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## THE USE OF A SEMIOTIC UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNICATION IN THE DEVELOPING OF A TYPOLOGIZATION OF ADVERTISEMENTS

### 1. FROM SIGNALS TO SINGS - THE SEMIOTICS OF ADVERTISEMENTS

When a company is going to take a market communicative action the decision maker should do two things:

- a) Determine the form and contents of the message;
- b) Choose one or more ways to bring the message into a position of exposure.

The media parameter theory deals with aspect (b) whereas aspect (a) has been considered mainly in a behaviouristic/statistical way with the use of

"Stimulus - Organism - Response"

as the central comprehension model for the transfer of advertising messages from the company to the receivers. This means that the question of messages and the understanding of them, the impact, and effect have been conceived primarily as a question of influence at the level of the individual, cf. model 1 where the segments consist of individuals encountering a message:

S (Stimulus) should here be seen as the manifest and stable contents with a substantial affiliation to the "message" which can enable the Organism to react:

Sender - Message (= STABLE CONTENTS) - Receiver (Organism)

Thus, the S-O-R model represents a linear, processual communication model where the following have been used in the market research by means of empirical measurements:

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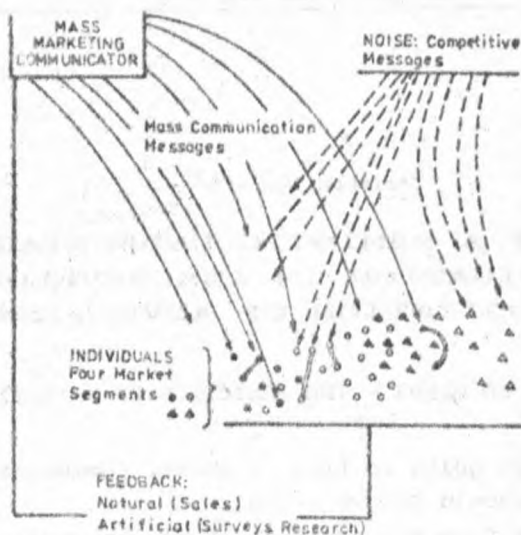


Fig. 1. Model 1 (after M. L. Ray, "Advertising and Communication Management")

"S" as a given "objectival stimulus"

"O" as a given "objectival organism" acquiring a message and responding

"R" as an "objectival and measurable effect", e.g.

- change of preference and pattern of loyalty,
- change of buying behaviour.

This fundamental concept of the human perception and "learning and acquisition process" can also be seen in the classical Hierarchy-of-Effects models (AIDA, DAGMAR, etc.) where "O"'s acquisition and handling of stimuli take place processually, linearly, and divided into phases.

Thus, the psychological approach focused on processes in the individual cuts off an understanding of the significance of the social and cultural aspects which are set off by the new humanistic communication research as decisive to all communicative behaviour among people<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the behaviouristic point of

<sup>1</sup> As exponent for this conception should be mentioned Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, but also Laing's antipsychiatry has stated this point of view as to the development of the human being as a function of an interaction with the environment, which has been considered important for the comprehension of the development of schizophrenia and other mental diseases.

