

Artificial Intelligence Meets Semiotics: Optimising Advertising Strategies across Cultures

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Abstract. *The symbols have always been the most important means of communication, empowering emotional engaging. Product marketing has always been a central topic of research, while the digital advertising has increased its importance in the recent years, both being interested in conveying strategic messages in order to influence the consumers' behaviour and to preserve the values of the society. Being now at the intersection of semiotics and technology, the artificial intelligence and the data analysis are becoming more relevant than ever in enhancing the personalisation of the messages.*

Semiotics, with all its elements ranging from colour, language, music to gestures, functions as a symbolic tool for communication, being a fundamental component of branding. In this study, we analysed the semiotic and rhetorical features that appear in meat-product commercials across Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom. The results revealed several cultural differences; the Romanian ads use more rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and antitheses, emphasising more on traditions and emotional appeal. The Italians are in favour of allusions and metaphors, being more keen on happiness and innovation, while the British advertisements rely less on the figures of speech, but using a lot of humour and subtlety.

In order to offer a profound indepth to our study, we made a bibliometric analysis of marketing, advertising and semiotics in the domain of meat-products, thus offering a framework on how the semiotic strategies can shape the consumers' perception in the commercials across quite different cultural markets. Our findings lead to the idea that, in order to have an effective advertising, there have to be culturally-tailored semiotic strategies. With the advancing of digitalisation, the integration of semiotics in commercials with the help of AI-driven tools can help at targeting more precisely the audience. Our research highlights the importance of balancing the technological innovation with the cultural awareness in order to ensure an ethical and effective advertising. By empowering semiotics, the brands can maintain authenticity in this rapidly-evolving digital era.

Keywords: AI, semiotics, consumers' behaviour, meat-products advertisements, cultural marketing.

Introduction

The language has always been the means through which people have conveyed ideas, information and subtle meanings to one another, in the same manner in which the advertising has become an integral part of our daily lives. Every commercial that appears on our screens embodies a compelling force, capable of influencing the customers to the very point of motivating, prompting and even firmly implanting itself in the minds of the people. The power of words is immense, that is why we seldom see an advertisement without words.

The overabundance of advertisements that have emerged on the market in the last several decades, has led to an increasing interest and curiosity regarding the rhetorical elements present in the commercials. Easily understood, the linguists have taken the task of describing, categorising

and evaluating the linguistic features that are the most used in this domain. They sought to unveil their principles, to find new connections between words and gestures and to develop new techniques for enhancing inventiveness and freshness.

A well-known fact is that the advertising slogans have a significant importance both in the linguistic and marketing domains. From our point of view, it is the very language that offers the opportunity of wordplay, the figures of speech, the allures and persuasion in order to convey the information, to rouse emotions and to stimulate the imagination of the auditorium.

Literature review

The starting point for this paper has been the latest research regarding the most famous Romanian brands from food industry and their place on the market. As Popa C.N et.al. (2013, p.277) has stated, “the most successful brands belong to different Romanian food branches in that they represent secondary and tertiary processing products of raw materials derived from agriculture and zootechnics”. Continuing the same idea, the study of Panzaru R.et.al. (2021) mentions the fact that the consumption of processed products from pork and poultry are continuously on the rise.

Turning to the countless definitions of advertisements that have been stated so far, it cannot be said that there is one inclusive or self-sufficient. The most interesting definitions that we have come across belong to the Oxford Dictionary Online, that asserts that it is “a notice, picture or film telling people about a product, job or service”, while the Romanian Dictionary Online considers it to be a “(commercial) activity that seeks, through advertising (through print, radio, television, cinema etc.) to raise and gain public interest in certain goods, books, a show or use of services”. Another interesting definition is offered by the Free Dictionary Online, seeing it as “an announcement, a public statement giving information about something”.

Persuasion is everything in advertising and how could it be better done if not through the stylistic and rhetorical devices such as anaphora, allegory, metaphor, metonymy or personification? Conventionally, rhetoric has been considered to belong to the domain of spoken language. Nonetheless, especially in advertising, eloquence is considered when using the images in order to convey the information with the purpose of persuading the auditorium. According to Vu D.(2017, p.32), it “is not meant to convey semantic information. It focuses primarily on the implications of the way information is conveyed”.

One of the main objectives of advertising is to buttress the identity of the brand for the already existing customers and to attract new ones, of course, having in view what is the most important thing: to influence the perception of the consumers for the benefit of the seller. In other words, the interest of advertising is to captivate the customers’ attention by creating a memorable impression in order to make the purchase.

Along the years, advertising has grown to be seen as a mode of communication between the company and the general public. According to Griffin (2021), communication is “the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response.” Twenty-five years ago, it would have been difficult to get a prompt response from people looking at an advertisement in a newspaper. But lately, the newest technologies have become increasingly important, superseding print media in favour of visual communication (Newman, M., Ogle D., 2019). According to semiotician Umberto Eco (1976), semiotics encompasses all phenomena that can be interpreted as signs. He states that signs are ubiquitous and comprise body language, imagery, and colour. The theories of the significant field of semiotics are applicable to the realm of communication.

Kasianova (2021) pointed out that “the effect of an advertisement is defined by the interaction of its visual and verbal elements, one contributing to the meaning of another”, and we will start from this point to analyse the TV advertisements of our study.

As it could be easily noticed, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed how advertising is created, distributed, and interpreted. Traditionally, advertisers have relied on semiotic principles and human intuition to craft compelling messages. However, with the advent of AI, there is an increasing shift towards data-driven advertising that is tailored to individual preferences and behaviours.

Matthews and Danesi (2019) conducted a seminal study examining AI via a semiotic lens. The authors contend that AI is not just a technology but also a multifaceted semiotic system that influences human cognition via symbolization and interpretation. Moreover, they emphasize the philosophical ramifications of AI within the frameworks of post humanism and transhumanism, proposing that it transforms the comprehension of reality via signs and symbols (Matthews & Danesi, 2019).

