A methodological framework for projecting brand equity: Putting back the imaginary into brand knowledge structures

George Rossolatos

Department of English and American Studies
Faculty of Humanities, University of Kassel
Kassel, Germany
email: georgerossolatos123@gmail.com

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to outline a methodological framework for brand equity planning with structuralist rhetorical semiotics. By drawing on the connectionist conceptual model of the brand generative trajectory of signification it will be displayed in a stepwise fashion how a set of nuclear semes and classemes or an intended semic structure that underlies manifest discursive structures may be projected by its internal stakeholders (i.e., a brand management team, an account planning team or a marketing research team) with view to attaining differential brand associations. The suggested methodological framework focuses on the strength and uniqueness of brand associations as integral aspects of a brand's equity structure and comprises a set of calculi that aim at addressing from a brand textuality point of view how associations may be systematically linked to their key sources with an emphasis on the ad filmic text. The propounded methodology is exemplified by recourse to a corpus of ad filmic texts from the major brand players in the UK cereals market. The argumentative thrust is intent on demonstrating that structuralist rhetorical semiotics is not only useful for analysing/interpreting brand texts, but, moreover, for constructing and for managing them over time. This demonstration is deployed by adopting a synchronic/diachronic and intra-(ad)-filmic/inter-(ad)-filmic approach to the formation of brand associations that make up a projected brand equity structure, in the context of embedded product category dynamics.

Keywords: brand equity, content analysis, multimodal rhetorical semiotics, brand textuality

Introduction

Structuralist semiotics still constitutes one of the dominant perspectives in the semiotic discipline. Despite its presumed disintegration with the advent of post-structuralism (Frank 1989; Dosse 1992; Rastier 2006; Danesi 2009) it is still practiced in the context of academic textual analysis, but also in applied semiotic approaches in the wider field of branding. It is regularly evoked as a dominant perspective in cinematic film analysis, and widely practiced in the interpretation of literary and cultural texts. Furthermore, time-hallowed structuralist semiotic conceptual constructs, such as isotopy, semes, redundancy, have been integral to semiotic rhetorical approaches, as evinced in Groupe μ's seminal rhetorical semiotic treatises (cf. Badir 2010; Rossolatos 2014).

The 'interpretivist movement' in marketing research, under which terminological rubric a diverse range of paradigms have been hosted (cf. Cova, Elliott 2008; Rossolatos 2014) favoured an opening up of alternative research horizons, albeit in a context where due to a 'battle of perspectives' some were abandoned before their full-blown benefits could be reaped. Such is the case with structuralist semiotics whose momentum was undercut perhaps far too hastily by its successor, that is post-structuralism (see Rossolatos 2013b). Somehow a few concepts from the vast conceptual armoury of structuralist semiotics seem to have endured throughout this transition. Among these concepts, the semiotic square has survived mainly due to its propagation by practitioners in marketing semiotics and to its intuitive accessibility for the purpose of planning alternative brand positioning routes (see Rossolatos 2012a). However, as I have argued elsewhere (Rossolatos 2012b), the piecemeal adaptation of the semiotic square in disregard of its operational role in the wider generativist approach to signification that was propounded by Greimas, coupled with considerable criticisms that have been launched against it by its originators (i.e., Rastier who co-created the semiotic square with Greimas; see Rossolatos 2013a), are likely to overshadow the conceptual richness of structuralist semiotics, its practical relevance to the construction and management of sign systems, such as brands, but also its fruitful transformation from a speculative conceptual panoply to a methodologically pertinent framework.

The possibility of adopting structuralist semiotics and, by extension, structuralist rhetorical semiotics as methodological framework for the projection of a brand equity structure constitutes the focus of this paper. The propounded methodological framework is not intent on furnishing a general branding model, in which case I would like to refer the reader to an earlier review of models that have been put forward in the relevant marketing and semiotic literatures (Rossolatos 2012b, 2014; also see Thellefsen, Sorensen 2013), but a specific approach to the projection of a brand

equity structure that is intent on reinstating structures of the imaginary into brand knowledge structures.

In greater detail, this paper starts with an overview of the meaning of brand equity and the advertising text as a key source of equity. The argumentation proceeds with highlighting the relevance of a structuralist semiotic approach to the management of brand equity over time, while pointing out potential limitations in this undertaking. Then, the nine steps that comprise the propounded methodological framework are laid out. These steps which constitute parts of a feedback-looping and not necessarily a linear process, consist of (1) the projection of an elementary structure of signification *qua* nuclear semes and classemes or core and peripheral associations in a projected brand knowledge structure; (2) the designation of a brand master narrative; (3) the segmentation of manifest discourse into narrative utterances; (4) the demarcation of an ad text's surface discourse through verbo-visual semantic markers as pro-filmic elements; (5–6) the outline of production techniques and rhetorical figures (and operations) as modes of connectivity among verbo-visual pro-filmic elements; (7) the preparation of homological chains among surface discourse expressive elements (parallel structures) and (8) the generation of isotopies. The process culminates in (9) a set of semiotic brand equity calculi (brand associative uniqueness, strength and linguistic value) which portray the interactions among salient equity variables from a brand textuality point of view. The proposed methodology is finally illustrated by recourse to the content analytic output from 62 ad filmic texts from the three key brand players (and the 13 highest ranking sub-brands) in the UK cold cereals market, by pursuing a segment-by-segment analysis.

What is brand equity?

At the risk of repeating myself, but for the sake of guiding the reader through parts of the analysis that are crucial for understanding the ensuing methodological approach, let us begin this exposition by defining the fundamentals of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) and how the advertising text functions as a key source:

"Brand equity is a function of the level or depth and breadth of brand awareness and the strength, favorability and uniqueness of brand associations" (Keller 1998: 87). "Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer has a high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand and holds some strong, favorable and unique brand associations in memory" (Keller 1998: 50). "The definition of consumer based brand equity does not distinguish between the source of brand associations and the manner in which they are formed" (Keller 1998: 51).

However, as the research at hand will attempt to demonstrate, it is precisely the 'modes' whereby expressive elements as sources of brand equity are transformed into brand associations that determine the level of potential equity erosion or the degree of sustainability of brand equity. In essence, managing brand equity is indistinguishable from managing the 'transformational grammar' from expressive elements to associations, with the aid of structuralist rhetorical semiotics.

"Brand associations contain the meaning of the brand for consumers. The strength, favorability and uniqueness of brand associations play an important role in determining the differential response that makes up brand equity" (Keller 1998: 93). Following Kevin L. Keller, brand associations may be classified into three major categories, viz., attributes, benefits and attitudes.

Attributes may be distinguished into two categories, product- and non-product-related ones, denoting, respectively, the ingredients necessary for performing the product or service function and the aspects that relate to their purchase and consumption.

Benefits can be distinguished into three categories, functional, symbolic and experiential. Functional benefits correspond to product-related attributes, symbolic benefits correspond to non-product-related attributes, especially user imagery. Experiential benefits correspond to both product and non product related attributes and reflect emotional aspects of brand usage.

Attitudes concern overall evaluations of brands by consumers. Attitudes towards brands are the outcomes of attributes and perceived benefits.

The level of ownability of brand associations by a brand, according to Keller, depends on three dimensions, viz., their strength, favourability, uniqueness (Keller 1998: 51–53).

Strength is a function of both the quantity of processing of brand related associations and the nature or quality of that processing. Uniqueness refers to the distinctiveness of brand associations, that is associations not shared with other brands. Favourable brand associations are those associations that are desirable to consumers and are successfully conveyed by a marketing program.

In sum, brand associations consist of three main components (attributes, benefits, attitudes) and are evinced alongside three key dimensions (strength, uniqueness, favourability). What seems to be lacking in Keller's otherwise seminal account of how brand equity is built is the transformational grammar or 'how' brand elements may be selected in the first place, during the encoding phase of ad texts, and how they may be transformed into brand associations as a projected brand equity structure.

The advertising filmic text as key source of brand equity

Advertising constitutes one of the principal semiotic modes whereby brand meaning is generated: "Traditionally, advertising has been a particularly powerful way of communicating a brand's functional values, as well as building and communicating its emotional values" (De Chernatony 2006: 6); "Advertising can influence brand equity in two ways. First, advertising can influence brand attitude, an important component of brand equity. Second, and more importantly, advertising can influence brand equity by influencing the consumer's memory structure for a brand" (Edell, Moore 1993: 96); "Advertising has become such a pervasive mode of semiosis in today's advanced economies that it is now an essential way of knowing the world" (Mick et al. 2004: 26).