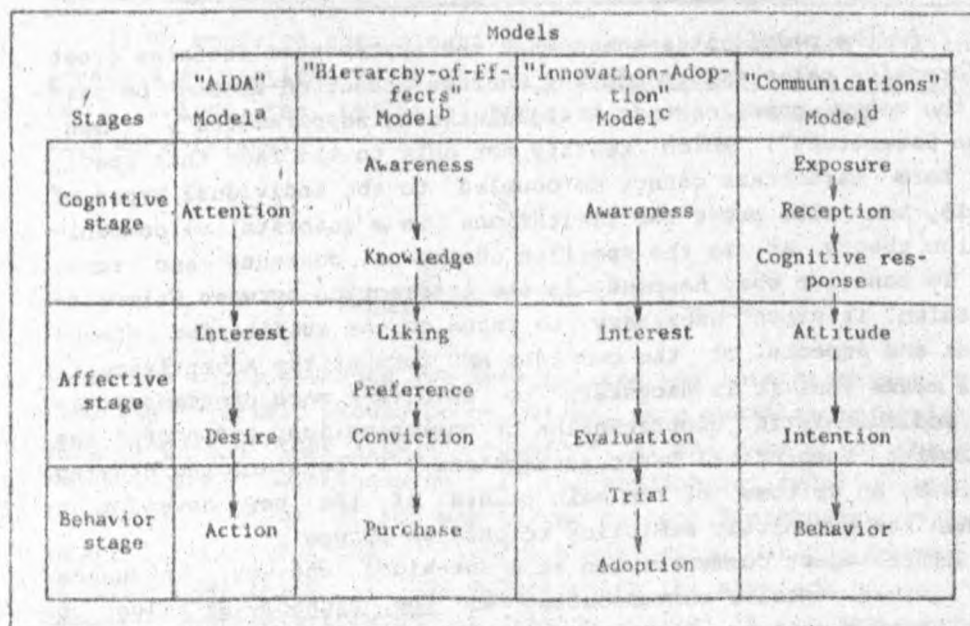


Fig. 2. Model 2 (Ph. Kotler, p. 612)

view also sets off an understanding of the interaction between stimulus and organism, the importance of which, the Gestalt psychology and the semiotics, among others, have pointed out. We can see the consequence of this view on communication by looking more closely at professor Otto Ottesen's matrix of the various types of communication parameters:

masse		individuelle		
personlige	upersonlige	personlige	upersonlige	
				signal- (ulformings-) parametre
mater (forhandler- mater, mater med konsumenter)	aviser ukeblader manesblader gratisblader lidsskrifter kinofilm	telefon beso (selgerbesok, canvassing)	post (brev m.v.) telegraf	media- parametre
demonstras- joner	adresseslose sendinger plakater butikkmedia utstillinger			

Fig. 3. Model 3 (O. Ottesen, "Innforing i Markedskommunikasjon", p. 33)

From the model, it appears that the systematism contains great informative value as to media - whereas attention should be paid to the empty boxes next to "signalutformningsparametre", ("message parameters") which testify not only to the fact that specific form parameters cannot be coupled to the individual types of media, but also prove the limitations in a quantitative communication theory as to the specific choice of contents and form.

To conceive what happens in the interaction between Stimulus-Organism, it seems necessary to focus on the qualitative dimensions and aspects of the contents AND form of the advertisement. This means that it is necessary to involve a more phenomenological and humanistic comprehension of communication, and accept the following theoretical basic assumptions. I consider the drawing up to be an epitome of the main points of the new development within the humanistic semiotics science in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

1) To reject communication as a one-sided one-way influence and instead conceive communication as the exchange of values of meaning of a culture with itself by means of signs and symbols, the meaning of which is affirmed by consensus - i.e. via an agreement (a code) between the members of a society or a culture. This means that not only the sender, but also the receiver, is active in the decoding process, i.e. that messages should only be conceived as an interaction between sender and receiver, where the concrete message form acts as a vehicle for the exchange of meaning:

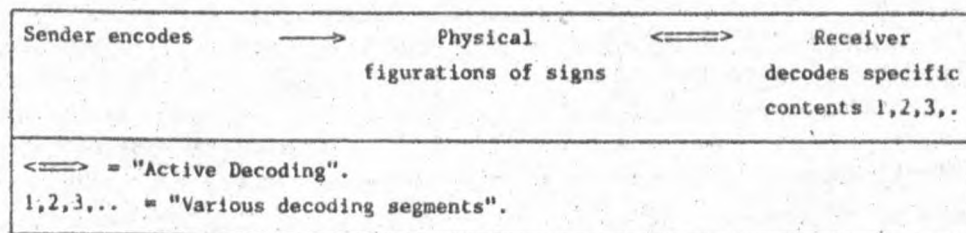
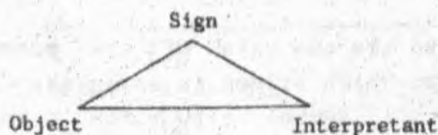


Fig. 4. Model 4

<sup>2</sup> Fundamentally, I consider J. de Saussure, Charles F. Peirce, and Claude Levi-Strauss to be important contributors to the development of the semiotic concept. Among younger researchers I attach much importance to Umberto Eco (1977); Roland Barthes (1957) and J. M. Peters (1977). As to the transfer and use of semiotics for advertising analytical purposes, Judith Williamson (1978) and David G. Mick (1986), Rebecca Holman (1981, 1986), Morris B. Holbrook and Elisabeth Hirschman (1982) have contributed with considerable works.