Boero (2024) examined the influence of generative AI technologies on advertising and the alterations they need in creative processes. The research highlights that AI produces commercial material that requires a re-evaluation of traditional semiotic notions, including attribution, generativity, and authorship. Furthermore, the author posits that AI generates novel advertising texts, necessitating a re-evaluation of their analysis and interpretation within the realm of advertising semiotics (Boero, 2024).

Lytvynenko et al. (2022) offer an in-depth analysis of contemporary developments in advertising semiotics. Their work elucidates the attributes of semiotic models employed in modern media advertising, demonstrating how AI facilitates the emergence of novel visual communication forms. Furthermore, they assert that symbols and signs in advertising are shaped by AI algorithms, resulting in alterations in consumer perception and interpretation of advertising messages (Lytvynenko et al., 2022).

Luca Cian (2023) provides another notable contribution in this domain by analysing customer perceptions of AI in advertising. His notion of "Word-of-Machine" exemplifies how consumers engage with AI-driven systems and the impact of these interactions on consumer decision-making. Moreover, the phenomena of "algorithmic transference," in which customers ascribe human-like traits to AI and interact with it as a social entity, offers a profound insight into how AI influences advertising semiotics and the dynamics between consumers and businesses.

Methodology

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the role of semiotics in advertising. The qualitative aspect focuses on a detailed semiotic and rhetorical analysis of selected advertisements, while the quantitative component involves a bibliometric analysis of the specialized literature on semiotics in advertising.

A bibliometric analysis was conducted using academic databases, specifically analysing the frequency and relevance of key terms related to semiotics in advertising. This analysis helped to identify trends, patterns, and influential works within the field, offering a broader context for the study of advertising semiotics. It also facilitated a clearer understanding of how semiotic principles are applied across different regions and markets.

The corpus taken into study comprised British, Italian, and Romanian advertisements that have been broadcast on television over the past 10 years. A total of fifteen advertisements were selected, with five chosen to represent each country. To account for the fact that four companies

were analysed per country, two advertisements from the same company appear within the dataset. This choice was intentional to ensure that advertisements from each company were adequately represented in the analysis.

The study involves a thorough examination of these advertisements, which is presented through a comparison of their semiotic and rhetorical characteristics. Specifically, the study identifies both similarities and differences between advertisements from different countries, highlighting the unique features of each. The analysis emphasizes the use of semiotic signs and rhetorical devices, such as imagery, language, and visual motifs, and how these elements contribute to the effectiveness of the advertisement in its respective cultural context.

This combination of bibliometric analysis and in-depth semiotic analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of how semiotics functions in advertising across multiple cultures. The study aims to offer new insights into the strategic use of signs in advertisements, comparing how different cultural and social contexts shape the communication process within the advertising industry.

Results and discussions

After reviewing the specialized literature, we observed that semiotics in advertising is considered a powerful tool for brand building. Advertisements rely on symbols and cultural codes to convey specific messages. Semiotic studies have shown that the intelligent use of signs and symbols can influence consumer perceptions by manipulating visual and linguistic signs to enhance brand recognition on a global scale.

With the development of artificial intelligence (AI), a revolution has taken place in the interpretation and creation of advertising symbols. AI impacts semiotics and advertising by changing the paradigm through which advertisements are created, interpreted, and adapted. Below, we present a series of such stages:

A. Automated Advertising Content Generation:

- AI can analyse consumer preference data and generate personalized advertisements, adapting to symbols that have the greatest emotional impact on the audience.
- AI models, such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), can create persuasive slogans by analysing the semiotic significance of keywords and their associated sentiments.

B. Big Data Analysis and Semiotic Optimization:

- AI can analyse millions of ads to determine which types of symbols, colours, or messages resonate best with the audience.
- Through machine learning, AI algorithms can predict which combinations of symbolic elements (colour, shape, shade) will have the greatest impact on a specific audience.

C. Dynamic and Personalized Ads:

- Using AI, brands can adapt advertisements in real-time to deliver personalized messages based on cultural, emotional, or demographic context.
- AI can analyse users' facial expressions (through facial recognition) and adjust ads based on observed emotional responses.

D. Creating Advanced Visual Experiences:

- Generative AI allows brands to create sophisticated visual content in which symbols and messages are adapted based on user behaviour.
- Integrating augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) with AI provides new ways to interact with advertising symbols and messages.

Ethical Challenges and Limitations

Although AI presents a huge opportunity for the development of advertising semiotics, several challenges must be considered:

- Psychological Manipulation: AI can be used to create hyper-personalized ads that influence consumer decision-making in an intrusive manner.
- Authenticity and Creativity: AI can take over the advertising creation process, but it may remove the human element that brings authenticity and originality to advertising messages.
- Cultural Biases: AI may inherit cultural biases from analysed data, generating messages that favour certain demographic groups while ignoring global diversity.

Semiotics remains a key element in advertising, but AI is transforming how symbols and messages are created and interpreted. From automated content generation to extreme ad personalization, AI is redefining advertising and semiotics in a profound way. However, ethical challenges and human creativity must remain central to this process to ensure a balance between innovation and authenticity