Advertising constitutes one of the major fields of applied semiotic research (Pinson 1988). A plethora of considerably divergent approaches to the semiotic analysis of ad texts have been yielded by various scholars, some of which are cited in the following. Mick (1987) put forward a sketch map for the analysis of the depth structure of ad films by drawing on rewriting or transformational rules (e.g., deletions, movements, mergers). "The story grammar enterprise, with its search for invariant story components and related transformational rules, is really a semiotic enterprise" (Mick 1987: 272). Winfried Nöth delineated a multi-frame typological framework for ad texts, by drawing primarily on the distinction between inner and outer textual frames: "The outer textual frame contains formal indicators that distinguish the advertisement from the surrounding messages" (Nöth 1987: 283), while "[t]he inner textual frame of an advertisement contains those content units which constitute the textual core message of a typical advertisement" (Nöth 1987: 284). From an inner frame or core message point of view, further types of ads were identified, such as presentational, informational, classified, predicative, evaluative, hyperbolic, persuasive, prototypical. Jean-Marie Floch's (2001) analysis of print ads in the pharmaceutical category of psychotropic medication culminated in detecting recurrent stylistic patterns in the form of twelve visual categories, viz., "clear vs. dark", "shaded vs. contrasting", "monochromatism vs. polychromatism", "thin vs. thick lines", "continuous vs. discontinuous lines", "definite vs. vague planes", "simple vs. complex forms", "symmetrical vs disymmetrical forms", "single vs multiple forms", "high vs low", "layouts in conjunction vs layouts in disjunction", "pictorial vs graphic techniques". Danesi and Beasley's (2002) approach to advertising textuality bears considerable resemblance to Greimas's generative trajectory of signification as evinced in the distinction between surface and underlying textual levels. The underlying level is defined as "the hidden level of meaning of an ad text, also called the sub-text" (Danesi, Beasley 2002: 42). The surface level is "the physically perceivable part of an ad text" (Danesi, Beasley 2002: 42). The authors also identify surface textuality with the conscious,

denotative dimension and the subtextual layer with an unconscious, connotative dimension (Danesi, Beasley 2002: 129).

Veronika Koller (2007) conducted a combined linguistic/visual analysis of multi-media/multimodal advertising of the HSBC bank by drawing on Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's (2006) sociosemiotic concepts: "The visual analysis took into account the use of color as well as layout features such as frames, vectors, angles, and arrangements and size of items. The linguistic analysis […] looked at lexis (i.e., the keywords found) and at semantics in the form of key concepts" (Koller 2007: 117). A similar approach to advertising interpretation by drawing on Barthes's and Greimas's methods of textual analysis, complemented by insights about the structural elements of visual discourse in relationship to their intended effects as illustrated by authors who stem from diverse semiotic schools, such as Joly and Kress/Van Leeuwen, was pursued by Cian (2012). By drawing on a print ad from Chrysler PT Cruiser and a textual semiotic conception of the advertising text as a semiotic text, that is "a complex and multidimensional element, interwoven with its social, cultural, and interpretative reality, and not just a simple message" (Cian 2012: 57) as put forward by Umberto Eco and Paolo Fabbri, the author further split the interpretative dimensions into visual (such as colours and lighting, composition and layout), and linguistic (headline, brand name, payoff line).

A more extensive application of the dimensions of the Greimasian semiotic square that sought to combine the usefulness (and strenuousness) of interpolating surface structural expressive units on the elementary semantic units of interlocking squares, as well as to demonstrate how homological chains may ensue from such an analysis was laid out in Rossolatos 2012a. Leanne White (2009) analysed the copy from TV, cinema, web, print ads that were included in Foster Lager's IMC plan with view to culling which so-called 'national signifiers' were employed (e.g., the payoff line "Down Under is on top"), as well as how stereotypical myths about Australians were dispelled in the ad discourse, by following a shot-by-shot analysis. Denis Bertrand carried out a structuralist semiotic reading of four Black and White print ads in order to determine binary pairs of salient dimensions, e.g., dynamic/static, western/oriental (Bertrand 1988: 278), that may be recruited in order to furnish a reading grid, in Greimas's terms, of the brand's advertising; how depth structural elements of the brand's semantic content (e.g., life and death) are reflected in surface structural chromatic categories (e.g., white and black) and verbo-visual expressive elements that partake of such categories (e.g., family photo, tunnel picture), but also how rhetorical figures such as irony in fact upset the stability of strict oppositions.

Keller (1998) identified the main brand elements as brand names, logos, symbols, characters, slogans, jingles, packages. Expressive elements such as characters, slogans, jingles are part and parcel of a brand's textual edifice that is formed

diachronically through the employment of various ad texts. Insofar as sources of brand equity, according to Keller, concern primarily how brand meaning is constructed through strong, favourable, unique brand associations and given that brand associations stem from signifying structures, made up of advertising expressive elements, we may infer that the semiotic discipline that is first and foremost concerned with the study of sign-systems, is particularly suitable for examining the ways whereby the encoding and decoding of brand meaning may be accomplished.

The role of advertising in building and maintaining brand equity has been extensively researched in the marketing literature ever since the 1990s. The vast majority of analyses that have been offered in this stream pertain to the 'decoding' side of advertising and concomitantly to the already attained transformation of advertising expressive elements into brand image attributes, with an undue emphasis on the very encoding process of brand texts (see Solomon, Greenberg 1993). Scholars in the advertising research stream (e.g., Goldenberg, Mazursky 2008) have made attempts at discerning 'depth structures' of ad expressive elements, albeit against a non-semiotically informed conceptual background, while linking such 'depth structures' neither to intended brand signification nor to a brand's semic nucleus as the essential correlate at the plane of content and in a product-category-specific framework.

My contention is that unless an associative structure is projected in the first place in such a manner that adjoins an intended semic universe to a selected expressive inventory, it is impossible to gauge and, furthermore, to manage to what extent the resulting brand associations in consumers' minds do in fact derive from a brand's communicated expressive inventory. To this end, the ensuing structuralist rhetorical semiotic methodology for projecting an intended brand equity structure aims at bridging this gap between what is intended and what is perceived by the final consumer, with a focus on brand uniqueness and brand strength which are the main controllable dimensions by an internal marketing environment (given that favourability is strictly a function of the decoding process on behalf of the enunciatee or receiver of an ad message; cf. Baack 2006 for a focused approach on the impact of advertising on brand associative strength).

The value of a structuralist semiotic approach to the construction and management of brand equity

Greimas's semiotic perspective which appeared initially in the form of a semantic theory and was further elaborated into a full-fledged textual semiotic conceptual armoury and methodology,[1] primarily concerns relations and transformations. Brand

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[1]   "Semantics differs from semiotics chiefly in its insistence on the description of meaning in natural languages, as opposed to all sign systems" (Nef 1977: 20).

meaning arises only through relations among signs, while it takes place through various transformations in different levels or strata [*niveaus*] of the so-called generative trajectory of signification. Insofar as brand equity points to the possibility of attaining higher brand value and given that brand meaning is the source of brand value (see Rossolatos 2013e), then structuralist semiotics and particularly a generativist approach to the generation and management of brand meaning over time constitutes a most pertinent blueprint (Rossolatos 2013a; 2013f).

The fact that structuralist semiotics is pertinent as a conceptual and methodological backdrop for edifying a semiotic approach to brand equity is neither bereft of the need for adaptations to the exigencies of the signs system at hand, nor immune from limitations and potential criticisms.

The first and foremost limitation of structuralist semiotics (as noted in Rossolatos 2013a) consists in over-emphasizing oppositional pairs (both in terms of content and expression). In fact, this has been structuralism's battlefield and key point of criticism from post-structuralists (see Danesi 2009). As noted by Greimas and further criticized by Rastier (see Rossolatos 2013a) there is absolutely no reason why a depth structure should be of oppositional form. At the risk of incurring a cataclysmic anathema on behalf of 'hardcore' structuralists, yet respecting the very fundamental tenet of Greimasian structuralism, *viz*., that relations have precedence over standalone signs in determining how sign systems signify, I readdressed the time-hallowed trajectory of signification in a connectionist fashion (see Rossolatos 2013a, 2014) in the context of my approach to the brand trajectory of signification, that is by positing a brand equity structure as an associative network of nodes and links among expression and content elements (see Figure 1 for an example of the application of such a connectionist approach with the aid of the content analytic software Atlas.ti 7).

On the one hand, this approach to brand signification is closer to contemporary approaches in the marketing literature that seek to determine how brand associations are shaped in consumers' minds. On the other hand, it shows how a generativist approach to brand signification emerges dynamically through the interaction among the morphologically distinctive elements of the three strata of the trajectory, while bearing in mind that one of the major gaps in preceding attempts at applying the generative trajectory of signification consisted in under-emphasizing how elements from the three strata interact and how elements from one stratum are transformed into another stratum's components with a different syntax (see Rossolatos 2012b).

Furthermore, a major limitation, or rather area for further research and scope for enrichment, of the original conception of the trajectory consists in an undue emphasis on the importance of rhetorical operations and figures as modes of connectivity

among the strata of the trajectory, whose instrumentality was nevertheless recognized by Greimas (particularly as regards metaphorical connectors) as 'semiotic glue' across the strata (see Rossolatos 2013a). To this end I recruited a list of rhetorical figures (over and above rhetorical operations), with view to gauging how brand textuality actually emerges through an interplay between a brand's semic universe and its surface discursive manifestations or ad expressive elements.

Moreover, even though peripherally tackled in this paper for the sake of minimizing complexity, the case of the ad filmic text calls for attending not only to elements that pertain to the form of expression, but also to the substance of the plane of expression as production techniques. This is an area where film semiotics and film theory have proven to be instrumental. Insofar as in the filmic text the materiality of the signifier is directly affected by the employed production techniques that impact on the mode of perceptual engineering with regard to the concatenation of expressive units, a holistic generativist approach to brand equity should address differential modes of signification also by allusion to production techniques and their combinations. Let this otherwise crucial aspect be put aside for the time being for the sake of reducing the complexity of the proposed methodological framework.

The issues of whether the trajectory may be applied consistently across brands, categories, ad films as key sources of brand equity, and how this can be achieved are still pending. As remarked elsewhere (Rossolatos 2012b), Floch, undoubtedly a seminal figure in structuralist marketing semiotics, kicked off his *Semiotics, Marketing and Communication* (2001) with an exposition of the importance of the generative trajectory, yet he hardly applied it consistently as a holistic model for brand building throughout the multifarious projects that he undertook.