2) To conceive communicative messages as consisting of signs = sensuous figurations referring to something other than themselves. Ch. S. Peirce, the semiotic, depicted the basic structure of the sign as a triangle

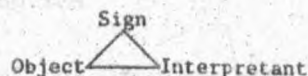


where the three elements are interrelated and interdependent. Thus "The Sign" itself should be conceived as a quantity referring to something other than itself = "Object". At the same time, the phenomenological comprehension of the sign/object relation appears in Peirce by means of the use of the concept "Interpretant" which is not "the interpreter", (i.e. a human being) but the impression or the mental image of the object which the sign activates. "The proper significate effect" as Peirce calls it, is activated on the basis of the experience the sign decoder has with "the sign" and "the object". This means that the Interpretant contents are formed on the basis of the coded relations between sign/object, object/interpretant, and sign/interpretant, respectively.

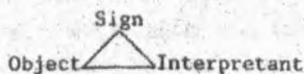
In the marketing theory "interpretant" may for instance correspond to "image" whereas "object" may be a product or a company profile. In our present advertising connection, object corresponds to the circumstances which an advertisement refers to (the technical data of the product and complementary relation in, for example, a situation of use, as well as the associative sign elements with which the product is sought linked).

Thus, "Object" is not necessarily a physical object, a physical product, but may just as well be a number of linguistically coded representations of circumstances, so that we get a web of sign references:

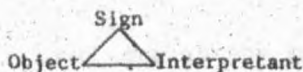
Code 1:



Code 2:



Code 3:



Etc., etc.

Fig. 5. Model 5



3) To conceive the symbols of messages as arranged in structures governed by underlying rules ("grammar and syntax").

4) To perceive manifested sign structures and the contents of sign structures as ambiguous and relative - depending on complex relations to referent, code, sender, receiver, and communication channels.

5) To conceive the contents of the communication as an exchange of meaning which arises in an interaction of symbol references (= "Objects"), symbol structures (= the relation of signs to other signs in the manifested message), channel, applied code (the semantic contents of sign register and combination rules for the manifestation of sign structures), and the reader's qualifications and experience (in terms of experience with product and decoding ability). This interaction can be illustrated by the following model:

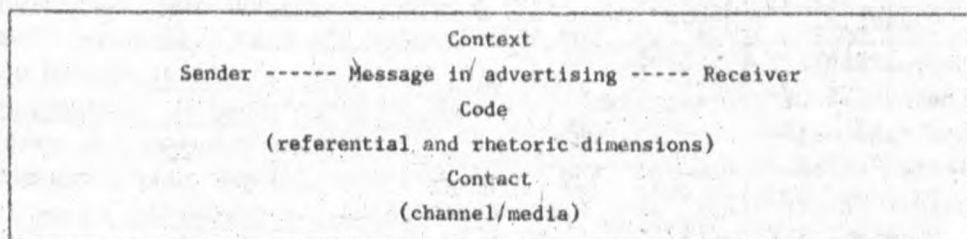


Fig. 6. Model 6

6) To conceive the receiver as an active decoder who understands the message in relation to the reference frame and anticipation horizon he/she possesses by virtue of affiliation.