Bibliometric Analysis of Specialized Literature

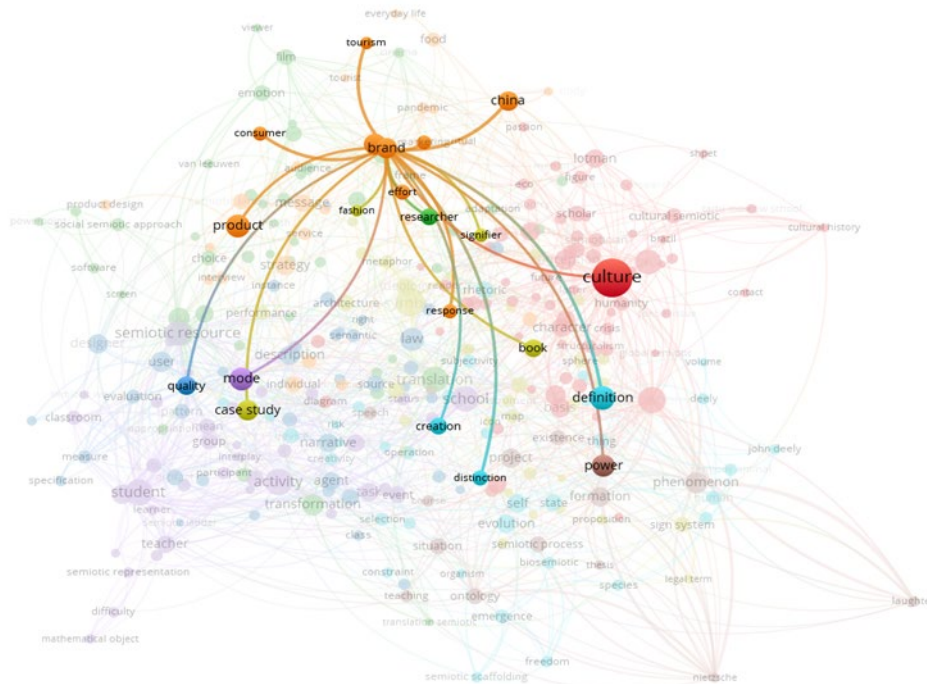
To support this study, a bibliometric analysis of specialized literature was conducted to examine the role of semiotics in advertising. This type of analysis is quantitative and aims to identify research trends, research networks, and the influence of different authors, works, and institutions.

The Web of Science academic database was used for this research, retrieving 1,115 relevant articles for the current study.

A minimum threshold for the occurrence of terms to be included in the network analysis was selected. In this case, 2,710 terms were identified in the analysed corpus. Among them, 65 terms appeared at least 10 times, meaning only these were included in the network map. From these 65 terms, a relevance score was calculated. By default, 60% of the most relevant terms were selected, equating to 40 terms. This step helps filter the most important terms to obtain a clearer and more meaningful visualization.

The selected keywords were: semiotics, advertising, marketing, and AI influence. Thus, a co-occurrence matrix of keywords was generated.

Source: Authors' own research.



Source: Authors' own research.

Key Identified Research Themes

Orange Cluster – "Branding and Consumer" (Keywords: brand, consumer, product, fashion, researcher, effort)

This cluster focuses on the relationship between branding and consumer behaviour, including areas such as fashion, product quality, and marketing strategies.

Red Cluster – "Culture and Semiotics" (Keywords: culture, humanity, book, character)

This section explores cultural semiotics and its impact on human identity, literature, and history.

Blue Cluster – "Quality and Research Methods" (Keywords: quality, mode, case study)

This section analyses methods for measuring quality in branding, market research, and applied semiotics.

Green Cluster – "Definition and Power" (Keywords: definition, power)

This cluster explores conceptual definitions and the relationship between semiotics and social or political influence.

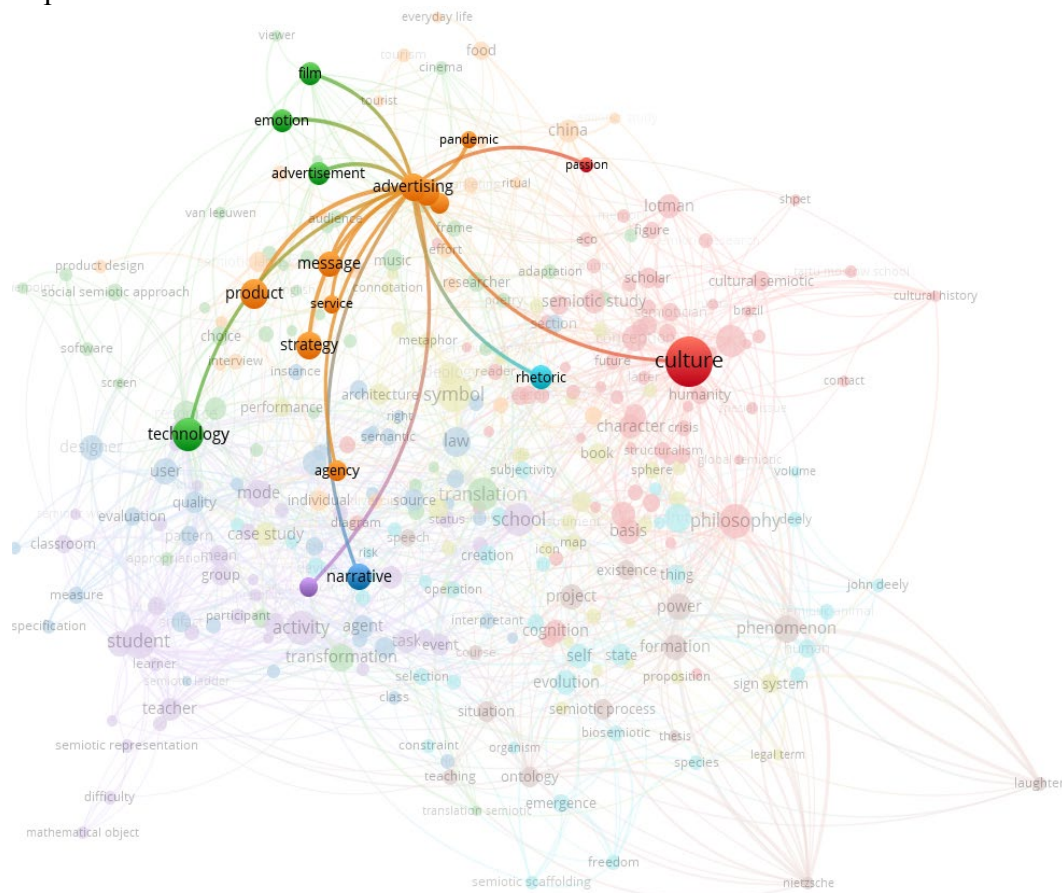


Figure 3. The co-occurrence matrix on clusters of interest 2

Source: Authors' own research.