Moreover, Greimas's *Maupassant* (1976) that constitutes his most representative attempt at showing how structuralist semiotics may be applied for unearthing the depth structure of literary texts, neither made use of the trajectory nor applied a consistent methodology for digging progressively from surface discourse to depth structures. In short, there has been no consistent application of a full-fledged and a prioristic methodological framework that has been edified on structuralist semiotics.

In sum, structuralist semiotics is more than pertinent as a conceptual and methodological platform for constructing a brand equity structure at the very encoding stage of projecting an intended brand equity structure *qua* plenum of associations between ad expressive elements, a brand's semic universe and rhetorical modes of connectivity. The project of applying or, rather, re-constructing, a methodological framework that derives from the humanities and that was designed primarily against the background of literary analysis to the social sciences (in which marketing research is embedded) is neither dissonant with the advances in marketing research that have been marked by progressive imports from traditional humanities disciplines (e.g., hermeneutic approaches to a brand's diachronic development; see Hatch,

Rubin 2006) nor foreign to qualitative marketing research and practice. In the following section the details of the propounded methodological framework are laid out, while bearing in mind the limitations and adaptation exigencies, as above noted.

Methodological framework for projecting a brand equity structure

The proposed methodological framework is embedded in a mixed qualitative/quantitative research design. Attempts at quantifying qualitative phenomena or at furnishing calculi that may account for how salient variables to understanding sign systems interact in combinatorial schemes are not alien to semiotic research – see, for example, Peirce's formula for the quantity of information (Extension X Comprehension = Information; Nöth 2012) and Souriau's 'dramatic calculus' (Elam 1987: 77–79). At the same time, the quantification of linguistic phenomena and the analysis of textual patterns through meta-analyses with the employment of techniques that range from simple frequency distributions to multivariate and reductionist statistical techniques (e.g., correspondence analysis, factor analysis) is standard practice in textual/corpus linguistics (see Rossolatos 2013g). In this respect, a mixed qual/quant research design that employs semiotic interpretation alongside a standard method for the quantification of qualitative phenomena of textual nature, such as content analysis (which is employed in the proposed methodology) is neither alien to the wider linguistics/semiotics discipline, nor dissonant with marketing research.

In terms of brand equity research, from a marketing point of view, there is a vast literature and highly divergent methods for its conceptualization and operationalization in discrete product/service sectors, its relationship to advertising, its impact on the bottom-line (sales, market share, shareholder value; see Wood 2000; Veloutsou et al. 2013 for an overview of approaches). Methodological frameworks and data collection/analysis methods in brand equity research range from purely qualitative approaches (e.g., Blackston 1995;[2] Grace, O'Cass 2002) to advanced econometric ones (e,g., Srivastava et al. 1998; Srinivasan et al. 2005). Each approach has its own merits and is geared towards answering different research questions.

The proposed approach is situated in the wider consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) paradigm that was put forward by Keller (1998, 2001), the basic tenets of which were described earlier. This research stream prioritizes modes of formation of brand knowledge structures in terms of brand associations (see Rossolatos 2013a for a review of the relevant marketing literature on brand associations) which are edified

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[2]   Blackston, Max 1995. The qualitative dimension of brand equity. *ARF Brand Equity Workshop.* can be accessed at http://www.warc.com/fulltext/JAR/6212.htm.

on brand image attributes (or nuclear semes and classemes in Greimasian terminology) as *sources* of brand equity. As argued elsewhere (Rossolatos 2014) brand image constitutes the outcome and not the source of brand equity. In these terms, from a semiotic point of view, a methodology that seeks to provide an understanding of how superior brand equity, as superior linguistic value that concerns the potential for a brand discourse to attain differentially superior modes of configuration/ exchange among ad expressive elements and semes (see Rossolatos 2013e) may be projected at the very initial encoding level of a brand text is bound to engage with the modes whereby a brand's semic universe emerges in the light of its figurative discourse.

As Greimas has repeatedly stressed (see Rossolatos 2014) structures are primarily responsible for the organization of the imaginary. According to Keller, brand knowledge perspectives draw largely on cognitive psychology. However, "part of the challenge in developing mental maps for consumers that accurately reflect their brand knowledge is how best to incorporate multiple theoretical or methodological paradigms" (Keller 2003: 600).

Could the aforementioned Greimasian structuralist semiotic tenet be dissonant, one might ponder, with the cognitive psychological approach that undergirds Keller's conception of brand knowledge structure? An ineradicable bifurcation inheres in the answer to this question. This bifurcation consists in the role performed by the imaginary in the formation of brand associations. In the context of Keller's cognitivist approach there seems to be little space for the epistemic accommodation of the imaginary. In fact, imagination seems to have been dispelled from the epistemic dimension that the construct of brand knowledge structure seeks to encapsulate. The suppression of this faculty within the contours of Keller's cognitivist approach constrains our ability to account for how brand associations are shaped in the light of a highly figurative discourse, such as advertising. To this end, a structuralist semiotic approach that is intent on mapping the imaginary process of the formation of brand associations may prove to be an essential adjunct to an epistemic perspective that has been edified on cognitive psychological premises.

In contradistinction to employing structuralist semiotics as method for analysing/interpreting ad texts *ex post facto*, this framework is proposed as methodological platform for constructing a brand equity structure in the first place and furthermore as a way for managing a brand equity structure over time. This focused orientation mandates the consideration of a salient set that is strictly defined in specific product (or service) category terms as point of departure, and hence presupposes its enactment against a clearly conceived market segmentation. This necessary condition (which merely reflects a fundamental principle of strategic marketing management) posits a very strict criterion on the method's applicability, as against semiotic readings

of advertising texts that do not take into account either an intended positioning on behalf of brand players or enact readings against a corpus that is made up of ad texts from multiple brands in multiple categories.

Further to the above introductory remarks on the scope and aims of the proposed methodological framework for building brand equity with structuralist rhetorical semiotics, let us proceed with the exposition of the methodology which involves progressive levels of synthesis in terms of synchrony/diachrony and intra-filmic/inter-filmic levels (see Rossolatos 2013a, 2014), that is by reading each ad text initially as a standalone unit and then against the background of a brand's diachronically formed idiolect. The same procedure is repeated in terms of reading an entire product category's language diachronically, that is as formed through time by synchronically deployed ad texts from multiple brand players. The aim of this progressively synthetic reading is to produce local norms of a given product category's language, both in terms of content (that is semes), as well as expression (that is ad expressive units), but also, and even more importantly from a structuralist point of view, of modes of connectivity (i.e., rhetorical figures), as a category's local degree zero, against which individual brand deviations may be gauged.

Each of the nine steps of the proposed methodology addresses projected brand textual signification both on each stratum of a brand trajectory, as well as in terms of interactions amongst strata. The preparatory tables and intermediate calculi that are employed in different steps throughout the process aim at furnishing the essential building blocks that will feed into the resulting brand equity metrics.

Step 1. Determination of a brand's elementary structure of signification

The first step consists in demarcating a brand's semic micro-universe as elementary structure of signification in terms of nuclear semes and classemes or core and peripheral brand associations respectively. This is the bottom-up route that is followed when constructing a brand structure in the first place. In the illustration of the methodology that is offered in this paper a top-down procedure is followed for extrapolating this semic micro-universe based on aired ad filmic texts. In any case, since the construction of a brand structure presupposes a salient set of competitive brands the two approaches (that is bottom-up and top-down) are inextricably linked.

Nuclear semes and classemes consist of attributes, benefits and attitudes (Table 1), that is, primary and secondary brand associations, in line with Keller's model of brand knowledge structure or base and utopian brand values, according to Floch's terminology (cf. Rossolatos 2012b, 2014).

Table 1. Determination of a brand's semic micro-universe.

	Nuclear semes	Classemes
Attributes		
Benefits		
Attitudes		

Step 2. Construction of a brand's master brand narrative

A master brand narrative as canonical narrative schema concerns the textual institution of a set of background expectations about a brand. These expectations concern an anticipatory structure on behalf of the target audience as a recurrent depth structure in terms of its semic microuniverse. This step in the suggested semiotic brand equity planning methodology aims at translating a brand's positioning statement into the key morphological units at the semio-narrative level of the brand trajectory of signification, viz., into actantial figures. Given that the final reconstruction of the narrative utterances that make up the semio-narrative rendition of a brand's manifest discourse *qua* ad filmic text may be effected only upon a consideration of verbo-visual expressive elements (that is an ad text's pro-filmic units), which will be tackled in the ensuing steps, this step involves translating the nuclear and classematic semes that were identified in Step 1 into actantial objects (or objects of desire).

Elsewhere (Rossolatos 2012b) it was argued that the direct applicability of the narrative functions and characters, and by implication of the Canonical Narrative Schema, employed by, among others, Propp, Greimas, Floch is contestable in the face of the particularities of branding discourse, while the need for accounting for how a brand's positioning statement functions canonically in the brand trajectory of signification was dealt with by adapting the canonical narrative schema in the form of a master brand narrative.