On the basis of the above, we can draw up the following model for the interaction which takes place in the decoding phase:

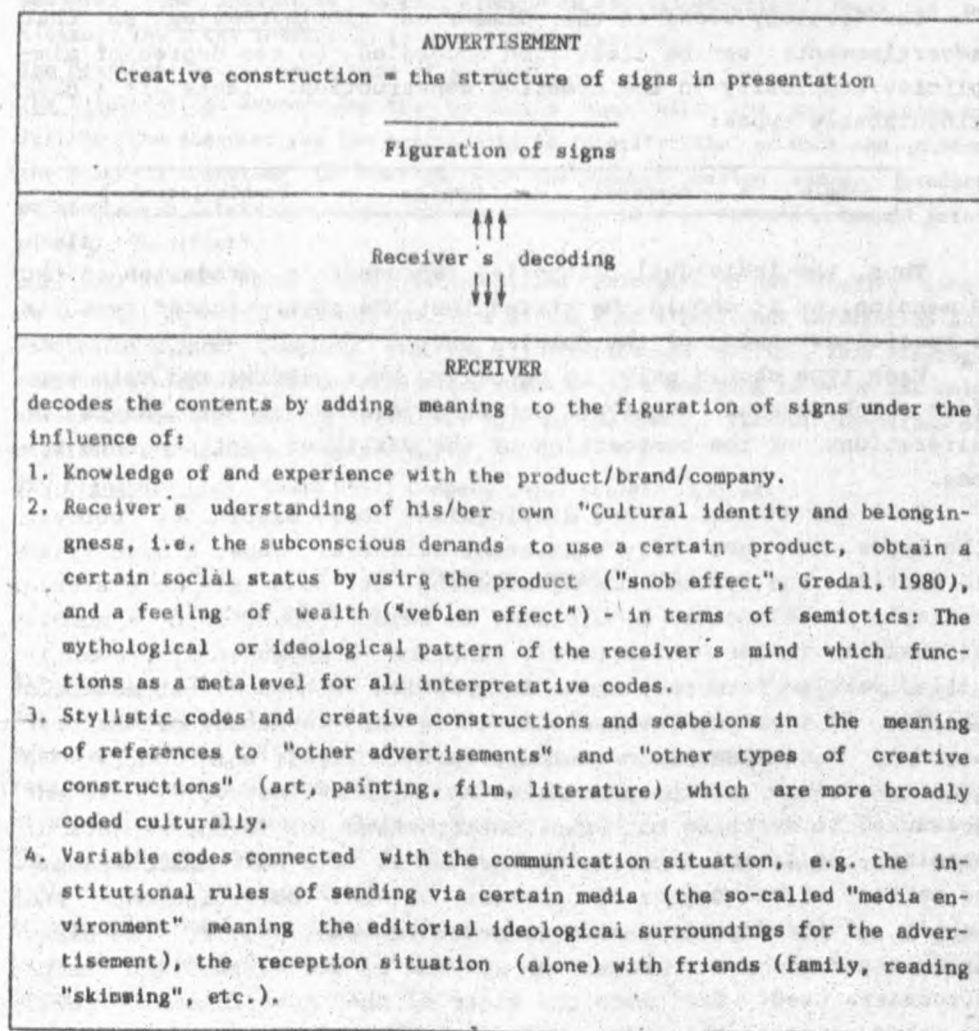


Fig. 7. Model 7

## 2. ASPECTS OF THE CREATIVE CONSTRUCTION

In her book "Advertising as Communication", G. Dyer presents a wide range of studies of and theoretical work with the ways in which advertisements are arranged, and evaluated for their semantic and syntactic structures.

A typology, which can be useful here due to the fact that it presents a simple categorizing systematism from clear principles is Hall and Whannel's typology.

The typology works in the dimension simple/complex so that advertisements can be classified according to the degree of simplicity/complexity in the creative construction. There are 4 distinguishable types:

Simple	-	Compound	-	Complex	-	Sophisticated
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Thus, the individual categories represent a gradation of the dimension, as it should be stated that the sophisticated type is a special extension of the complex one.

Each type should only be conceived as a generalized main type from which several sub-types can be generated on the basis of alterations of the composition of the variables defining the types.