Identification of Key Thematic Clusters

Orange Cluster – "Advertising and Marketing Strategy" (Key Nodes: advertising, product, strategy, message, agency)

This cluster highlights advertising and marketing strategies, analysing how products and services are promoted. Connections with pandemic and emotion suggest the emotional impact of advertising, especially during global crises.

Red Cluster – "Cultural Semiotics" (Key Nodes: culture, rhetoric, semiotic study, Lotman)

This section focuses on semiotics and cultural studies, with influences from Yuri Lotman's theory. Connections with humanity and character crisis suggest an interest in the impact of culture on social identity.

Green Cluster – "Technology and Digital Advertising" (Key Nodes: technology, user, product, emotion)

This section examines the relationship between technology, users, and marketing. Connections between advertisement, film, and emotion suggest that digital advertising and video content are essential in this research direction.

Blue Cluster – "Narrative Quality and Analysis" (Key Nodes: narrative, agency, quality, evaluation)

This cluster focuses on the importance of narrative and message quality in advertising. The intersection with case study and pattern suggests methodological approaches based on case studies.

Purple Cluster – "Education and Transformation" (Key Nodes: student, teacher, transformation, activity)

Connections with agent and task event suggest studies related to the role of semiotics in education and pedagogy.

Marketing and digital advertising are key topics, with a focus on technology, emotions, and strategy. Cultural semiotics remains a strong direction, with research on the influence of symbols in society. Narrative and quality analysis are essential in advertising, showing concern for the impact of the message on the audience. The intersection of technology and semiotics is becoming increasingly relevant, especially in the era of digitization.

This bibliometric map highlights the importance of semiotics in marketing, advertising, and education, emphasizing current and emerging research directions. Technology and digitization are key factors in the evolution of advertising strategies, while semiotics remains an essential tool for analysing messages and cultural influence.

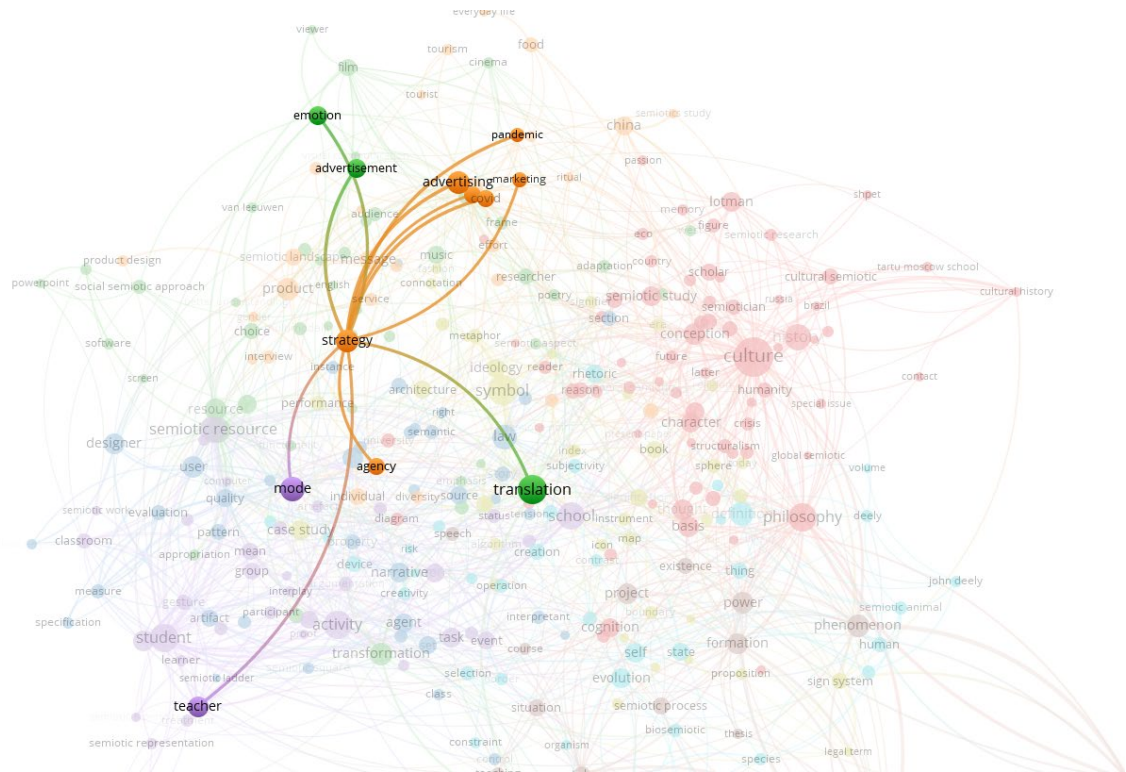


Figure 4. The co-occurrence matrix on clusters of interest 3

Source: Authors' own research.

Identification of Key Thematic Clusters

Orange Cluster - "Advertising and Marketing Strategies" (Keywords: advertising, advertisement, marketing, strategy, agency)

This cluster explores the relationship between advertising, marketing, and strategy, focusing on the use of semiotics in building persuasive messages. Connections with pandemic and emotion suggest the impact of social contexts on advertising strategies.

Green Cluster - "Translation and Semiotic Interpretation" (Keywords: translation, interpretation, speech, text, language)

This cluster analyzes the role of semiotics in translation and the interpretation of messages, showing how signs and symbols are adapted in different languages and cultural contexts.