Insofar as the canonical narrative schema is a regulative principle, according to Greimas or a narrative algorithm[3] (as put metaphorically by both Rastier [1971] and Guiroud, Panier [1979]), while, allegedly, not all its components are universally applicable (Courtés 1991), as well as given Greimas's own suggestion that the scope of modalities (and by extension the entire semio-narrative level) is open to enrich-

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[3]   A narrative algorithm is more like an interpretative heuristic device, as "unlike an algorithm, a heuristic does not guarantee a solution, but it is the best strategy for solving the ill-defined problems characteristic of interpretation" (Bordwell 1989: 138). Rastier (2006), while comparing hermeneutics with AI, also subscribes to the position that it is impossible to furnish an algorithm that would account for interpretative semiotic constraints.

ment (as practiced by Greimas, Fontanille 1991), the canonical narrative schema is by default open to redefinition according to the particularities of the corpus and genre at hand.

Step 3. Segmentation of manifest discourse into narrative utterances

Having thus far determined a brand's semic micro-universe and singled out the semes that will be used as actantial objects in a string of narrative utterances, let us now turn to a consideration of the methodological aspects pertaining to the segmentation of a brand's discourse, that is of an ad filmic text, into narrative utterances (hence-forth denoted as NUs). As with the previous steps, the segmentation will be addressed alongside the two key aspects of the semio-narrative level.

In crude terms, the segmentation of a narrative text (regardless of genre, e.g., literary, filmic) from a structuralist semiotic point of view aims at laying bare the text's internal organization, by imposing a logical structure on what appears on the surface discursive level as loosely connected sequences. The semio-narrative recon-struction of a manifest text follows a different temporal order than the latter in an attempt to elucidate how a subject is transformed through various actions by enter-ing in relations of conjunction and disjunction with the object(s) of desire. A trans-formation may take place in any position within the manifest discursive text, while more than one transformations are likely to occur in the succession among various narrative utterances. The transformations which the subject undergoes at the semio-narrative level are equivalent to transitions among states-of-being from one tempo-ral point (t) to another (t+1). The temporalization of a semic structure is mandatory for its *in vivo* deployment. "In order to be capable of manifestation, the logical cat-egory of content must be temporalized" (Greimas 1976: 26). However, as Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 80) stress, especially regarding the deployment of filmic tem-porality, the succession of events as portrayed in the manifest plot is hardly ever equivalent to the temporal order of the actual story (also affected by production techniques, such as flashbacks and flashforwards). In this sense, the temporal order of the story is always incumbent on the interpreter's reconstructive activity.[4] Hence, the reconstructed sequences, based on the semio-narrative logic may, but do not necessarily coincide with the manifest flow of the text.

The semio-narratively reconstructed filmic sequences are equivalent to narra-tive programs (NPs) or, in the case of communications, narrative utterances (NUs), that is, relatively autonomous narrative units ("abstract formulas used to represent

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[4]   "Such reordering doesn't confuse us because we mentally rearrange the events into the order in which they would logically have to occur" (Bordwell, Thompson 2008: 80).

action", according to Hebert[5] 2012: 92) that assume signification in the context of the entire text that engulfs them.

The importance of segmenting a text into NUs/sequences lies with (i) the fact that it enables us to account for how transformations take place in the deployment of a text and hence reconstruct them at a semio-narrative level (ii) gauging whether certain syntagms, by virtue of their recurrence (even in a figurative mode) constitute invariable surface discourse elements, thus being amenable to constituting isotopies in terms of stylistic and/or thematic isotopies (as will be shown in the ensuing steps).

Step 4. Demarcation of an ad text's surface discourse with the determination of verbo-visual semantic markers as pro-filmic elements

In order to reconstruct a surface discursive text into salient NUs, we must have determined the manifest ad text's pro-filmic elements. Pro-filmic elements constitute semantic markers that cater for a figurative text's coherence (which is complemented by syntactic markers of textual cohesion, in the form of rhetorical operations/figures and production techniques). In the case of the ad filmic text, semantic markers partake of identifiable figurative categories (e.g., actors, settings). Figurative semiotic categories allow for the interpretation of ad expressive elements by providing orientation. Orientation is yielded by identifying pertinent markers in the text that correspond to the organizing categories. The orientation strategy with the employment of 'grammatical markers' that was suggested by Groupe μ (1970) in their first rhetorical treatise was complemented by figurative markers (Groupe μ 1992: 151) for the recognition of rhetorical deviations in figurative texts (by reference to which a figure may be recognized as being operative in a text). Pro-filmic elements constitute figurative semantic markers which must be inventoried in tandem with figurative syntactic markers in order to account for a text's semantic coherence and syntactic cohesion, and proceed with coining isotopies, as will be shown in the ensuing steps. The key differences between textual linguistic and lexical semantic approaches (e.g., Cruse 1986; Swanson 2003; Biber, Conrad 2009) that explore issues of semantic coherence and syntactic cohesion and the proposed structuralist semiotic approach consists in the latter's (i) adopting principles of film grammar as its point of departure and methodological toolbox, as against standard lexical grammar (even though it does take into account lexicogrammatical rules), and hence adopting a textual segmentation rationale by drawing on verbo-visual filmic syntagms, rather than verbal syntagms (ii) by implication adopting a multimodal approach to semantic and syntactic markers that is visual in complementarity to lexical items, (iii) focusing not only on general

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5   Hebert, Louis 2012. *Dictionnaire de Sémiotique Générale* can be retrieved from http://www.signosemio.com/documents/dictionnaire-semiotiquegenerale.pdf

grammatical rules for tapping semantic deviations and rhetorical transformations, but, even more importantly, local textual rules that pertain to brands' local degrees zero.

The pro-filmic elements constitute the basis for gauging isotopies and homologies (cf. Rossolatos 2012b, 2014). The designation of pro-filmic units is essential in order to determine (i) which surface actorial figures in a manifest ad text function as subjects/ actants at a semio-narrative level; (ii) how objects of value as objects/actants are figuratively represented in surface discourse (let us recall that an actant, either object or subject, according to Greimas, may be represented in a text in any possible manner, either as a human actor or as a company or as an animal figure etc.); (iii) how pro-filmic elements function as markers of an ad text's local textual semantic coherence, prior to addressing aspects of syntactic cohesion by reference to grammatical syntactic markers and figurative (i.e., tropical) syntactic markers, but also in order to enact the operations of reduction and redundancy in the structuration process that allow for the transition to the semio-narrative and elementary signification levels.

Step 5. Demarcation of an ad text's surface discourse with the determination of rhetorical operations and figures as modes of connectivity among verbo-visual pro-filmic elements

The purpose of this step is to show how rhetorical operations and figures may and should be methodologically incorporated in a semiotic model of brand equity and the ad filmic text as its key source. As a point of departure, let us draw a distinction between structuralist operations of transformation and rhetorical operations of transformation, while pointing out how they function in complementarity.

Structuralist operations are responsible for bringing about a text's structuration (Rossolatos 2012b). The operations of redundancy, recurrence and reduction are particularly important as transition mechanisms from the surface discursive to the semio-narrative level. On the contrary, rhetorical operations of transformation determine *prima facie* the transformation of signification on a surface discursive level, while in the case of the ad filmic text they function as transition mechanisms among sequences or filmic syntagms or within the same sequence (or even shot), but also as ways of semantically (re)channeling the employed verbo-visual expressive elements.

Rhetorical figures may function both semantically and syntactically in the tropical configuration of ad textual pro-filmic elements, a point that was raised by Groupe μ (1970) ever since their first rhetorical treatise (see Rossolatos 2014). Regardless of whether a figure functions semantically or syntactically in the context of a filmic segment or in the wider (global) context of an ad film, at its core it performs the role of a mode of connectivity among verbo-visual expressive or pro-filmic elements. Hence, rhetorical operations and figures are particularly important, on

a first reading level and prior to considering and analysing their function as connectors among the various strata of a brand trajectory, as modes of figurative connectivity among an ad text's key pro-filmic elements. The taxonomy of rhetorical operations and figures that is employed in this methodology were extensively laid out in Rossolatos (2013c, 2013d), so I shall refrain from citing them anew.

Step 6. Demarcation of an ad text's surface discourse with the determination of production techniques as modes of connectivity among verbo-visual semantic markers (pro-filmic elements)

In Rossolatos 2014 a parallel was drawn between dreamwork and brandwork in the light of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, as well as Lacan's theory of the imaginary. Additionally, it was demonstrated how Greimas's key tenet regarding structures' mission in organizing the imaginary are echoed in film semiotic approaches, such as Christian Metz's (1982) imaginary signifier. The key processes of displacement and condensation involved in the dreamwork find their way into the filmic text through certain production techniques, which must be addressed as aspects of the substance of the form of expression, insofar as they affect directly the discursive organization of the ad filmic text. Hence, displacement is materialized by editing transitions between shots and condensation through lap-dissolves and superimpositions (see Ben Shaul 2007: 107; Stam et al. 1992: 60, with reference to Metz).

By incorporating in the applied methodological approach to the formation of brand signification at the discursive level salient film production techniques that pertain to the substance of the plane of expression as they affect the materiality of the elements of the form of expression we also attain to expand our account of modes of textual configuration, such as demonstrating the effects of lap-dissolve on the operation of permutation and the rhetorical figures that fall under its umbrella.

Paying close attention to how signification emerges by manipulating the filmic text through various production techniques is particularly useful where a dream-like hyperreal setting is concerned, aimed at producing a sensory experience that transgresses embedded notions of time and space.