Hall and Whannel do not distinguish very distinctly between the types, nor use very consistent criteria. Thus, I have tried to clarify the systematism by breaking it down into more stable criteria and elements by dividing an advertisement into a number of semantic fields which partly function independently semantically, partly form part of an interaction with the other semantic fields. In each semantic field, there are a number of manifest elements of meaning (the semiotic surface layer) which carry more latent meanings of an associative and mythical nature. I have endeavoured to describe both the manifest and the latent aspects of meaning, the latent ones being derived as some sort of consequence partly of the degree of openness of the advertisement, and partly of the degree of direct, concrete reference to the exact product and the exact situation of use of the signs and sign structures used. The more the signs of the advertisement refer to other aspects than the product and the situation of use realistically, the more complex and sophisticated it works - which means involvement of the more latent universe of imagination of the receiver.

### 3. SPECIFIC CHARACTERIZATION

#### I. THE SIMPLE ADVERTISEMENT

(Example: Mackenzie Decongestant Tablets)

This type of advertisement gives specific information about the product (technical features; how it functions; advantages of using the product; prices



dealers). The product is the only element in the illustration. There is no slogan. The total impression is poor in associations.

The Headline: Brand name + name of product.

The Illustration: Reproducing the product's look with the sole purpose of letting the consumer get the opportunity to identify the product and combine the features described in the text with the product design and/or product packing which determines the contents which is poor in associations and principally "manifest".

The Copy: Informs about product features, and relevance of use. "Dealer" (where to buy); price. The text functions as the most significant information AND PERSUASION ELEMENT, compared with the illustration and headline. This strategy of construction of the ad determines results in a decoding in which the main stress of the significance effort is laid on the exact, factual dimensions of significance (denotative significance).

The Signature Line: Brand name, Company Logo, Dealers' addresses.

## II. THE COMPOUND ADVERTISEMENT

(Example of "Pendleton's wool - Young Pendleton")

The Headline: Tries to form a catch phrase, where the word "young" contains a lot of latent significance. Apart from standing for a product line, it also promises you some lifestyle qualities (future and possibilities). This latent structure determines the reading of the illustration, creates some sort of anchorage or framing of fields of associations.

The Illustration: The product forms visually a part of a setting with 2 possible dimension of significance:

1. A manifest one - showing what the product looks like and how it is used (e.g. in combination with other products and people) in specific situations of use.
2. An associative/latent one - where the setting (apart from function (1)) also functions as a vehicle for the evocation of specific associations in the decoding process - e.g. "luxury", "happiness".

The Copy: Informs about the product - information the illustration does not give. In this way, the text function is "relieving" (Roland Barthes) in relation to the illustration.

The Signature Line: The anchors the most important dimension of the product - it's wool - by using the international logo for wool.

### III. THE COMPLEX ADVERTISING

(Example: Parker's Pen)

The Headline: Anchors the symbolic analogy lobster soup with the finest ingredients/Parker with the best qualities - in relation to both illustration and text.

The Illustration: The product forms part of a symbolic interaction with the surroundings no matter whether there are persons present, or whether a situation of use is shown. Thereby, the complex advertisement differs from the compound advertisement. The illustration is dominated by symbolic signs arousing strong associations with other connections and worlds than the one immediately linked with the product, whereby the complex advertisement seeks to attach more postulating values to the product by means of analogies and metaphors - this means that the complex advertisement is actually concept innovative. The persuasive power of the complex advertisement depends entirely on how well the interaction between the symbolism of the illustration, the text, and the headline functions - and how relevantly the symbolism used is perceived. In the present advertisement, it is possible visually to perceive the combination "Parker in lobster's claw" as a visualization of Parker's logo.

The Copy: The use of postulated metaphors (in this case the comparison between Parker's dimension of exclusiveness and something of the most tasteful in Haute Cuisine which places Parker "in a class with lobster soup") can be used to create/maintain an image - even the personality of the brand in relation to other brands (symbolic positioning). The text emphasizes the dimensions of exclusiveness which characterizes "the secret of Parker".

The Signature Line: Logo/brand name (cf. the connection of the logo with the illustration).

### IV. THE SOPHISTICATED ADVERTISEMENT

(Example: Tuborg Beer)

The Headline: ("What makes life more green?")

