Marketing Semiotics

Professor Christian Pinson

Semiosis, i.e. the process by which things and events come to be recognized as signs, is of particular relevance to marketing scholars and practitioners. The term marketing encompasses those activities involved in identifying the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors. Whereas early definitions of marketing focused on the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer or user, modern definitions stress that marketing activities involve interaction between seller and buyer and not a one-way flow from producer to consumer. As a consequence, the majority of marketeters now view marketing in terms of exchange relationships. These relationships entail physical, financial, psychological and social meanings. The broad objective of the semiotics of marketing is to make explicit the conditions under which these meanings are produced and apprehended.

Although semioticians have been actively working in the field of marketing since the 1960s, it is only recently that semiotic concepts and approaches have received international attention and recognition (for an overview, see Larsen et al. 1991, Mick, 1986, 1997 Umiker-Sebeok, 1988, Pinson, 1988). Diffusion of semiotic research in marketing has been made difficult by cultural and linguistic barriers as well as by divergence of thought. Whereas Anglo-Saxon researchers base their conceptual framework on Charles Pierce's ideas, Continental scholars tend to refer to the sign theory in Ferdinand de Saussure and to its interpretation by Hjelmslev.

1. The symbolic nature of consumption.

Consumer researchers and critics of marketing have long recognized the symbolic nature of consumption and the importance of studying the meanings attached by consumers to the various linguistic and non-linguistic signs available to them in the marketplace. In a seminal article, Sidney Levy (1959) suggested that products are 'symbols for sale'. What he meant was that products are often purchased and consumed for their symbolic as well as their pragmatic value.

Products (and services) serve three symbolic purposes. First, products allow consumers to create meaning for themselves, to symbolize to themselves who they are (self concept theory). The self concept comprises all of an individual's thoughts and feelings about himself. It is an articulated schema (knowledge structure) that functionally controls how self-referent information is processed and structurally organized in memory. Second, products are signs that are essential for creating an identity, a status in the eyes of significant others. The study of status symbols goes back to Veblen's 1899 book 'The Theory of the Leisure Class' in which he strongly criticized the 'conspicuous consumption' and 'conspicuous waste' that he saw around him. Consumers acquire very early the 'language' of consumption symbols (see for example Holbrook and Hirschman 1993, Richins 1994, Wiley 1994). They learn to make inferences about others based on their choices of consumption objects and prefer products with images more similar to their self concept and ‘ideal self concept’ (how the individual would ideally like to see himself or be seen by others). Finally, products may be instrumental to the symbolic extension of the self. Extension of the self through the display of possessions corresponds to a long research traditional in anthropology and sociology and some of these works (e.g. Appadurai 1986, Dittmar 1992, McCracken 1988) have eventually led to the emergence of a new stream of consumer research (called 'postmodernist'), which has been the subject of considerable controversy involving methodological and philosophical issues (see Belk 1995, Brown and Turley 1997, Featherstone 1991, Gottdiener 1995, Hirschman and Holbrook 1992, Sherry 1995).

Products are not the only consumption objects that consumers can use to create meanings. Brands can too, be bought for their symbolic value and the affectional bonds they allow to develop. This explains that they are an increasingly concern for marketing researchers (e.g. Cross and Smith 1995, Fournier and Yao 1997) and applied semioticians (e.g. Semprini 1992). Noting that consumers often imbue brands with human personality traits, some authors (e.g. Aaker 1997, Fournier 1998, Heilbrunn 1998) have developed an anthropomorphic representation of the brand as a person.