Advertising film production methods are directly pertinent to the emergence of brand signification, as they impact on the substance of the plane of expression,[6] while acting as facilitators for bringing about operations of rhetorical transformation (e.g., the production method of montage facilitates the rhetorical operation of adjunction). At a more fundamental level, production techniques are indispensable for the segmentation of a surface discourse ad text into pertinent units of analysis as a necessary step to the reconstruction of a manifest discourse in semio-narrative

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[6]   For a similar treatment of production techniques in the context of filmic language as pertaining to the substance of the plane of expression see Groupe μ 1970: 180.

terms. The rationale adopted in this methodology for the segmentation of ad texts consists in breaking them down into relatively autonomous filmic syntagms[7] with the aid of content analysis and the content analytic software Atlas.ti 7 (as will be described in the ensuing section; see Rossolatos 2013c, 2013d), by analogy to the relative autonomy of NUs at the semio-narrative level. A filmic syntagm is deemed to be relatively autonomous insofar as it consists of pro-filmic elements that may be described in the same sense as a standalone propositional unit that describes the course of action in a manifest filmic plot.

The enrichment of the Greimasian structuralist approach to the generative trajectory by recourse to production techniques and rhetorical operations/figures attempts to demonstrate the priority of relata over pro-filmic elements in maintaining brand textual isotopic coherence.

Step 7. Preparation of homological chains among surface discourse expressive elements (parallel structures)

Homologies constitute a preparatory step for coining isotopies (thematic and stylistic) and for tapping patterns of textual coherence (Rossolatos 2012b). This step is not necessary in completing the brand equity trajectory process, but a heuristic mechanism that allows for deriving patterns of semantic coherence. Homological chains essentially are responsible for establishing analogical relations of similarity among ad filmic syntagms and key themes that run across a film's textual fabric, thus laying bare the latent iconic relationship between various textual segments, against the background of a brand's inner logic (or logico-semantic simulacrum in Greimas's terms).

According to Greimas, homologies do not pertain merely to comparisons in the form of oppositions and dissimilarities, but also to relationships of complementarity. Insofar as they apply to relationships of complementarity, they involve relationships of figurative similarity and by extension relationships of contrived iconic similarity between abstract concepts (semes) and verbo-visual expressive elements. These analogical relationships of similarity, as Rastier (1989: 61) notes, are 'qualitative' and rest with the reconstructive efforts of the semiotician. Insofar as textual coherence may be gauged through the existence of a set of structural homologies, then the internal coherence of an ad filmic text must manifest itself as a complex chain of intra-textual homologies that conjoin elements from different strata in the generative trajectory, such as by pairing sememes with lexemes or entire filmic syntagms with nuclear semes and classemes, but also actants. In such a manner one affords to establish a

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[7]   This was also Metz's point of departure in the segmentation of filmic narratives: "The starting unit for Metz's classification of alternatives is what he terms the autonomous sequence. This is the filmic realization of what, on the narrative level mentioned above, can be described or is being constructed as a single 'episode' with some 'unity of "action"'" (Bateman 2007: 20).

homological network of brand-related associations as a structurally inter-related whole (or a textual fabric, in Metz's [1971: 162] terms) or a homological matrix (Rastier 1989: 61). It may also be argued that homological chains allow for unearthing parallel structures in a text, by attending to how distinctive multimodal expressive categories (by analogy to grammatical categories, employed for gauging the incidence of a parallel structure – cf. Kolln 1999: 275; e.g., the repetition of adjectives in a syntagm), such as key visuals or key proxemic indicators or parasynonymic nouns are stringed with distinctive classes of semantic content, that is nuclear semes and classemes.

Step 8. Generation of stylistic and thematic isotopies

In terms of correspondences between the figurative and the thematic or the discursive and the narrative levels, various combinations are possible, such as between two or more figurative elements and a single narrative element, or between different complexes of figurative elements and different themes within the same text. Isotopies furnish a reading grid that allows for a homogeneous reading of a text (Greimas, Courtés 1979: 197–198) across the thematic/figurative axes. But what is the difference between this task and the task that was the focal point of the previous methodological step, other than that isotopic relations do not feature analogical structures? The answer lies in that homologies constitute a heuristic step and do not feature quantified relations, while the recruitment of the two main classes of degree zero of signification in the calculation of isotopies was not featured in the creation of homological chains.

The two dominant isotopic classes are defined as follows: (i) stylistic isotopies concern the frequency of recurrence of co-referring pro-filmic elements, where co-referentiality is defined under the aegis of general stylistic classes, e.g. different verbo-visual syntagms all portraying brand usage or different lifestyles that are related co-referentially to the projected brand image in an ad text; (ii) thematic isotopies concern the correspondence of different verbal, visual expressive elements and/or entire verbo-visual syntagms to particular nuclear semes and/or classemes. The brand equity calculi involved in the quantification of isotopies which will allow for gauging a brand's differential associative benefits and first mover rhetorical advantages *vis-à-vis* a projected equity structure will be laid out after the clarification of how degrees zero will be operationalized methodologically.

A general degree zero functions as a set of absolute semiotic constraints in the interpretation of the configuration of an ad text. It is produced through the generation of allotopies (see Rossolatos 2013h), as the outcome of comparison of a tropically semanticized filmic syntagm, where the plane of expression is made up of verbo-visual pro-filmic elements, and modes of connectivity *qua* figurative syntax and production techniques by reference to (i) grammatical rules; (ii) genre rules; and (iii) cultural background expectancies.

Further to the delineation of the above three frames of reference *qua* aspects of general degree zero that must be attended to in the determination of a rhetorical deviation, the following three semantic levels within the filmic text are addressed for gauging the incidence of rhetorical transformations against the background of a local degree zero: (i) the level of word/visual unit; (ii) the level of individual filmic syntagm, comprising one or more verbal phrases and one or more visual units; and (iii) the level of an ad film's global semantic context (see Rossolatos 2013d). In terms of criteria for delimiting filmic syntagms or sequences, as Metz (1974: 162–165) has shown, there is no such thing in the moving image as a priori clear-cut boundaries for their determination.

Step 9. Calculation of brand associative strength, uniqueness and linguistic value
The semiotic calculi of brand equity as linguistic value that are proposed in this methodology aim at quantifying (i) the strength of projected brand associations *qua* thematic isotopies from an encoding point of view; (ii) the uniqueness of the projected brand associations; (iii) a composite index that is reflective of a brand's linguistic value as the semiotic counterpart of brand equity.

In line with antecedents in structuralist semiotic related methods of quantification of textual phenomena and specifically of isotopies (e.g., Rastier 1989) with a focus on their weight and density, the following calculi are intended to account for how superior linguistic value emerges in ad filmic texts as a key source of brand equity.

The first calculus is reflective of the strength of projected brand associations with a focus on nuclear semic components that are inscribed in distinctive ad filmic segments' verbo-visual figurative expressive units, as the product of weight x density:

(i)   Brand associative strength = nuclear semic weight x nuclear semic density,

where weight is gauged by calculating the frequency of occurrence of nuclear semes across the various verbo-visual expressive units throughout filmic syntagms from a diachronic perspective (i.e., across the different ad filmic texts on an intra-brand level), while density is gauged by calculating the frequency of occurrence of nuclear semic attributes in particular verbo-visual expressive units, as a ratio of the total diachronic incidence of each nuclear seme by the total number of segments making up each brand's filmic sub-corpus.

A brand's semic density is the sum of individual semes' density scores. Density, thus, caters for understanding how dispersed the occurrence of nuclear semic attributes is across figurative elements which entails that the more dispersed a semic attribute is across figurative elements (and hence less frequently recurring), the more likely brand textual coherence will be diluted in the face of a highly variable advertising discourse.

(ii)   Semic density = sum of individual semes' density scores on an intra-brand, diachronic level

The qualification of strength of projected brand associations thus far has taken into account only pro-filmic elements that are reflected in thematic isotopies, but not 'how' this internal mirroring in a brand qua logicosemantic simulacrum has been effected. In order to account for this mode of brand structuration from a structuralist rhetorical semiotic point of view, we have to bring into the brand textual coherence picture the effect of rhetorical figures. Hence, the resulting isotopic scores must be adjusted by mode of figurative connectivity, in order to reflect more accurately the mode of each isotopic configuration. To this end, the product *weight x density* is divided by the ratio of total incidence of different rhetorical figures across a brand's ad texts' filmic segments that are employed in the corpus.

(iii)   Brand associative strength adjusted for density of rhetorical configurations = (brand 1…n nuclear semic weight × brand 1…n nuclear semic density) / (total incidence of figures / number of filmic segments making up the total number of each brand's ad films in the corpus)

The resulting figure combines structuralist textual metrics with rhetorical modes of textual configuration. It takes into account both pro-filmic elements and rhetorical relata.

The final calculus for brand associative strength consists of producing individual brand associative strength indices (adjusted for density of rhetorical configurations) within an inter-brand and diachronic framework as follows:

(iv)   Brand associative strength index (adjusted for density of rhetorical configurations) = (iii)/category average × 100

The second brand equity dimension from an encoding point of view in the light of the ad filmic text as key source of equity, viz., uniqueness of associations, is quantified by brand by examining to what extent the identified thematic isotopies differ from the remaining brands that partake of the same product category. The difference may concern either the employment of a thematic isotopy that is only encountered in a particular brand's discourse, but also the relatively more 'compact' employment of a thematic isotopy by a brand, compared to its employment by competitors. In order to determine a total uniqueness score for each brand we must account in our calculus for both of the above uniqueness dimensions. To this end, we must compare the relative frequency of a thematic isotopy within the same brand discourse from a diachronic perspective, that is, across a brand's total filmic segments (e.g., the relative occurrence of the nuclear seme /heart-healthy/ in a brand's discourse among

other nuclear semic attributes). In order to accomplish this task the following formula is proposed, *viz*., producing a diachronic average score across individual isotopically recurring nuclear semes for each brand:

(v)   Uniqueness of brand association= average density score produced from individual nuclear semes' densities

Finally, comparing uniqueness scores across brands that have been produced with the employment of calculus (v) with the category average allows us to produce a uniqueness of brand association index for each brand.