Questions - in combination with the illustration - refer to a coded catch phrase which contains a special Danish concept: "Green Spare Time" which means "working in the garden in a relaxed way". But - when this spontaneous association has appeared, the receiver still wonders - what is the product? If the receiver spends a little more time on the ad, he/she will discover an atypical sort of garden tool - "a bottle opener or a handle" (furthest to the right). This bottle opener has been hung up like a garden tool, thus postulating that its function is just as natural as that of the spade and the rake, i.e. that

beer is almost organically connected with "garden" and the special qualities of life connected with the garden as a hobby. The Danish receiver will also be familiar with the campaign which Tuborg, the brewery, has conducted for 10 years under the slogan "Tuborg makes life greener". And finally, "a green one" is the nickname for a bottle of Tuborg because the colour green is the "beer colour" in Denmark. Thus, the ad is a typical reminder.

The Illustration: shows a range of garden tools. Visually, the product is totally absent. The setting has a pure symbolic function and establishes

1) a supernatural, dreamlike universe with sexual elements (objects which arouse associations to sexuality) and symbols pointing to an internal fantasy world - "the dream world" - where all the (subconscious) codes are related to taboo realms of structured desire (Freud). This "dreamworld" also contains imaginations of ideal "utopic" situations and memories; or

2) a strong coded cultural or mythological world where the elements point to typical cultural situations with ideal importance in the everyday pattern of life. Thus, the project of the advertisement is to paraphrase product/aspects of use into pure mythical "paradigms", so that only the symbolic meaning of the product is emphasized in the advertisement.

### 3. THE USE OF THE CLASSIFICATION IN MARKETING

It must be taken for granted that the degree of complexity in the rhetoric operation of the advertisements shown also presupposes other coded conditions than the mythical code register of the receiver - e.g. a specific knowledge of a product, a brand or a company, i.e. that the complex and sophisticated advertisements play on a number of developed and refined codes as far as the syntactic/rhetoric structure itself is concerned - whereas the individual signs used might well be both culturally wide and typical (stereotyped) as to what they refer at a mythical and cultural level to secure the cultural identity with the product in this way. This is the case, for instance, with the sophisticated advertisement for Tuborg.

Thus, it would be a mistake to disregard a form of learning process in connection with the product and its use when we are to take a decision on the more strategic use of certain rhetoric patterns in the advertisement. Certain types of signs and syntactic constructions will thus be most expedient in the passing on of certain messages in consideration of specific levels of experience of the consumers. In the traditional advertising li-

terature, we find this aspect of experience described in, among others, D. A. Aaker, J. G. Myers (1982), A. Rasmussen (1983), and O. Kleppner, S. Greyser (1986).

D. A. Aaker and J. G. Myers (1982) and A. Rasmussen (1983) indicate that advertising and other market communications should assume different characters depending on the place of the product in the diffusion process. In D. A. Aaker and J. G. Myers, O. Kleppner and S. Greyser, E. M. Rogers and F. F. Shoemaker and others, it is said that the basic knowledge and the preimpression of the product which the consumer is presumed to have determine the communication contents. From this, the more specific contents which are to be used in the present communication effort are deducible. These suppositions have resulted in a connection between a superior "key message" or "main theme" and certain stages of the life cycle, as follows (according to A. Rasmussen):

1. Innovation: Need for product information in relation to the user's product requirements and knowledge of previous products which the new product replaces or substitutes.

2. Growth, stage 1: Heavy growth and few brands. Need for diversification of the individual brand in relation to the competitors. Still based mainly on technical and functional qualities of the product.

3. Growth, stage 2: Declining growth, many brands, and intensified competition. Need for diversification of the brands by means of image qualities.

4. Repositioning: A) New markets and/or B) Product modifications: re: A) The contents of the advertisement are governed by a strategy corresponding to a mix of the stage of "Innovation" and to "Growth, stage 1"; re: B) the contents of the advertisement are governed by a strategy corresponding to "Growth stage 2".

Corresponding to O. Kleppner's advertising strategy, 3 advertising stages can be identified:

1. Pioneering - the product is new and the advertising has to pull the consumer through a learning process- what can this product be used for?. Thus the "main theme" is "the product".