Purple Cluster - "Education and Pedagogical Semiotics" (Keywords: teacher, student, learning, mode, case study)

This group emphasizes the importance of semiotics in education, exploring the methods by which symbols and narrative structures are used in learning processes. Connections with pattern and transformation suggest an interest in educational innovation based on semiotics.

Red Cluster - "Cultural and Philosophical Semiotics" (Keywords: culture, semiotic study, conception, character)

This cluster focuses on the impact of semiotics on culture and ideology, examining how symbols shape human identity and social structures.

Advertising and marketing are heavily influenced by semiotics, suggesting that the use of symbols and semiotic strategies is essential in brand communication. Translation and semiotic interpretation are emerging themes, indicating a growing interest in analyzing and adapting signs

in global communication. Educational semiotics is an important direction, reflected in the connections between student, teacher, and case study, highlighting the role of semiotics in learning processes. The cultural and philosophical dimension of semiotics remains crucial, pointing to the ongoing concern with understanding symbols and their influence on society.

This bibliometric analysis shows that semiotics is applied across a variety of fields, from advertising and marketing to translation, education, and culture. The strong relationships between advertising, strategy, and emotion suggest that semiotics is a key factor in the development of marketing messages, and emerging trends indicate an increased interest in linguistic and educational semiotics.

Semiotics of adverts

The bibliometric analysis conducted highlights the growing importance of semiotics in various fields such as brand communication, translation, education, and culture, with advertising being one of the primary domains influenced by these principles. The identified clusters demonstrate how semiotic strategies play a vital role in the creation of advertising messages, with particular emphasis on advertising, strategy, and emotion. These connections underline the fact that semiotic devices are deeply embedded in the process of crafting advertisements, allowing companies to effectively engage their audiences and convey their messages. The increasing recognition of the power of symbols and signs in shaping consumer perceptions has led to a more sophisticated understanding of how semiotics can drive both individual responses and larger cultural narratives.

As we transition into the specific focus of this study, we delve into the semiotic analysis of advertisements for meat products across the Romanian, Italian, and UK markets. By examining these advertisements, this research will explore how semiotic principles are employed to craft messages that resonate within different cultural contexts. The goal is to uncover the subtle use of signs, symbols, and rhetoric in these advertisements, allowing us to better understand how companies tailor their messages to the unique tastes and values of each market. This semiotic analysis will not only highlight similarities and differences between advertisements from the three countries but also shed light on how semiotic strategies contribute to the effectiveness of marketing campaigns in the meat industry.

When it comes to advertising, it is crucial to craft messages that are meaningful, ensuring that the audience comprehends the concepts the company proposes and that the campaign has the intended impact. (Kasianova, 2021)

We also rely on Chandler's taxonomy of codes due to its consideration of codes in terms of the knowledge they represent (Chandler, 2017). Interpretive codes are fundamentally linked to individuals' perceptions of reality. Codes determine the manner in which individuals interpret symbols (Kasianova, 2021). Further, we made an analysis regarding the themes that are the most appealing to the public.

Interpretation and Research Trends

Branding and semiotics are closely correlated, especially in the context of consumer behaviour and marketing strategies. The cultural dimension of semiotics remains a major area of interest, with implications in philosophy, literature, and semiotic theory. Research methods and data quality play a crucial role in validating studies on semiotics and marketing.

This bibliometric map highlights the relationships between **semiotics, marketing, and branding**, suggesting that semiotics is a central element in analysing consumer behaviour and brand-building strategies. Additionally, its impact on modern culture and philosophy is well

emphasized through connections with **humanity, conceptual definitions, and social influence**. By mapping the relationships between these areas, the study highlights the growing significance of understanding cultural dimensions in marketing campaigns. This is particularly evident in the analysis of meat-product advertisements, where the thematic focus of ads reflects deeper cultural values and national identities. For example, the Romanian advertisements emphasize tradition, romantic narratives, and promises, aligning with the cultural sensitivity towards societal values, while Italian ads highlight happiness, creativity, and uniqueness, mirroring the Italian penchant for joy and distinctiveness. British advertisements, on the other hand, foreground themes of honour and humour, reflecting the British sense of national pride and wit.

Table 1. Example of themes of meat-products adverts

No crt	Theme of the advertisement	Name of the company and advertisement
1	Tradition	Forma – <i>Salumi</i> Matache Macelaru – <i>Cine stie, cunoaste!</i> Matache Macelaru – <i>Pofta ta, specialitatea lui Matache</i> Cris-Tim – <i>Cu un pas inaintea timpului</i>
2	Happy moments	Richmond – <i>Comin' home for a sausage</i> Beretta – <i>Salamini</i> Gardani – <i>Bontà dal gusto italiano</i>
3	Uniqueness	Quorn – <i>Why choose the alternative?</i> Forma – <i>Salumi</i> Beretta – <i>Tutt'altra musica</i>
4	Honour	Richmond – <i>The Nation's Favourite</i> Beretta – <i>Prosciutto Cotto Fabio Cannavaro</i>
5	Promises	Cris-Tim – <i>Cu un pas inaintea timpului</i> Quorn – <i>Tasty resolutions are easy to keep</i>
6	Innovation/Progressivism	Villani – <i>Salumi</i> Meda – <i>Salamieri de top</i>
7	Love-story	Caroli – <i>Painea tanjeste dupa salamul Caroli</i>

Source: Authors' own research.

The themes identified in the Table 1 offer valuable insights into the cultural and emotional underpinnings of advertising strategies, particularly within the context of meat-product commercials. These themes—ranging from tradition and happy moments to uniqueness, honour, promises, innovation, and love stories—demonstrate how advertising leverages cultural values and societal norms to resonate with target audiences. Each theme reflects specific national preferences and emotional appeals, which are tailored to align with the distinct cultural identities of the consumers in Italy, Romania, and the United Kingdom. For instance, Romanian ads tend to highlight tradition and commitment, Italian ads focus on joy and creativity, while British ads emphasize humour and a sense of honour.