(vi)   Uniqueness of brand association index = (v)/category average × 100

The final calculation consists in a grand score for each brand that reflects its linguistic value, qua projected brand equity, which is calculated by adding the two brand related indices. This composite index is an indicator of each brand's linguistic value as projected brand equity:

(vii) Projected brand equity as linguistic value = brand associative strength index (iv) + uniqueness of brand association index (vi)

Illustration of the proposed methodology

The application of the proposed methodology calls for a mixed qualitative/quantitative research design, while employing a case-study research approach (Miles, Huberman 1994). The qualitative aspect consists of semiotic interpretation, while the quantitative aspect in the employment of content analysis for quantifying the incidence of rhetorical figures and semes on intra- and inter-brand, as well as on intra- and inter-filmic levels, as will be demonstrated in due course.

For the purpose of exemplifying the proposed methodology a corpus of 62 ad films from the major brand players in the UK cereals market was recruited. Based on the Mintel 2012 UK cereals market report the concerned market is characterized by high penetration levels (90%) in the total population, as well as by frequent and regular usage patterns (which vary by brand and product variant). The market is dominated by three major manufacturers who account in total for 47% of the entire category's value share. The thirteen brands that make up the corpus of this research, which also constitute the category's heaviest advertising spenders, are Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Kellogg's Special K, Kellogg's Rice Krispies, Kellogg's Coco Pops, Kellogg's All-Bran, Kellogg's Crunchy Nut, Kellogg's Frosties, Weetabix, Weetabix Minis, Weetos, Cheerios, Shreddies, Shredded Wheat.

The selected ad films spanned (almost invariably) a ten-year period (2003–2013), with an average of five films per brand. Each film was segmented into filmic segments with the aid of the content analytic software Atlas.ti 7 (see Rossolatos 2013d for an extensive analysis of the process followed in ad filmic segmentation and coding). The segmentation of the filmic corpus yielded an effective sample of N=321 segments (each segment constituting a primary analysis unit). Concomitantly, each segment was coded with one or more nuclear semes and classemes and with one or more rhetorical figures (ibid.). As an example of the methodology that was laid out in the previous section, and prior to proceeding with the exposition of the main findings, I am citing the interpretive procedure that was followed in the discernment of semes and rhetorical figures in the filmic segments of an ad filmic text from Kellogg's Special K from the selected corpus (see Appendix 1 for filmic segments and transcript).

Interpretation of the Special K ad film
The key settings of this ad film consist of bedroom, kitchen, clubbing venue and reflect the interdependence between feeling good inside one's own home with oneself and feeling good in public occasions, such as a night out with friends. The key actorial figure in the first two settings is an actress, in her late 20s or mid-30s, who is reflecting on the fact that she has gained weight, while the actorial figures in the public venue setting consist of her female group of friends, who are of equal age. The expressive unit of a pair of jeans functions as a visual marker of semantic coherence throughout the ad film. The semic universe of this Special K ad film comprises the nuclear semes /for women/, /makes you slim/ and the classeme /social acceptance/.

Table 2. Semic structure of the Special K ad film.

	Nuclear semes	Classemes
Attributes		
Benefits	/makes you slim/	
Attitudes	/for women/	/social acceptance/

Slimness constitutes the actantial object of desire, with which the enunciatee is summoned to conjoin herself in two separate NUs, where the first NU1= S2(Kellogg's) → S1 (non-slim females 25–34yrs. old) /\ (slimness), that underpins semionarratively the manifest discursive filmic segments 6.4–6.7, presupposes the initial state of disjunction with slimness (segments 6.1–6.3) NU2= S2 V (slimness). S1 is portrayed as being endowed with the 'being willing to' modality in segment 6.2, which is complemented by the modalities of being capable of and knowing how to (segments 6.3, 6.4), which are succeeded by the sanction of her successful inscription of the brand's narrative in

the context of her social acceptance by her peer group (segments 6.6, 6.7). The above-noted semes recur isotopically in the following filmic segments as per Table 3.

Table 3. Thematic isotopies of the Special K ad film (see Appendix 1 for the corresponding segments).

Segment	Nuclear seme /makes you slim/	Nuclear seme /for women/	Classeme /social acceptance/
6.1		X	
6.2		X	
6.3		X	
6.4	X	X	
6.5	X	X	
6.6	X	X	X
6.7	X	X	X

From a rhetorical point of view, an ellipsis is noted in segment 6.3 (*see if you can again*), which omits the verb phrase 'become slim' that would complete the syntactic arrangement, yet which is implied by the respective interpolated visual unit that portrays the key actress in front of her mirror intending to become slimmer. At the same time, the memorability of the brand's imperative *slim again* is enhanced by the employment of rhyme in the phrase *can again*. A visual pun is noted in segment 6.6 through a visual play between being fit and fitting in a group of friends (on a general degree zero level that functions against a cultural isotopy). From a production techniques point of view, this pun is facilitated by alternating shots between the main actress' walking down the stairs at a club in anticipation of meeting her friends and her peer group members who are waiting to accept their friend as being fit, thus befitting of being group member. Accolorance (i.e., repetition of same colour; Rossolatos 2013d) is evinced from segment 6.3 onwards through the portrayal of the actress' wearing a red t-shirt which coheres with the visual identity of Special K. The pro-filmic element of jeans also functions anaphorically as a recurrent visual expressive unit throughout the film's segments, while, against the background of the film's wider thematic context that is established after having undergone a valorization of the object of desire qua slimness from satisfying an individual aspiration to a goal of social acceptance, the imperative put forward by the narrator's voice-over *love your jeans again* may be read as a synecdochic function of jeans for one's entire self.

The synchronic interpretation of each ad film's structuration, in line with the propounded methodology, was followed by two progressive steps of synthesis (i) at an intra-brand diachronic level, that is spanning each brand's filmic sub-corpus; (ii) at an inter-brand diachronic level, that is spanning all brands' filmic sub-corpora.

The following tables and map are cited below as examples of the output pertaining to (i), in line with the brand equity calculi that were outlined in the preceding section.

Table 4. Thematic isotopies for all Kellogg's Special K ad films.

Seme / Segment	Nuclear seme /for women/	Nuclear seme /makes you slim/	Nuclear seme /sexiness/	Nuclear seme /taste/	Classeme /social acceptance/	Classeme /makes you slim/	Classeme /sexiness/
6.1	X						
6.2	X						
6.3	X						
6.4	X	X					
6.5	X	X					
6.6	X	X			X		
6.7	X	X			X		
7.1	X						
7.2	X						
7.3	X						
7.4	X						
7.5	X						
7.6	X	X					
8.1	X						
8.2	X						
8.3	X						
8.4	X						
8.5	X						
8.6	X	X					X
8.7	X						
9.1	X						
9.2	X		X			X	
9.3	X						
9.4	X		X		X		
10.1	X						
10.2	X			X			
10.3	X		X				
10.4	X		X				

Table 5. Key brand equity metrics for Kellogg's Special K (brand associative strength and brand uniqueness).

Nuclear semes for Kellogg's Special K	Diachronic weight of isotopy for each nuclear seme across a brand's ad filmic sub-corpus	Diachronic density for each nuclear seme across a brand's ad filmic sub-corpus
/makes you slim/	7	0,250
/for women/	28	1,000
/sexiness/	4	0,143
/taste/	1	0,036
total no of filmic segments	28	
total incidence of rhetorical figures	37	
nuclear semic weight	40	
nuclear semic density	1,43	
Kellogg's Special K brand associative strength (see calculus i)	57,14	
Kellogg's Special K brand associative strength adjusted for density of rhetorical configurations (see calculus iii)	43,24	
Kellogg's Special K brand associative uniqueness (see calculus v)	0,357	

The diachronic semic-*cum*-rhetorical structure of Kellogg's Special K is displayed in Figure 1.

The preparatory tables (as per Tables 2 and 3) and the interim calculations of the brand equity calculi (Table 5) on an intra-brand level were finally synthesized across brands, thus yielding the results that are displayed in Table 6.
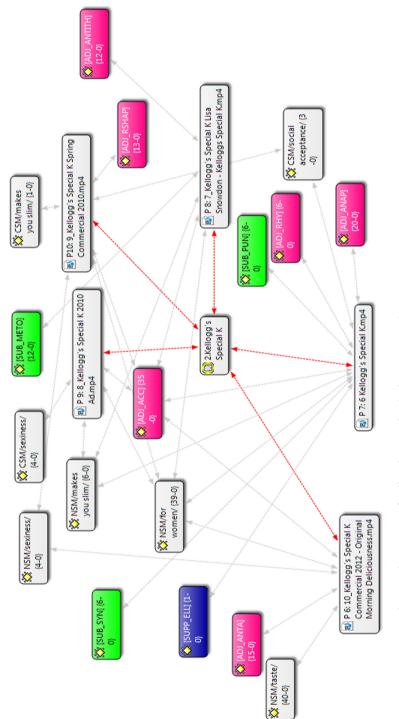
Figure 1. Semic-*cum*-rhetorical structure of Kellogg's Special K (Atlas.ti 7 output).