2. Competitive - the product is in competition with other brands and the advertising stresses the brand's special advantages. People make their choices from among the different brands. Main themes: "The Brand Advantages in all Dimensions" - from physical to psychological: (technique, price, design, service) building up a position and image of the brand.

3. Retentive - the product is sold to specific buyers, and the advertiser may seek to hold the patronage of the present buyers. Main theme: "Image".

Each stage claims its own contents, following the advertising spiral:

- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Pioneering  | 4. NEW Pioneering  |
| 2. Competitive | 5. NEW Competitive |
| 3. Retentive   | 6. NEW Retentive   |
|                | etc.               |

#### 4. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CONTENTS AND RHETORIC DIMENSIONS

If we compare all these demands with the contents and the creation of the message, it is obvious that our typology with all its aspects can easily function as an operational instrument to identify important content structures (themes). The complexity of the themes depends on the degree of rhetoric sophistication. All these aspects are linked to the sophistication and complexity of the symbols used. In other words, we postulate that the simple advertisement is most convenient in connection with the demand for simple, introductory product information (the task of advertising in the pioneering/innovative stage). In contrast, the more sophisticated the advertising task has to be (positioning and image building), the more the advertiser has to use complex signs and symbols, as well as syntactic and rhetoric structures.

So we postulate this very rough correlation between PLC stage, type of main theme, and type of ad:

PLC stages	: Innovation	Growth 1	Growth 2	Saturation
Advert. stage	: Pioneering	Competitive		Retentive
Main themes	: "Product"	"Brand aspects" - "Image aspects"		
Ad types	: "Simple"	"Compound"	"Complex"	"Sophist."

Fig. 8. Model 8

#### 5. THE CONSUMER'S INVOLVEMENT - A DETERMINING CONSTANT

If we assume that the knowledge of the consumer of the product is a determining variable in our search of the most appropriate advertising strategy, we also have to mention the consumer's in-



volvement. This means that the more involved the buyer is, the more aspects of a product should be communicated in one way or another.

The consumer will spend more time on the searching process, i.e. "reading an ad" for a high involvement product. Apart from the demand for hard facts, this also increases the demand for deeper, symbolic dimensions in the construction of the ad, even if it is a new product on the innovation PLC stage. In this situation, the advertiser has to start with a type of ad which also stresses the symbolic meaning of the product or the surroundings - i.e. a "compound", or possibly a "complex" ad.

The Correlation between Ad Type, Product Category, and Media Compared with product type categories, the ad types may be classified as below (the same circumstances as to involvement as described above applying). An anonymous commodity generally attracts less attention, so even when the launching a new brand on a growth market, or a pure image advertising on a saturated market are concerned, the learning process in connection with the individual brand will be of such a one-dimensional character and the memory so relatively diffuse (general orientation towards the product type, poor brand loyalty) that more complex and sophisticated forms of advertising will easily imply complex codes, unless a strong operation was concerned in which a strong coding for the brand in question was established.

Product Type	Simple	Composite	Complex	Sophisticated
Anonymous Marks	XXX	XX	X	
Brand Marks		X	XX	XXX
Durable	X	XX	XXX	XX
Non durable	XX	XXX	XX	X

Fig. 9. Model 9

In relation to media types in which technical characteristics and reader conventions have fixed reception situations, the following factors should be regarded as "determining": The reading of ads in daily papers takes less time than the reading of weekly magazines due to both the reading situation and the character of the media copy (daily news and broad information). Each copy of the weekly magazine is read more often than a daily paper and during various reception situations, just as the editorial copy is

generally of a higher involvement character in relation to the daily paper. The copy can be characterized as more season- and trend-oriented, more personally activating, analytically demanding (a relatively narrow and deep selection of themes).