2. Products as language.

Products are often perceived and described as being part of a family, constellation or system of complementary or substitutable objects (e.g. Baudrillard 1968) and can be conceptualized as a text, a discourse (see Semprini 1995). This suggests that products are not only signs but also form sign systems and that they are analyzable in terms of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. While paradigmatic relationships refer to both similarities and differences between the products under consideration, syntagmatic relationships correspond to a formal proximity, a co-presence, of these products in the same purchase or usage strings. A purchase/usage 'string' or 'chain' consists of all the products bought/used by the consumer in the course of fulfilling his consumption goal. A product paradigm is a class of products that can occupy the same place in the syntagmatic string or, in other terms, a set of products, each of which is compatible with or substitutable for the other in the same usage context (e.g. toque - hood - bonnet). These products belong to the same associative set by virtue of the function they share. Syntagmatic product relations refer to the permissible ways in which products succeed each other or combine together in a usage string. These products are brought together by virtue of syntactic rules as in clothing codes (e.g. shirt - blouse - jacket) or culinary codes (appetizer - entrée - dessert). These rules reflect cultural or aesthetic conventions. They may also correspond to functional constraints (other than 'part-whole' or metonymic relations) which suggest certain ordering as in the followingsyntagm: facial cleanser - pre-shave lotion - shaver - after-shave lotion.

While the paradigmatic dimension of the language of products has been well researched and is ingrained in almost any market-structure and product-image and positioning studies, the topic of product syntax and syntagmatic relations has received comparatively little attention from scholars and marketing practitioners. For the most part, marketing researchers have looked at usage situations to get a feel for which products are perceived to be similar, hence substitutable (paradigmatic relationships), and have largely ignored how product combinations arise (syntagmatic relationships). The objectives of syntagmatic research in marketing have been described (Kehret-Ward, 1988) as involving the following five steps: a) itemize the string of complementary products required by consumers to achieve a particular consumption goal; b) identify temporal and/or spatial combinatorial categories for objects which are functionally related to that goal; c) identify principles for establishing prominence among the combinatorial categories and d) describe any systematic differences in the combinatorial rules observed by different user groups.

Critics (e.g. Nöth, 1988) have objected that students of consumption syntax do not have firm bases on which to decide what constitutes an 'acceptable' combination of products, and that the product combinations studied so far are rudimentary (e.g. additive) operations involving cultural or aesthetic rules and conventions which simply restrict the possibility of combining certain products for reasons which might be more pragmatic than syntactic in nature.

3. Meaning and Structure in Advertising

Advertising constitutes one of the major fields of applied semiotic research (see Aoki 1988, Appiano, 1991, Bachand, 1988, Henny, 1987, IREP, 1976, 1983, Péninou, 1972, Perez Tornero 1982, Semprini 1996). Following Barthes (1964), one can distinguish three types of messages in an illustrated advertisement: the linguistic message (brand name, text...), the uncoded iconic message in which the 'photographic' image denotes the material object advertised and finally the coded iconic message. Eco (1968) introduces three additional elements: the verbal and visual tropes, or rhetorical figures; the loci, or topoi, of argumentation and the enthymemes, i.e. the incomplete or apparent syllogisms used to persuade emotionally rather than logically. Metaphor and metonymy are two examples of tropes frequently used by advertisers. Geis (1982) argues that advertisers (like many other speakers) often employ the strategy of implying rather than asserting claims and that they should be held responsible for these invalid 'conversational implicatures' (Grice) that derive from what they say. Grunig (1990) offers a well-documented study of how advertisers "play with words" to seduce their readers. Durand (1970) identified virtually all of the rhetorical figures used in advertisements and suggested classifying them according to four rhetorical operations: addition/suppression/substitution/ exchange, and four relationships between the variable elements: identity/ similarity/difference/opposition.

In recent years, researchers have shown an increasing interest in studying the rhetorical structure of ads (e.g. Leigh 1994, McQuarrie and Mick 1996, Scott 1994, Stern 1990, Tanaka 1992). One rhetorical figure which has been particularly studied is the metaphor (e.g. Bremer and Lee 1977, Forceville 1996, van den Bulte 1994).

