensional scale known as INDSCALE identifies seven dimensions in the brand-consumer relationship: harmonious and cooperative vs. competitive and hostile; emotional and identity-orientated vs. functional orientation; weak and superficial vs. strong and deep; balanced vs. hierarchical; lasting vs. fleeting; independent vs. interdependent; and voluntary vs. imposed. Thirdly, consumer-

brand relationships evolve and change via interactions and contextual variations.

The research evidence suggesting that consumers think about their relationships with brands in narrative terms, leads us to infer that narrative texts, and in particular advertising narratives, are most effective in determining and positively influencing the connections between consumers and brands (Escalas 1998, 2004).

Consumers' processing of narrative messages in advertising leads them to make connections between the manifest story in the advertising narrative and their own stories that are stored in memory. But most importantly, it enables them to auto-generate narratives via autobiographical memories or mental simulations involving brand use (Fiske 1993; Baumeister and Newman 1994). The incidence of parallels between the stories narrated in advertising texts and consumers' own stories in relation to the achievement of goals and the satisfaction of desires and aspirations, enables the establishment of positive brand associations. The very structure of narrative advertising fosters and reinforces these associations.

The phenomenon of narrative transportation has also been related to advertising effectiveness. Narrative transportation occurs when the audience is absorbed by the story they are following, thus being lured into the world of the story (Green and Brock 2000). According to Escalas (2007), when viewers of advertisements are transported by the story they are following, the produced experiences tend to neutralize the negative effects of the weaker arguments.

Apparently, the effectiveness of narrative advertising is based on the importance of narrative in consumers' self-reflective comportment towards their life and their relationship with brands. Nevertheless, this thesis contradicts the fact that there are other types of advertising that do not tell stories, albeit they have a marked impact on memory and, ultimately, on advertising effectiveness. This contradiction has been underlined by Escalas

(1998, 2004) who shows that only 20% of advertisements portray well-constructed stories and that other types of advertisements that do not tell stories also attain to establish robust brand associations.

3.6 Concluding remarks

In this Section we draw conclusions about the similarities and differences between the narrative approaches to branding that have been laid out throughout this Chapter, while highlighting the relative merits of leveraging semiotics for carving a truly narratively oriented branding model.

The “narratological” approaches to branding vary markedly and have different goals and characteristics. As already shown, structuralist semiotics features a narratological prong that is applicable to any text or structure of signification, since it considers, at least in principle, any text to be a narrative configuration of different levels in a generative trajectory of meaning. Conversely, the branding related narrativity perspectives that derive from psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, hermeneutics, are suggestive of a narrative dimension in brands, only when their textual manifestations and communications display a clearly recognizable narrative organization as stories. In this sense, it is only through narrative semiotics that one can address a brand’s textual essence to its full extent. The rest approaches, by dint of their restrictive theoretical assumptions, only afford to address partial manifestations of narrativity, based on manifest storylines.

Due to space limitations, only a handful of theoretical models and methodological avenues have been considered in this Chapter: storytelling, semiotics, archetypes and consumers’ narratives. As stated in the introduction, the criteria used in this selection concern their relevance both for academic scholarship and branding practice.

Some of these perspectives may be said to be fully narratological, whereas others can be understood as “proto-

narrative” models. Fully narratological models address narrative analysis in its most explicit and fullest sense. On the other hand, a proto-narrative model, such as that of archetypes, outlines a range of characters-symbols (each character-symbol is equipped with a personality, capabilities, motivations, and specific ways of acting, feeling and simply being in the world) that can be considered as a narrative matrix, in the sense of constituting a vantage point for generating possible narratives.

Semiotics, anthropology, cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis offer different approaches to brand narrativity. Each and every one of these theoretical perspectives may aid researchers in understanding different aspects and levels of brand meaning and social signification; in concert, they can provide a broad and deep knowledge about brands: for example, consumers’ cognitive and affective relationships with brands, brands’ meaning for individuals and social groups, the invariable expressive elements of brand communications, the values conveyed by brands’ discourses and their articulation in specific product categories.

The theoretical approaches to brand narrativity that were laid out in this Chapter have different, yet complementary facets that are pertinent both for academic scholarship and branding practice, while seeking to construct and manage a brand’s identity and meaning. For example, cognitive psychology claims that human comprehension, memory and identity are narratively mediated. Therefore, narratively oriented advertisements are, in principle, more effective. Narrative semiotics offers a more accentuated picture of this principle through canonical narrative schemata that can be used as frameworks for constructing brand narratives. It also proposes a generative trajectory of meaning model that can guide branding professionals in the process of creating brand communications. Anthropology establishes links between brands and myths, and, therefore, it points to ways whereby universal myths may be leveraged as models for the creation of brand identity.

Nevertheless, as explained earlier, theoretical models that understand the core of a brand's meaning and identity as a static character, endowed with certain values, fail to take into account the narrative dimension of brand signification. Narrativity is based on transformations from a state defined by a value, to another state defined by a different, contrary or contradictory value. Thus, a semiotic model that takes into account narrativity should consider that the deep meaning of a brand is defined by the transformation between two states, for example by passing from one state defined by the value "oppression" to another state defined by the value "freedom". In this case, the transformation would concern the object of value "liberation" at the semio-narrative level and its equivalent story at the discursive level. These axiological transformations occur at the semio-narrative and discursive levels as transformations between states-of-being of subjects who perform actions.

The narrative definition of brands should conceptualize narrativity as the principle that shapes their meaning at its very kernel. This implies an appreciation of a brand discourse as an articulation on three inter-locking levels: a) the brand as a narrative, b) the brand as an author-enunciator of the narrative and c) the brand as a character in the narrative. Firstly, the brand should be identified with a specific narrative. Nike-narrative, Apple-narrative, Volvo-narrative, etc. correspond to this category. Secondly, the brand should be understood as the author of this narrative and its enunciator. Furthermore, the brand may be a co-author insofar as consumers also construct stories about their relationship with it, thus actively participating in the social construction of its narrative. Thirdly, the brand should be regarded as a particular character in the brand-narrative. However, as person-character, it must be understood within an encompassing narrative structure that fleshes out brand personality, identity and meaning. This is why Nike, Volvo and Apple, within the Nike-narrative, Volvo-narrative and Apple-narrative respectively, are characters related to other characters;

they set themselves missions, perform actions and are motivated by passions.

Thus, a brand can be analyzed as a single coherent entity with its own identity that unfolds on three levels and through three roles: as a narrative, as the subject of enunciation, and as the enunciated subject. Structuralist semiotics is most capable of systematically and rigorously defining narrative models of brands as configurations of meaning. However, semiotics should take into consideration contributions from other disciplines and other theoretical perspectives, as pointed out throughout this Chapter.

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