<u>Characterization of weekly magazines and newspapers evaluated for qualitative relations between contents and reception</u>	
Weekly Magazines	Daily papers
Season- and trend-oriented contents	Topical contents
Narrow and deep theme universe	Wide and flat theme universe
High involvement themes	Low involvement themes
Several exposures	Few exposures
Various reception situations	Uniform reception situations
Great receiver activity	Less receiver activity

Fig. 10. Model 10

Due to the short and time-compressed course of events, the audiovisual advertising form is best suited for symbolic visual rhetoric without much text (= complexity and sophistication). At the same time, there is a difference in the reception situations for films and TV, respectively, since films are received in the cinema, whereas TV is received in the home, in the bosom of one's family. Furthermore, a distinction should be made between local and national TV, as both the contents categories and the expectations connected to them, are different. Local TV will also be characterized by the property "locality" for the advertisers, so that the advertising forms characterizing the local market, e.g. the retail trade, are transferred to TV.

A judicious observation of the most common types of advertisements (in periodicals, weekly magazines, and daily papers) seems to indicate that the most common types are "The Compound" and "The Complex" ones, whereas "The Sophisticated" one is rather rare. "The Simple" one especially attaches itself to certain types of periodicals (such as hobby magazines, radio and hi-fi magazines, etc.), just as it can be asserted that the advertisement form "Classified Advertisements" is a simple type, irrespective of product type and PLC stage.

	Simple	Compound	Complex	Sophisticated
Media				
Daily papers	: XXX	XXX	XX	X
Weekly magaz.	: X	XXX	XX	XX
Film	: X	XXX	XXX	XX
TV (local)	: XX	XXX	XXX	X
TV (nation)	: X	XX	XXX	XX

Fig. 11. Model 11

The last examples and models are highly postulated and have only been included to show a spectrum of the fields of activity and the qualitative connections where the systematism can be used in connection with the generating of a normative theory. Obviously, these advanced hypotheses indicate a number of empirical examinations which can reveal some valid, reliable, and verifiable connections for the use of not only the advertising agencies. In this paper, it has been made clear that the systematism itself in a way does not offer any serious problems as to the manifest semantic elements, whereas the disclosure of more latent themes and meaning structures requires a large bulk of material and subsequent empirical tests of a sample from the segment to which the advertisement appeals. This is due to the higher insecurity and divergence which can be empirically established between decodings at the latent levels of meaning of a given manifest sign structure (cf. for instance Chr. Alsted et. al., 1987)). However, the empirical communication tests cannot replace the semiotic analysis. The two forms of analysis - the hermeneutic hypothesis generating one and the empirically verifying one - should walk hand in hand in a kind of cognitive spiral motion reciprocally stimulating one another in a profound communication analysis.

The empirical world cannot be examined in a meaningful way in the communication field without a previous advance of hypothesis which includes structural aspects of the linguistic side of communication statements. As to decoding and understanding of signs and symbols, linguistics and semiotics have proposed a varied theoretical concept apparatus for the description of the basic structures which are games in communicative actions. The question is then, how these systems work in practice and are filled with contents and signs for certain experiences and culturally conditioned comprehensions of the surrounding world which include products and their use in society.

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WYKORZYSTANIE SEMIOTYCZNEJ INTERPRETACJI PRZEKAZU  
DLA OPRACOWANIA TYPOLOGII REKLAMY

Dotychczasowe badania marketingowe w zakresie procesów komunikowania koncentrowały się głównie na wyborze nośników reklamy. Na polu tym osiągnięto też szereg pozytywnych wyników. Niewiele było natomiast badań na temat treści i form reklamy, choć według licznych badaczy decyzje w tej sferze mają często większe znaczenie niż wybór nośników reklamy. Dlatego też celem artykułu jest próba analizy i opisu zawartości przekazu reklamowego i jego form, przy wykorzystaniu jakościowego, humanistycznego podejścia.

W artykule przedstawiono niektóre podstawowe aspekty semiotycznego podejścia do komunikacji, w odróżnieniu od tradycyjnego modelu S-O-R (bodziec-odbiorca informacji-reakcja). Autor skoncentrował się na związku pomiędzy oddziaływaniem przekazu reklamowego i odbiorcą. Opracowano semiotyczny model konsumpcji dla procesu dekodowania informacji. W części II wykorzystano rozumowanie semiotyczne dla opracowania typologii reklamy.