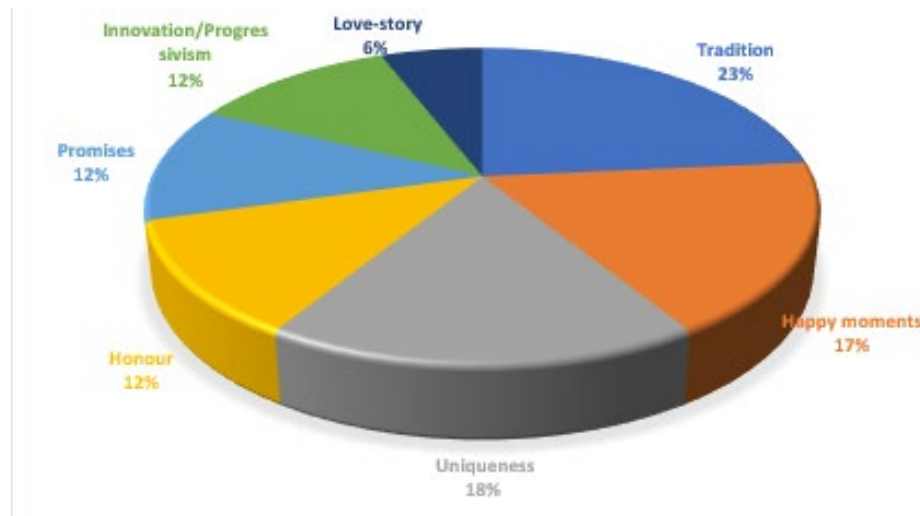


Figure 5. Distribution of themes of meat-products adverts

Source: Authors' own research.

As presented in Figure 5, we can state that there are no significant differences between the tackled themes. This can be interpreted as indicating that the companies accustomed the advertisements to the public. The first place is occupied by tradition (23%), which is present in the advertisements from all three countries. Uniqueness (18%) and happy moments (17%) are found only in Italian and British commercials, with Romanians being more keen on progressivism (12%) and romance (6%).

Cultural and social affiliations are reflected in the significance and potency of colour as a means of communication, and advertising takes full advantage of everything the colour can offer. This also has a specific term, colour communication. Analysing the logos of the companies in our study, we can state that the most used colour is red, i.e., 7 out of 11. It is followed by green, 5 of 11, and black, 4 of 11.

The colour red is often linked to emotions and passion in many cultures, particularly in Western societies. The food industry often opts for the colour red, with yellow and orange being popular choices as well. Yellow and orange are colours that can stimulate appetite (Medek, 2021). Therefore, when red is combined with yellow and/or orange, it tends to evoke a strong sense of hunger. Red is also used for drawing attention. A red price signifies a promotion or an offer. And a specific trait connected to meat: the red meat seems to be more fortifying than the white one (Pastoreau, 2022).

In regards to green, advertising offers value to the product, making it more reliable. It is also the symbol of "bio" products, and, in our case, it is part of the national flag of the country (Italy).

Rhetorical devices

The semiotic analysis of the advertisements for meat products across the Romanian, Italian, and UK markets will provide valuable insight into how semiotic strategies are used to connect with target audiences in each cultural context. By examining the signs, symbols, colours, and imagery used in these ads, the study will explore how they reflect local values and preferences, offering a deeper understanding of how messages are crafted to influence consumer perceptions. This

approach will not only focus on the visual and linguistic signs within the advertisements but also assess the cultural codes at play, shedding light on the different ways these campaigns are designed to evoke emotions and drive consumer behaviour in each market.

Building on this foundation, the study will also include a **rhetorical analysis** of the selected advertisements. Rhetoric, much like semiotics, is a powerful tool in advertising, where persuasive techniques are used to enhance the appeal of a product and persuade the audience to take action. The rhetorical analysis will delve into the use of various rhetorical devices such as **allusion**, **anaphora**, **antithesis**, **metaphor**, **metonymy**, **parallelism**, **personification**, **tautology**, and **epistrophe**. These devices are commonly used to strengthen messages, create emotional connections, and highlight key attributes of the product. By examining how these rhetorical strategies are applied in the meat product advertisements from Romania, Italy, and the UK, we will be able to assess how they serve to reinforce the semiotic elements of the campaign and further enhance its impact on the consumer.

The corpus showed that 80% of English, 100% of Romanian, and 80% of Italian advertising texts involve at least one rhetorical device.

Table 2. Frequency of rhetorical figures

No	Figures	Frequency	% of total
1	Allusion	5	15%
2	Anaphora	1	3%
3	Antithesis	5	15%
4	Metaphor	15	44%
5	Metonymy	2	6%
6	Parallelism	1	3%
7	Personification	3	9%
8	Tautology	1	3%
9	Epistrophe	1	3%
Total		34	100%

Source: Authors' own research.

The results of the analysis indicated that certain rhetorical devices were notably more prevalent in the advertisements. Specifically, metaphor, allusion, and antithesis emerged as the most frequently used devices, comprising 44%, 15%, and 15% of the total rhetorical strategies, respectively, as illustrated in Table 2. Metaphor, with its dominant presence, was the most employed device, reflecting its significant role in conveying meaning and emotional appeal. Allusion and antithesis, while less frequent, still played an important role in shaping the tone and messaging of the advertisements. These findings highlight the importance of these rhetorical strategies in crafting persuasive and culturally resonant messages. In the following sections, each

of these devices will be explored in greater detail to understand how they contribute to the overall effectiveness of the advertisements in the context of different cultural markets.

Metaphor

As presented in Table 2, the metaphor is by far the most used rhetorical device. It is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Metaphors, by their very nature, involve expressing and experiencing one thing in terms of an unexpected object. When consumers are exposed to a metaphoric headline or picture in an advertisement, they will rely on their existing knowledge and perceptions of the conventions and context of the metaphor in order to understand the message (Pop, 2010).