The 'signifier-signified' dichotomy introduced by de Saussure and Hjelmslev to distinguish between the material object or ostensible representation of the sign ('signifier') and the mental concept to which it refers ('signified') has been considered by many applied semioticians the key to advertising analysis. The importance of semiotic connotations has been clearly shown in the work of Roland Barthes on advertising images. Denotative signifieds are 'first-order' signifying systems. They correspond to the literal meaning of the advertising sign, to what is 'objectively' referred to in the advertising image. Connotative signifiers are introduced by the receiver of the advertising message. They correspond to 'second-order' signifying systems - systems which build on already existing ones. While the denotative meaning of an advertising image is generally viewed as a non-coded, iconic message, its connotative meaning involves a coded iconic, or symbolic, message that requires interpretation by means of cultural conventions or codes. Barthes, like other critics of advertising (e.g. Dyer 1988, Goldman 1992, Wernick 1991, Williamson 1978), identifies connotation with the operation of 'ideology' and production of 'myth'. He also suggests that denotation itself is not innocent or neutral and participates in the manipulation of the public by creating the illusion that 'it is the first meaning'.

Literary criticism (see Stern 1989, 1995) and hermeneutics (see Arnold and Fisher 1994, Thompson 1997) are two neighbouring disciplines of semiotics which have been also increasingly used to interpret textual and visual persuasive messages. For example Thompson and Haytko (1997) offer an interesting hermeneutic study of how consumers use fashion discourses to inscribe their consumption behavior in a complex ideological system of folk theories about the nature of self and society. Stern (1996) shows how Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction can be applied to the reading of an exemplar text - the Joe Camel campaign. Pierce's division of signs between icon, index and symbol provides another way of looking at advertising signs. Iconic advertising signs (e.g. photographic pictures) are used to make the signifier-signified relationship one of resemblance to the 'real' object or person. Some advertising signs are used indexically to indicate a further meaning to the one immediately and obviously signified. The index sets up a relation of 'natural' or existential contiguity. For example, the co-presence of a woman in front of the Eiffel Tower in the advertisement for Yves Saint Laurent's 'Paris' perfume indexically suggests French 'Parisienne'. The relationship between signifier and signified is often not based on resemblance nor on a natural link. In the case of symbols, the signified is related to the signifier by convention or contract as where a crown is used as a trademark for a beer.

Structuralist semioticians offer still another research paradigm. The so-called School of Paris and Algirdas Greimas in particular (see Greimas and Courtès, 1979) has inspired many applied studies of the 'deep' as opposed to 'surface' structures of advertising messages. A key principle of this research tradition is that the meaning of a sign can be assessed only in relation to its structural relationship with other signs. The procedure of commutation (i.e. artificially changing an element in the advertising message to observe whether the change modifies the meaning) provides one way of recognizing semiotic units. Differences between surface and deep messages correspond to different levels of meaning and (intensive and extensive) complexity. Greimas' model of the generative trajectory of discourse represents the production of meaning as a pathway which starts at the deep level with abstract relations (e.g. the semiotic square), ensuring the minimum conditions for signification, and progresses through semio-narrative and discursive structures to the complex patterns underlying the manifestation of advertising discourse, whether verbal, visual or otherwise.

The elementary structure of signification involves recognition of the existence of two basic types of opposition: contradiction (privative relation in the Jakobsonian sense) and contrariety (qualitative relation). For example, 'female' and 'male' are in a qualitative or contrariety relation whereas 'male'/'non-male' (or 'female'/'non-female') correspond to a privative or contradiction relation. The relations 'male'/'non-female' and 'female'/'non-male' correspond to complementarity relations and the operation which constitutes them is called implication. Greimas' celebrated semiotic square is a visual representation of these relations and elementary structure. The interest of the semiotic square for advertising researchers lies in its ability to model virtual and predictable relations. Potential semantic positions and processes can be entered onto the semiotic square to produce, ultimately, the specific items of advertising discourse.