Table 6. Consolidated key brand equity metrics.

	total no of segments	total no of figures	brand associative strength adjusted for density of rhetorical configurations	brand associative uniqueness	brand associative strength index	brand associative uniqueness index	brand equity (linguistic value)
1. Kellogg's Breakfast cereals	35	21	34,71	0,110	81	39	121
2. Kellogg's Special K	28	37	43,24	0,357	101	127	229
3. Kellogg's Rice Krispies	32	30	20,83	0,195	49	70	118
4. Kellogg's Coco Pops	27	33	8,76	0,105	21	37	58
5. Kellogg's All Bran	25	25	40,96	0,213	96	76	172
6. Kellogg's Crunchy Nut	31	33	48,48	0,430	114	153	267
7. Kellogg's Frosties	15	6	24,00	0,400	56	143	199
8. Weetabix	37	35	109,83	0,419	257	149	407
9. Weetabix Minis	11	8	8,00	0,182	19	65	84
10. Weetos	20	33	35,03	0,243	82	87	169
11. Nestle Cheerios	19	28	104,14	0,474	244	169	413
12. Nestle Shreddies	21	27	25,04	0,248	59	88	147
13. Neste Shredded Wheat	20	14	52,07	0,270	122	96	218
Category average	24,69	25,38	42,70	0,28	100	100	200

Starting from the bottom of the brand hierarchy, Coco Pops has the lowest linguistic value score (58), well below the category average (200). This is attributed to a low semic weight, which is caused by the low incidence of the nuclear semes that make up the brand's semantic universe compared to its total filmic segments. The already weak semic weight score is further aggravated by a high incidence of rhetorical figures compared to the brand's total number of segments which results in a low associative strength score. The low associative strength score (adjusted for the density of rhetorical configuration) is indicative of a highly rhetorically configured ad filmic discourse, coupled with a weak semic weight, which results in a low associative strength score. In other words, the nuclear semes that make up the brand's semantic universe are cloaked in a highly rhetorically configured discourse. The low associative strength score is further coupled with a low associative uniqueness score which is a function of the already noted low incidence of semes compared to the total number of filmic segments that make up this sub-corpus (as indicated by the division of the incidence of each seme across the ad films by the total number of filmic segments). This low incidence of semes throughout segments results in an overall low brand associative uniqueness score. In sum, if the brand were to claim the uniqueness of its propounded semic universe, it would be confronted with their weak incidence across filmic segments.

The case of Weetabix Minis, even though not being fully representative due to a weaker sample size compared to the rest of the brands (i.e., only two ad films compared to the rest of the brands that feature five films) which by definition results in a reduced number of segments and hence in a minimized incidence of semes in segments that impacts on the semic weight score, displays a weak semic weight and density that results in a low brand associative strength score. The brand's weak semic weight, coupled with a weak uniqueness score, results in a low linguistic value index.

Kellogg's Rice Krispies displays a high diachronic density score for its key nuclear seme /snappy, crackly, poppy sound/, which does not result in an overall high semic weight score in the light of a weak incidence of the remaining semes that make up its semic universe compared to the total number of segments that constitute the brand's ad filmic subcorpus. The incidence of rhetorical figures is almost equivalent to the number of segments, which results in almost identical scores for associative strength and adjusted associative strength for rhetorical figures. This implies that the brand's semantic universe is highly rhetorically configured, however, given the low incidence of the rest of the semes that make up its semic universe (with the exception of /snappy, crackly, poppy sound/), the adjusted associative strength score is significantly below category average. The dilution of the brand's semic core by virtue of its weakly manifested semes throughout the brand's ad filmic segments is also manifested in its associative uniqueness index that is below category average.

Kellogg's breakfast cereals' significant underperformance vis-à-vis the cereals category average in both associative strength and uniqueness terms is attributed to a

frequent change of key messages throughout its variable ad filmic texts which results in a dispersed semic universe. With the exception of the invariantly recurring nuclear seme /for the entire family/ that boosts its overall semic weight score, the rest of the semes occur weakly across films, due to the aforementioned frequent changes in main message strategy. This change culminates in a significantly low uniqueness score. This is reflected even after the adjustment of associative strength for rhetorical configuration, which ameliorates the brand's score in the light of a low incidence of rhetorical figures compared to the brand's total filmic segments.

Nestle Shreddies has a satisfactory semic density score, insofar as the total incidence of the semes that make up its semantic universe exceeds the total number of its filmic segments. However, the exceedingly rhetorically configured textual fabric of the brand, as discerned by comparing the total incidence of figures to the total filmic segments, reduces the adjusted associative strength score. Coupled with a sizeable, but relatively dispersed, semic universe, as gauged from the low incidence of the majority of the brand's nuclear semes whose dispersion is reflected in a low uniqueness score compared to the category's average, the brand is outperformed by other brand players.

Weetos' underperformance compared to the category average is attributed to an over-rhetoricized diachronic filmic structure (33 incidences of rhetorical figures, compared to 20 filmic segments on an intra-brand level, but also to an average incidence of 25 figures on an inter-brand level), coupled with a sizeable, yet dispersed semic structure. These two issues are reflected in low adjusted associative strength and associative uniqueness scores.

Kellogg's All Bran appears to be facing the same issue as Kellogg's breakfast cereals, viz., a frequent change of messages across its ad filmic texts. Even though the brand's discourse is quite solid, as attested from its semic density score, the semic incidence that is sufficiently weighted on an intra-filmic level, but dispersed on an inter-filmic one, results in an overall below-average associative strength index.

Kellogg's Frosties has an above-average associative uniqueness index (143), which is attributed to its focused communication strategy that revolves around two key nuclear semes that on average recur satisfactorily across its ad filmic texts. The main issue that withholds the brand's linguistic value from exceeding the category's threshold (index 199 vs. 200) appears to be dependent on its considerably low number of filmic segments (15) compared to the category's average (24,69), which entails that even though its focused nuclear semes have a relatively satisfactory weight, they fail to translate into an above category average semic weight index. As a result, the overly low semic weight score bars the brand from attaining an above-average linguistic value index, despite its above-average uniqueness index.

The top performers in terms of projected brand equity, as evinced from their linguistic value indices, are Nestle Cheerios, Weetabix, Kellogg's Crunchy Nut, Kellogg's Special K and Nestle Shredded Wheat. In fact, Nestle Cheerios and Weetabix

outperform competitors to a considerable extent, as their linguistic values exceed 400, while being positioned far from their outperforming competitors (whose linguistic value indices rest at below 300 levels). This excessive positive performance results in lifting the bar considerably for all other players. Let us take a closer look at the outperformers' success drivers.

Nestle Shredded Wheat displays an average associative uniqueness score (96), however, its overall performance is boosted by an above-average incidence of the key semes that make up its semantic universe, which results in an above-average solid semic weight. This performance is driven by an invariantly solid recurrence across films of two of its core semic components, that is /wholegrain/ and /simplicity/ which attain to consolidate the brand's semic structure in the face of more weakly recurring semes, such as /taste/, /keeping heart healthy/ and /flavour/. This positive performance in terms of associative strength is further augmented by an increased adjusted strength score for rhetorical configuration.

Kellogg's Special K performs positively primarily by virtue of its above-average uniqueness index (127) which is attributed to its leveraging uniquely the seme /for women/, and, moreover, in a consistent fashion across ad films, which results in a boosted semic weight score, accompanied by the seme /makes you slim/. Despite the brand's overly rhetorically configured textual fabric (37 incidences of figures versus 28 filmic segments) that result in a reduction of the brand's adjusted associative strength, its superior positive performance in terms of uniqueness results in an above average linguistic value.

 Kellogg's Crunchy Nut is also outperforming competitors by virtue of its associative uniqueness, as a result of a focused communication strategy that revolves around three nuclear semes which recur invariably across its ad filmic texts in a solid manner across segments, thus also resulting in an increased semic weight index. The brand's rhetorical structure is almost as solid (while comparing the number of filmic segments with the total incidence of rhetorical figures) as its semic weight, which does not result in a diminution of the brand's associative strength after adjusting it for rhetorical configuration.

The considerably above-average performance of Weetabix and Nestle Cheerios is attributed to almost identical factors, that is, a focused communication strategy that is reflected uniformly and in a weighty manner across the brands' filmic segments, with the difference that Weetabix follows a more focused strategy than Cheerios (i.e., leveraging less semes), whereas Cheerios is employing more semes, but ensures that they recur equally solidly across filmic segments. The invariable recurrence of focused nuclear semes across the majority of the involved filmic segments, coupled with a balanced use of rhetorical figures compared to the brands' total number of filmic segments yields superior associative strength and uniqueness scores that catapult them to the apex of the category's projected equity performance.