By far, the largest number of rhetorical devices used in our corpus of advertisements is that of metaphors. The areas of subjects in which these metaphors fall are very large, ranging from "longing bread" to "hanging taste" and "sculpted meat."

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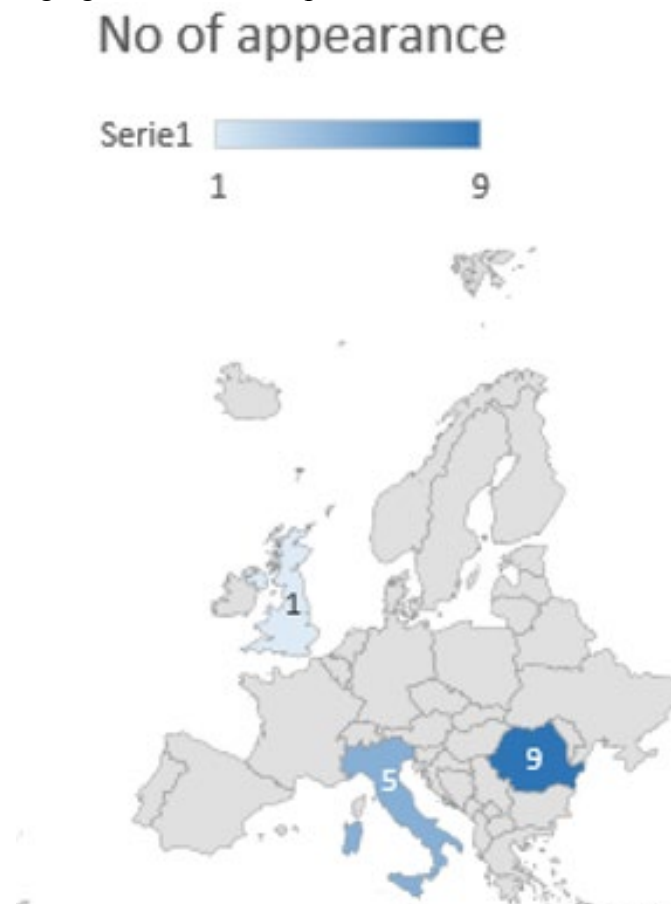


Figure 6. Distribution of metaphors in advertisements according to country

Source: Authors' own research.

As shown in Figure 6, the distribution of metaphors across different cultural perspectives is notably uneven. Romanian advertisements lead the way with the highest frequency, featuring a total of 9 occurrences of metaphors. Italian advertisements follow with 5 occurrences, indicating a strong use of metaphor but still fewer than in the Romanian ads. In contrast, British advertisements

show a significant disparity, with only one occurrence of a metaphor identified. This stark difference in the frequency of metaphors used across these cultural contexts highlights the varying emphasis placed on metaphorical language in advertising strategies. It suggests that the role of metaphors may be perceived and employed differently depending on the cultural norms and preferences of each market. This discrepancy emphasizes the importance of tailoring advertising strategies to align with the cultural expectations and tendencies of each target audience.

Antithesis

Antithesis is a figure of speech that emphasises the meaning of contrast by expressing two opposing concepts through the use of the same or a similar structure. Hussein (2015) considers that “the figure has the characteristics of a harmonious combination of sound and rhyme, balanced syllables, sharp rhythm, and compendiousness”.

Our corpus of advertisements comprises all sorts of antitheses, ranging from the linguistic register to the visual one. Thus, the British ones are in the latter group, the character from the Quorn having promised to “tone down his entrances,” and in the ad, he appears at the front door dressed in a costume in flames and in a fog of smoke. Other two similar antitheses follow, turning the entire advertisement into a humorous moment. The antitheses stop the moment in which the resolution for that year is made and the Quorn sausages appear. Thus, those very sausages turn a notorious liar into a man of words. There are studies that show that “humorous advertisements significantly support customers’ attention, increasing memorability.” (Eisend, M. 2009, Tomisová Z. 2014)

The Richmond advertisement continues in the same tone as the antithesis, thus presenting all the actions of a Richmond factory worker in the negative form of the verbs (the discourse), while the visual part presents them in the positive.

While the British have antitheses between speech and actions, the Romanian place their antitheses in the linguistic register, i.e., between neologisms and archaic words. Examples in point are:

Check-in...pravalie (Matache – Pofta ta, specialitatea lui Matache)
Search.....mestesug (Matache – Cine stie, cunoaste!)
Intens si delicat (Meda)

There were no antitheses in the Italian commercials.

Allusion

An allusion is a rhetorical device employed to evoke a mental image or thought without making it explicit; it is an indirect or passing reference. Its main purpose is to create mental images, to add extra meaning to a text, or it can go as far as to add a hue of sarcasm to one thing by comparing it to something completely different. In our corpus, it is present in 5 advertisements:

e.g. Salumier – alludes to Sommelier (Meda- Ro)

The Song (Richmond –UK) Coming come for a Sausage – alludes to a song by Molloy – “Meet you there”

-Gastronaut – astronaut (Villani – It)

- Style of poetry – Shakespeare (Richmond-The Nation’s Favourite – UK)

Beretta – Music – alludes to The Barber of Seville by Giacomo Rossini (It)

Anaphora

According to the Cambridge dictionary, anaphora is the practice in literature or rhetoric of repeating the same word at the start of several sentences to achieve an effect.

The only example we found in our corpus of study was one of the Italian commercials, Villani:

*“Tu che cerchi....
Tu che hai....
Tu che non sai....”*

The effect is intended to impress or persuade people, a general trait of this domain. In this very situation, it transposes the viewer into an atmosphere of ode, of ancient eulogy, an evoking of heroes.