Semio-narrative structures are viewed by Greimasians as the depository of fundamental signifying forms. They exist at the deep level and correspond to imaginary universals. These plots or stories are generated from a finite number of elements, disposed in a finite number of ways, and can be represented according to a model known as the 'narrative schema'. Derived from Propp's studies of folk-tales and myths, the schema describes the four major elements which comprise the basic structure of all narratives: contract competence - performance - sanction. The advertising message can therefore be studied as a 'contract' proposed by its enunciator to the addressee. To fulfil the 'contract', the enunciator needs to display the competences which will allow for the performance expected by the addressee to occur. Once the performance has been accomplished the enunciator will receive a positive or negative sanction reflecting how closely his performance matches the addressee's expectations. The advertising message quite often establishes an intersubjective relationship which has as its effect the modification of the status of each of the subjects involved. The addressee, therefore, should not be viewed as a given but rather is constructed through the portrait of the 'model reader' (Eco) presented in the message, to which the receiver is invited to conform. It is in this sense that the receiver is invited to become a co-enunciator, as in the Black & White advertising campaigns studied by Bertrand (1988): in this campaign, the addressee is identified as someone who is endowed with the ability to enjoy the use of irony in advertising.

The discursive structures correspond to the spatial, temporal and personal representations which define the thematic and figurative universe of each advertising discourse. It is through the discursive structures that the virtualities offered by the semio-narrative structures are selected and ordered by the enunciator to fulfil a particular narrative function. It is the task of the semiotician to identify the thematic and figurative roles held by the 'actants' (actantial model) and to study the various forms of narrative programs as well as the values which recur within them. For example, Floch (1990) shows that car advertising campaigns can be classified and studied according to four major types of values which may be invested in the car-object: utilitarian, utopian, critical and hedonic. These four values can be 'projected' onto a semiotic square to identify which positional values are currently invested, semantically, by car producers in their advertising discourses and which ones are still available for future campaigns and product positioning or repositioning attempts.

Jakobson's model of the six functions of communication has received considerable attention from advertising researchers. It is seen as a useful and simple representation of the major tasks of any advertising campaign. It also enables advertisements to be classified on the basis of which functions are predominant. It will be recalled that the referential function focuses on the referent (the product or service advertised), whereas the expressive, or emotive, and conative functions are oriented toward building the enunciator and the addressee, respectively. The conative and referential functions are particularly important in marketing where producers and sellers are attempting to segment their potential markets by creating unique images for their products and intended product users. Advertisers have often been accused of neglecting these marketing objectives in their attempts to capture the audience's attention (phatic function) or to produce autotelic messages (poetic function), i.e. the message has no other function beside itself. The sixth function, themetalinguistic, corresponds to communication strategies where advertisers try to install a code of communication between themselves and target customers. This code may involve the use of music (as in the famous DIM pantyhose campaigns), color (e.g. Marlboro's distinctive red and white shapes), or any other element.

Building on Cornu (1990), Julien (1997) uses a Piercean semiotic framework to study the olfactory dimension contained in 300 advertisements for perfumes. She shows that consumers can consciously or unconsciously use the various iconic and non-iconic signs available in these ads (e.g. the brand name, the logo, the bottle ...) to retrieve from their memory the olfactory sensations they may have developed in case of prior exposure to the perfume advertised. If they have not been physically exposed to it, the many signs contained in the ad (the colors, landscape, scene, characters ... used) can alternatively trigger the evocation of olfactory sensations which can then be used as weak cues to infer the likely olfactory properties of the perfume advertised. In this case, the fragrance is not communicated through the retrieval of a sensory memory trace. Rather it is built through aninterpretive process, which because of its subjectivity partly escapes the control of the advertiser. The olfactory concept built by the reader of the ad may be at variance with the olfactory reality of the perfume and the message (product positioning) intended by the advertiser.