The above calculi furnish a useful platform for comparing and contrasting among the key brand players' projected equity structure in a given product category by taking into account the interactions among the number of a brand's filmic segments, the level of invariant recurrence of a brand's nuclear semes across segments, the degree to which the recurring segments are uniquely reflected in the brand's communications, as well as the incidence and density of rhetorical figures in a brand's discourse. The assumption made while adjusting a brand's associative strength by the density of rhetorical figures is that there is an inverse relationship between semic weight and rhetorical density which entails that an incidence of rhetorical figures in excess of a brand's total filmic segments will tend to mitigate the brand's semic weight. This assumption derives from the criticisms that were launched in the light of research evidence against McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) inverse assumption that the more rhetorically rich an advertising message the more inviting it is in terms of the allocation of elaboration resources on behalf of enunciatees (cf. Rossolatos 2014). The operationalization of this assumption in the propounded brand equity calculi, however, addresses the incidence of rhetorical figures in terms of quantity, but not quality. As was clearly found and discussed in the above interpretation of the resulting brand equity calculi, and with reference to the underperforming brands in our corpus, when a brand's advertising strategy that is characterized by a dispersed semic structure and a low recurrence of nuclear semes across ad filmic segments is coupled with an overly configured textual fabric from a rhetorical point of view, the result tends to be a reduced associative strength index which is both intuitively appealing and in line with empirical findings from the marketing literature, as shown in Rossolatos 2014.

Nevertheless, from a qualitative and not quantitative point of view, and from a structuralist rhetorical perspective that prioritizes the importance of rhetorical relata over pro-filmic elements as indispensable connectives among the semic and surface discursive elements across a brand's generative trajectory, rhetorical figures contribute critically to brand differentiation by furnishing figurative advantages to brand discourses. In order to discern how such advantages may be yielded to brands we have to consider the rhetorical structuration of the ad texts in our corpus in terms of brands and in terms of semes which constitutes an area for further research (also see Rossolatos 2013d).

Conclusions

The proposed methodological framework and the involved brand equity calculi that were laid out in this paper aim at filling an important gap in the existing marketing semiotic, but also marketing literature concerning how a brand equity structure may be projected in the light of ad filmic texts as key sources at an encoding stage against the background of a salient set in a given product or service category. By drawing on a

structuralist rhetorical semiotic conceptual apparatus, the propounded methodology sought to quantify the salient dimensions of brand associative strength and uniqueness, and, concomitantly, how linguistic value as the semiotic counterpart of brand equity emerges in the face of a highly figurative discourse, such as that of advertising. The employment of a joint qualitative/quantitative research design that combines semiotic interpretation with the quantification capabilities of content analysis, and Atlas.ti 7 in particular, attains to address the exigencies imposed by this research approach. By following progressive layers of synthesis on intra- and inter-brand, intra- and inter-filmic levels on both synchronic and diachronic dimensions, the resulting output furnishes a platform for examining interactions among the elements that are constitutive of isotopies, in terms of both pro-filmic ad expressive elements and, even more importantly from a structuralist point of view, of modes of rhetorical connectivity among elements from the planes of expression and content, in an attempt to address which factors may hamper brands from attaining differentially superior associative strength and uniqueness.

The proposed methodology addresses brand structuration from a textual point of view. This approach is particularly useful for the ongoing management of brands as texts in the context of brand tracking surveys, as the assumptions that are made during the planning (encoding, projection) phase may be compared and contrasted with actual consumer response data that are collected in regular tracking survey waves, in terms, for example, of recalled ad expressive elements and the key image attributes (semes) that are recognized by consumers in the light of elements of a brand's expressive inventory.

The methodology involves co-operation and agreement among key stakeholders in a brand equity planning process, such as brand managers, marketing researchers and account planners. It is intent on sensitizing these stakeholders as to the importance of adopting a micro-textual approach to brand equity management, by focusing in a minutely detailed fashion on how a brand's intended semic universe emerges in the face of its figurative discourse, while attending to ad films segment-by-segment.

The proposed methodological framework constitutes the backbone of a roster of adjacent qualitative and quantitative techniques for attending to the ways of ad textual configuration *qua* plenum of pro-filmic elements and modes of rhetorical connectivity and how such modes impact on the attainment of differential brand associations which will be exposed in future articles.[8]

Appendix 1

Kellogg's Special K transcript and filmic segments[9]

6.1 (Visual. Music) Actress seen removing clothes no longer fitting her from wardrobe and throwing them in a box.

6.2 (Verbal, Visual. Music) Actress sitting on the floor in her bedroom going over old photographs and smiling at how 'fit' she used to be by drawing an imaginary line with her finger across the line of the blue-jean she wore on a photograph. Voice-over: "Everyone has a pair of jeans they used to look and feel gorgeous in". Woman seen picking up the old jeans, staring at them and biting her lip (music lyrics repeating verbally 'bites her lip').

Super at the bottom of the screen: "Eat Special K for breakfast and again for lunch OR dinner. Ensure 3rd meal well balanced".

6.3 (Verbal, Visual. Music) Actress in front of the mirror in sportswear gazing at herself while holding her old blue jeans.

Voice-over: "See if you can again in just two weeks with Special K's free online personal plan"

Super at the bottom of the screen: "Eat Special K for breakfast and again for lunch OR dinner. Ensure 3rd meal well balanced".

6.4 (Verbal, Visual. Music) Actress seen eating cereals and looking at the Kellogg's webpage on her laptop.

6.5 (Verbal, Visual. Music) Actress seen trying on old jeans (apparently after having lost weight) in front of her mirror and smiling.

Super at the bottom of the screen: "Can help slimming or weight control as part of a calorie controlled diet & active life-style. Participants must be aged 18 years or over and have a BMI of 25 or over".

6.6 (Verbal, Visual. Music) Actress moving downstairs and meeting female friends who congratulate her on her renewed slim looks. Voice-over: "Special K, love your jeans again in just two weeks".

Super at the bottom of the screen: "Can help slimming or weight control as part of a calorie controlled diet & active lifestyle. Participants must be aged 18 years or over and have a BMI of 25 or over".

6.7 (Visual. Music) Special K pack-shot with online address next to it: "myspecialk. co.uk".

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[9]   The ad film may be accessed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JCMolusVBk.

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Методологическая основа для проектирования ценности бренда: возвращение воображаемого в структуры узнаваемости бренда

Цель настоящей статьи состоит в определении методологической основы для планирования ценности бренда с помощью структуралистской риторической семиотики. Путем вычерчивания генеративной траектории сигнификации на коннекционистской концептуальной модели бренда будет шаг за шагом показываться, как набор ядерных сем и классов сем или предполагаемой семической структуры, лежащей в основе манифестируемой дискурсивной структуры, может быть прогнозируемым заинтересованными сторонами (т.е. командой бренд-менеджмента, группой стратегического планирования или группой исследователей маркетинга) с целью достижения дифференциальных ассоциаций с брендом. Предложенная методическая основа фокусируется на силе и уникальности ассоциаций с брендом как интегральных аспектов структуры ценности бренда и включает в себя набор формул, целью чего является рассмотрение (с точки зрения текстуальности бренда) того, как ассоциации могут систематически связываться с их ключевыми источниками при опоре на текст рекламного ролика. Предлагаемая методология иллюстрируется с помощью подборки рекламных роликов брендов главных игроков на рынке зерновых Великобритании. Аргументационная составляющая предлагаемой методологии направлена на демонстрацию того, что структуралистская риторическая семиотика полезна не только для анализа / интерпретации брендовых текстов, но и для их конструирования, а также для управления ими впоследствии. Эта демонстрация развертывается путем применения синхронного / диахронного и интра-(реклама)-роликового /интер-(реклама)-роликового подхода к формированию ассоциаций с брендом, которые составляют проецируемую структуру ценности бренда в контексте динамики внедряемых торговых категорий.

Metodoloogiline raam brändiväärtuse projitseerimiseks: imaginaarse naasmine bränditundmise struktuuridesse

Artikli eesmärgiks on visandada metodoloogline raam brändiväärtuse planeerimiseks strukturalistliku retoorilise semiootika abil. Lähtudes brändi genereeriva tähistamistrajektoori konnektsionistlikust kontseptuaalsest mudelist näidatakse samm-sammult, kuidas sisemisel huvigrupil (s.t brändikujundusmeeskonnal, strateegilise planeerimise meeskonnal või turundusuuringute meeskonnal) on võimalik projitseerida tuumseemide ja -klasseemide kogumit või kavandatavat seemilist struktuuri, mis on aluseks nähtavatele diskursiivsetele

struktuuridele, et saavutamaks eristavaid brändiassotsiatsioone. Pakutav metodoloogiline raam keskendub brändiassotsiatsioonide tugevusele ja unikaalsusele kui brändiväärtuse struktuuri integraalsetele aspektidele ning sisaldab valemite kogumit, mille eesmärgiks on bränditekstuaalsuse seisukohast lähtuvalt vaadelda, kuidas assotsiatsioonid võivad süstemaatliselt seostuda oma põhiallikatega, rõhuasetusega reklaamfilmitekstil. Välja käidud metodoloogiat näitlikustatakse, pöördudes Ühendkuningriigi hommikusöögihelveste turu tähtsaimate brändide reklaamfilmitekstikorpuse poole. Argumentatsiooniga üritatakse näidata, et strukturalistlik retooriline semiootika ei osutu kasulikuks mitte üksnes bränditekstide analüüsimisel/tõlgendamisel, vaid ka nende konstrueerimisel ja haldamisel aja vältel. See tõestus esitatakse, rakendades sünkroonset/diakroonset ning intra-(reklaam)-filmilist/inter-(reklaam)-filmilist lähenemist brändiassotsiatsioonide tekkimisele, mis moodustavad projitseeritava brändiväärtuse tootekategooria dünaamika konteksts.