Metonymy refers to things that are so closely related to something that they can serve as a symbol for it. There is a low percentage of metonymies in our studied corpus of only 9% (i.e., 2 metonymies) found in two separate Romanian ads:

Tres` bon.....Tres...Meda! (Meda)
Eticheta curata (Cris-Tim)

The same is true in the case of **parallelism**. Only one is present in an Italian commercial: *“Beretta campioni... come papa”* It enhances the focus, authority, or significance of the expression of ideas (Fox, 2014). The product identifies itself with the idea of a champion and being the best. As for **personification**, it serves to materialise abstract concepts such as human emotions, recollections, thoughts, and possessions. The object of personification can be humanised through the use of any human characteristic—be it an action or an emotion—in order to facilitate mental imagery, comprehension, and connection (Laurinavicius, T. 2022). Personification is not only widely embraced but also a captivating psychological phenomenon that provides valuable insights into our perception of the world (Luu, C. 2016).

In our corpus of advertisements, there were to be found 3 personifications, accounting for 9% of the total rhetorical devices. Thus, at Caroli, the bread falls in love with the salami, while at Matache Macelaru', the pork participates in the "Olympics," and each slice of ham has requests regarding the way in which it wants to be cut.

A less-known rhetorical device is **tautology**. It is defined as the repetition of an idea or concept using different words.

Rhetorical tautologies occur when additional words are used to convey a meaning that has already been expressed or implied (Al-Marsumi, N.H. R. 2017). According to Keach, when several words are used to convey the same concept, it implies that the meanings of such phrases or songs go beyond the capabilities of those words to express (Keach, W. 2004). In our unique case present in this study, *“Cine stie, cunoaste!”* (Matache Macelaru'), we have two words that, translated into English, both mean “to know”. Anyway, there seems to be a slight difference between the two Romanian words. The effect is that the slogan remains in the minds of the viewers, who wonder if the words *sti* and *cunoaste* are perfect synonyms or not. Thus, the slogan lingers in the mind for a longer period of time.

The **epistrophe** belongs to the category of repetition ways, and it can be recognised due to the fact that the words at the end of a sentence repeat. It is also called epiphora. One such situation can be encountered in our corpus, i.e., *Manaci bine, te simti bine*. (Cris-Tim) The purpose is to offer rhythm to the words and to be remembered.

And, getting to the group of repetition devices, we have to mention that they are a favourite tool among orators because they can help to emphasise a point and make a speech easier to follow.

It also adds to the power of persuasion, thus, in our corpus of texts we find many habitual repetitions, so we can draw the conclusion that they are highly used in advertising in order to make viewers remember the characteristics or name of the brand/ product.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role that semiotics and rhetorical devices play in advertising. Both semiotic and rhetorical strategies are instrumental in constructing persuasive messages that resonate with audiences. The analysis of Romanian, Italian, and British advertisements reveals notable cultural differences in the way these devices are employed.

Advertising, as an essential element of branding, draws heavily on symbols and cultural codes to communicate messages effectively, and these preferences are influenced by national characteristics and cultural values.

The Romanian advertisements stand out for their strong use of rhetorical devices, with a high frequency of metaphor, antithesis, personification, tautology, metonymy, and epistrophe. Romanians appear to be particularly sensitive to themes such as tradition, love stories, and promises, which are conveyed through the strategic use of semiotic symbols. The colour red also emerges as the most prominent and appealing colour connected to processed meat products in the Romanian market. These findings suggest that Romanian consumers are more receptive to emotional and culturally rich messages that evoke deep connections with societal values and norms.

In contrast, Italian advertisements show a lower overall use of rhetorical devices, with metaphors and allusions being the most common. Italian advertising leans heavily on themes of happiness, uniqueness, and innovation, reflecting the cultural pride in their creativity and traditions. The colours red and green are particularly prominent, aligning with Italian cultural associations. These advertisements also demonstrate an affinity for expressing joy and individuality, which are core to Italian national identity, further supporting the importance of cultural understanding in advertising strategies.

British advertisements, on the other hand, are the least inclined to use rhetorical devices. Antithesis and allusions are rarely used in British ads, while other devices are nearly absent. British advertisements prioritize humour and honour, elements that are deeply ingrained in their cultural identity. The preference for orange hues is also notable, reflecting a taste for warmth and vibrancy.

These cultural preferences suggest that British consumers engage with advertisements that speak to their sense of pride, humour, and respect for tradition, with a much more understated use of rhetorical complexity compared to their Romanian and Italian counterparts.

These cultural differences underscore the significance of tailoring advertising strategies to specific markets by understanding national tastes, traditions, and values. Semiotics and rhetoric are powerful tools for creating effective advertisements, but their impact is greatly influenced by the cultural context in which they are applied. With the rise of artificial intelligence in advertising, there is an opportunity to enhance the personalization and effectiveness of advertisements by considering cultural nuances.

In addition, the bibliometric analysis conducted in this study offers a comprehensive overview of current trends in marketing, advertising, and semiotics, underscoring their evolving relationship with technology and digitalization. By mapping the frequency and connections of published research, this analysis reveals the increasing prominence of semiotics as a crucial tool in understanding advertising strategies across various domains, including marketing and education. The bibliometric approach highlights key research areas, such as the intersection of technology and semiotics, where advancements in artificial intelligence, data analytics, and digital platforms are

reshaping advertising methods. Notably, the study points to the growing emphasis on emotional engagement, strategic messaging, and the role of symbols in shaping consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the bibliometric analysis identifies significant shifts in how cultural semiotics is integrated into advertising practices, showing that researchers are increasingly interested in understanding how cultural values influence consumer perceptions and brand communication.

However, it is essential for advertisers to remain mindful of ethical concerns, such as the potential for psychological manipulation and the loss of human creativity. Balancing technological advancements with cultural sensitivity and authenticity will ensure that advertisements remain both effective and responsible in their messaging.

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