While early semiotic approaches had relegated the receiver of the advertising message to a rather secondary or passive position, more recent approaches (e.g. Everaert-Desmedt 1984, Fouquier 1988, Jensen 1995), mainly inspired by theories of pragmatics (Austin,Searle, Ducrot) have assigned the receiver a crucial role in the reception of the message, apparently indicating a resurgence of interest in the subjective aspect ofsemiosis. Cook (1992) suggests that ads are a new discourse type that do not simply try to attract receivers' attention and persuade them to buy the product. They may also fulfill a societal need for "light-hearted code play" and display which is no longer satisfied - at least for some people - by the more traditional discourse types. Pragmatics takes into account factors which are external to the message and is founded on the idea of an intersubjective position on which the (advertising) discourse acts. In this framework, it is essential to define the enunciator and addressee as discursive entities which may be totally distinct from the real sender and receiver of the message. Signification is globally dependent on the context in which the communication act occurs. The ‘illocutionary force’ (Austin) of a successful communication, which determines how it is going to be received, is determined by such factors as what precedes and follows it (the co-text), what it refers to (referential context), the physical and social surroundings in which the act takes place (situational context), the activities or intentions of other ‘speakers’ participating in the communicative situation (actional context), the expectations, motivations, interests, the explicit and implicit images that the sender and the receiver have of themselves and of the communication (psychological context).

4. Other semiotic applications

Although advertising is by far the most visible application area, semiotic approaches have also been successfully applied to other elements of the marketing-mix, particularly to such varied domains as branding, the design of logos, packaging, products, stores, promotional objects, the media and so forth. The interested reader is referred to Pinson (1988), Umiker-Sebeok (1988), Floch (1990), Dano (1996); Semprini (1996) and Nöth (1997) and for a presentation of some of these studies. They testify that, over the past twenty years, semiotics has taken on a significant role in marketing research.

Semprini’s (1992) work on brand identity is particularly worth mentioning. Using a Greimassian approach, Semprini explains how the identity of a brand is gradually built through three stages or levels, referred to as axiological, narrative and discursive. Semprini also shows how Floch’s (1990) four axiologies of consumption: utilitarian, utopian, critical and hedonic can be used to produce a “semiotic mapping” of such well-known brands as Benetton, Swatch, Perrier, Lee, Virgin, Gatorade ... Semprini’s framework can be used by marketers to better understand the discourse, functions and underlying core values of various brands competing in the same market. These values and functions have to be studied in the broader theoretical context of how social discourses are produced and diffused (Veron, 1987). A recent study by Chandon and Dano (1997) suggests how a semiotic analysis can be fruitfully combined with types of statistical analyses traditionally used in market research. In the first stage of this study, a structural semiotic analysis of consumers’ discourses about the packaging of two products (rice and shampoos) resulted in a five class partition of consumers. Then a confirmatory cluster analysis of consumers questionnaire data was carried out to empirically validate the semiotic partition.

Future work is expected to give us a better understanding of the principles governing the production and reception of an expanded range of discourse, in particular of discourses that are mediated through shapes, materials, colors and other plastic elements (“plastic discourse"). In this context, Floch's work is worth reporting. Floch (1995) draws on C. Lévi-Strauss's concept of "bricolage" to offer a broad-ranging, innovative framework for understanding the process of building and managing the visual identity of a product, a brand, a corporation. His analysis of the logos of Apple vs. IBM is particularly interesting:Floch shows that the logo of Apple can be "deducted" from the logo of IBM by a process of plastic inversion or opposition. The fact that this opposition can also be found when comparing the corporate strategies and discourses of these two companies - Apple clearly wanting to position itself against IBM in the mind of the target customers, lends credence to Floch's main philosophical position: a visual identity does not simply correspond to a combination of signs, it is a narrative and dialectical process where one needs to creatively combine tradition and innovation.

Bibliography

Aaker J 1997 Dimensions of Brand Personality *Journal of Marketing Research* **34**: 347-356

Aoki S 1988 Semiotics of Significance in Advertising Text. *"Studia Semiotica". Journal of the Japanese Association for Semiotic Sudies*, **8**: 249-264

Appadurai A ed. 1986 *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge University Press

Appiano A 1991 *Pubblicitá Communicazione Immagine*. Zanichelli, Bologna

Arnold S J, Fischer E 1994 Hermeneutics and Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research* **21:** (June) 55-70

Sherry J F ed. 1995 *Contemporary Marketing and Consumer Behavior: An Anthropological Sourcebook*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, California

Bachand D 1988 Marketing Icons: A Survey of Advertising Semiotics. *Semiotic Inquiry* **3**: 277-295

Barthes R 1964 Rhétorique de l'image. *Communications* **4**: 40-51 (Translation: 1977 *Rhetoric of the Image, Music, Text*. Hill & Wang, New York)

Baudrillard J 1968 *Le Système des Objets*. Gallimard, Paris

Belk R 1995 Studies in the New Consumer Behaviour in Miller D ed., *Acknowledging Consumption. A Review of New Studies*. Routledge London 58-95

Bertrand D 1988 The Creation of Complicity: A Semiotic Analysis of Advertising Campaign for Black & White Whisky. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* **4**: 273-289

Bremer C Lee M 1997 Metaphors in Marketing: Review and Implications for Marketers. *Advances in Consumer Research* **24**: 419-424

Brown S Turley D eds. 1997 *Consumer Research: Postcards from the Edge*. Routledge, London

Chandon J L, Dano F 1997 Analyses typologiques confirmatoires: évaluation d'une partition hypothétique issue d'une étude sémiotique. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing* **12** (2): 1-22

Cornu G 1990 *Sémiologie de l'image dans la publicité*. Les Editions d'Organisation, Paris

Cross R, Smith J 1995 *Customer Bonding*. NTC Business Books, Lincolnwood, Illinois

Dano F 1996 Packaging: une approche sémiotique. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing* **11(1):** 23-36

Dittmar H 1992 *The Social Psychology of Social Possesions: To have is To Be*. Harvester Wheatscheaf, London

Durand J 1970 Rhétorique et Image Publicitaire. *Communications* **15**: 70-96 (Translation: 1988 Rhetorical Figures in the Advertising Image. In: Umiker-Sebeok J (ed). *Marketing and Semiotics*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin: 295-318)

Dyer G 1988 *Advertising as Communication*. Routledge, London

Eco U 1968 *La struttura assente*. Bompiani, Milan

Everaert-Desmedt N 1984 *La Communication Publicitaire: Etude Sémio-pragmatique*. Labay, Louvain-la-Neuve

Featherstone M 1991 *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism.* Sage, London

Floch J-M 1990 *Sémiotique, Marketing et Communication*. P.U.F., Paris

Floch J-M 1995 *Identités Visuelles.* P.U.F., Paris

Forceville C 1996 *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising.* Routledge, London

Fouquier E 1988 Figures of Reception: Concepts and Rules for a Semiotic Analysis of Mass Media Reception. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* **4**(3): 331-348

Fournier S 1998 Consumers and their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research* (forthcoming)

Fournier S, Yao J L 1997 Reviving Brand Loyalty: A Reconceptualization within the Framework of Consumer-based Relationships *International Journal of Research in Marketing **14**(5): 451-472*

Geis M L 1982 *The Language of Television Advertising*. Academic Press, New York

Goldman R 1992 *Reading Ads Socially*. Routledge, London

Gottdiener M 1995 *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life.* Blackwell, Cambridge MA

Greimas A J, Courtès J 1979 Sémiotique. *Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*. Hachette, Paris (Translation: 1982 *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. In: Indiana University Press, Bloomington)

Grunig B N, 1990 *Les Mots de la Publicité.* Les Presses du CNRS, Paris

Heilbrunn B 1998 My Brand the Hero: A Semiotic Analysis of the Consumer-Brand Relationship in M Lambkin et al. ed., *European Perspectives in Consumer Behavior.* Prentice Hall, London

Henny L (ed) 1987 *Semiotics of Advertisements*. Raderverlag, Aachen

Hirschman E, Holbrook M 1992 *Postmodern Consumer Research: The Study of Consumption as a Text.* Routledge, London 58-95

Holbrook M B, Hirschman C 1993 *The Semiotics of Consumption: Interpreting Symbolic Consumer Behavior in Popular Culture and Works of Art.* Mouton de Gruyter, New York

IREP 1976 *Les Apports de la Sémiotique au Marketing et à la Publicité*. IREP, Paris

IREP 1983 *Sémiotique II*. IREP, Paris

Jensen K B 1995 *The Social Semiotics of Mass Communication.* Sage, London

Julien M 1997 *L'image publicitiare des parfums.* L'Harmattan, Paris

Kehret-Ward T 1988 Combining Products in Use. In: Umiker-Sebeok J (ed). *Marketing and Semiotics*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin: 219-258

Larsen H H Mick D G and Alsted eds. 1991 *Marketing and Semiotics: Selected papers from the Copenhagen Symposium.* Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, Copenhagen

Leigh J H 1994 The Use of Figures of Speech in Print Ad Headlines. *Journal of Advertising* **23**: 17-34

Levy S J 1959 Symbols for Sale. *Harvard Business Review* **37**: 117-124

McCracken G 1988 *Culture and Consumption.* Indiana University Press, Blommington, Indiana

McQuarrie E F and Mick D G 1996 Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language *Journal of Consumer Research* **22**: 424-438

Mick D G 1986 Consumer Research and Semiotics: Exploring the Morphology of Signs, Symbols and Significance. *Journal of Consumer Research* **13**: 196-213

Mick D G 1997 Semiotics in Marketing and Consumer Research: Balderdash, Verity, Pleas in Brown S and Turley D eds. *Consumer Research: Postcards from the Edge.* Routledge, London, 249-262

Nöth W ed. 1997 *Semiotics of the Media.* Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin

Nöth W 1988 The Language of Commodities. *International Journal of Marketing* **4**: 173-186

Péninou G 1972 *Intelligence de la Publicité. Etude Sémiotique*. Robert Laffont, Paris

Pérez Tornero JM 1982 *La Semiotica de la publicidad.* Mitre, Barcelona

Pinson C (guest ed) 1988 Semiotics and Marketing Communication Research. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* **4**, Nos 3 & 4 (double issue)

Richins M L 1994 Valuing Things: The Private and Public Meanings of Possessions. *Journal of Consumer Research* **21**: 504-521

Scott L 1994 Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric *Journal of Consumer Research* **21**: 274-290

Semprini A 1992 *Le Marketing de la Marque: Approche Sémiotique.* Editions Liaisons, Paris

Semprini A 1995 *L'Objet comme procés et comme action.* L'Harmattan, Paris

Semprini A 1996 *Analyser la Communication.* L'Harmattan, Paris

Stern B B 1989 Literary Criticism and Consumer Research: Overview and Illustrative Analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research* **16**: 322-334

Stern B B 1990 Pleasure and Persuasion in Advertising: Rhetorical Irony as a Humor Technique. *Current Issues and Research in Advertising* **12**: 25-42

Stern B B 1995 Consumer Myths: Frye's Taxonomy and the Structural Analysis of Consumption Text. *Journal of Consumer Research* **22**: 165-185

Stern B B 1996 Deconstructive Strategy and Consumer Research: Concepts and Illustrative Examplar. *Journal of Consumer Research* **23**: 136- 147

Tanaka K 1994 *Advertising Language: A Pragmatic Approach to Advertisements in Britain and Japan.* Routledge, London

Thompson C J 1997 Interpreting Consumers: A Hermeneutical Framework for Deriving Marketing Insights from the Texts of Consumers' Consumption Stories *Journal of Marketing Research* **34**: 438-455

Thompson C J, Haytko D L 1997 Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings *Journal of Consumer Research* **24**: 15-42

Umiker-Sebeok J (ed) 1988 *Marketing and Semiotics. New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin

Van der Bulte 1994 Metaphor at Work in G Laurent et al eds. *Research Traditions in Marketing.* Kluwer, Boston, 405-425

Veblen T 1899 *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. MacMillan, New York

Veron E 1987 *La Semiosis Sociale*. Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, Vincennes

Wernick A 1991 *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression.* Sage, London

Wiley N 1994 *The Semiotic Self*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago

Williamson J 1978 *Decoding Advertisements*. Boyars, London