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DEPARTMENT: SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN CENTER FOR SEMIOTIC STUDIES  
(SEECSS)



## PhD Program in Semiotics

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT ON TOPIC:

### **Market Challenges of the Tobacco Industry. Integrated Research Analysis with a Focus on Semiotic Methods**

A dissertation for conferment on an educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the professional direction 3.1 – Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies (Semiotics)

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### SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The present dissertation on topic “Market Challenges of the Tobacco Industry. Integrated Research Analysis with Focus on the Semiotic Methods” consists of 197 pages, 556 622 characters with spaces. The thesis is constructed by introduction, three parts, conclusion, lists with figures/ tables/ illustrations, bibliography, and appendixes.

The introduction explains the importance of the topic – why in the process of solving marketing as well as commercial questions, applying an analytical integrated approach, comprising semiotic methods is highly valuable and effective approach in regard to reaching desired insights and this way, solving case studies. In order to show how the analytical integration works I have chosen the cigarette industry to apply for this research approach. In this regard, the introduction also explains why this business sector was preferred and selected.

The dissertation is developed in the following three parts:

Part 1: “Semiotics of tobacco consumption”, comprising four main points:

1. Introduction to the Science of Semiotics
2. Cultural and historical context of tobacco consumption
3. Tobacco business nowadays: scope and smoking culture
4. Semiotic analyses of tobacco consumption

Part 2: “Marketing semiotics and research solutions”, presented in the main points, as follows:

1. Marketing semiotics
2. Semiotic studies of the brand
3. Traditional market/ marketing studies

Part 3: “Analytical integration and a case study of the brand Corset”, developed across the points:

1. Analytical integration of research solutions
2. A case study of the brand Corset

The conclusion reports to what extent the goals and objectives of this dissertation have been achieved. It accentuates on the proved favor of the analytical integration and the inestimable function of the

semiotic method as a part from a research program, supported with some main findings from the developed integrated semiotic analysis for a cigarette brand.

The lists include 36 figures, 13 tables and 28 illustrations

The bibliography is constructed by 108 main information sources – 48 books, 4 collections, 31 articles, 23 corporate editions, 3 institutional documents. In addition, it includes 23 supplementary sources, too. The used editions are predominantly in English language.

Lastly, the thesis is supported by four appendixes, with the following titles:

Appendix 1: Advertisement and pack design audit of top selling cigarette brands

Appendix 2: Advertisement, product and point of sales audit of NGPs

Appendix 3: Structured questionnaire for consumer research

Appendix 4: Table report from consumer research. One-dimensional allocation (toplines). Field Work: May - June 2017

## **OBJECTIVE, TASKS AND METHODOLOGY**

Objective of the present dissertation is to prove that the analytical integration of market research methods, with assigning a central role to the semiotic approach, gives substantial advantages to the researcher. Such advantages are particularly obvious when comes to study and manage brands where semiotics is irreplaceable. To evidence all this in Part 2 is developed an integrated research model.

Why analytical integration? Practice has shown plenty of marketing and commercial questions (e.g., opening of a new market, the development of a new brand, the decline of market share, the problem of brand image, etc.) that do need more studies to be initiated and as a next step, their data, and analyses to be linked so that the right solutions crystalized.

Regarding the relationship of semiotics to marketing research, Virginia Valentine defines semiotics as follows, "Semiotics is the theory of the production of meaning: it is a fascinating and powerful analytic tool and brings to market research a unique perspective on how information is encoded and decoded in everyday life. Its findings are based on state-of-the-art cultural and communication theory, not on consumer opinion" [Valentine 2007].

Each type of research has its own objectives and methodology, which are unlikely to overlap. So semiotic analysis, qualitative consumer research, quantitative consumer research or retail audit measurement provide completely different insights that do not allow a single study to address a mix of marketing needs. Along with this position, we share the view of the special and unique application of semiotic research as part of the market/marketing research portfolio. As the experts at specialist agency Practical Semiotics say, "Traditional quality research collects consumer opinions and behaviours, but semiotics shows you what creates those opinions and behaviours in the first place" [Practical Semiotics web site]

According to Valentine, there is a growing application of the semiotic approach among other types of research, where FMCG and international companies are among the leading areas [Valentine 2007]. With

this statement in mind, I can further argue why the tobacco industry (cigarettes in particular) has been chosen for the application of the analytical integration of research methods and show how it works:

1. The cigarette industry is part of the industries that make up the FMCG sector.
2. Large international companies with great traditions and an established culture in the use of research define the state of the Tobacco industry. Analysis in this paper will show that the tobacco market is highly globalised and concentrated among a few multinational cigarette manufacturers.
3. The manufacturing and marketing activities of this industry are subject to scrutiny and heavy regulation by governmental and non-governmental, local and global organizations because tobacco products are harmful to human health. Prohibitions are provoking drastic changes (e.g. high percentage of health warning labelling on packaging, plain packaging, few advertising channels) and new developments (e.g. new generation products). All this makes the industry very dynamic and changing in various aspects, including consumer culture. Such a dynamic industry, with complex marketing cases and characterised by very high competition, should be a good choice to apply the analytical integration model, with a focus on semiotics.

For the main objective thus defined, the following main tasks should be fulfilled:

1. Understand the theory of semiotics.
2. Represent the tobacco business sector within the research.
3. Understand the theory of marketing semiotics.
4. Review the main semiotic tools for brand research.
5. Overview of common research solutions.
6. Development of an integrated model as the final theoretical outcome.

Methodology: analytical integration of research methods – semiotics, consumer research and retail measurement data.

## **BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE DISSERTATION**

### **PART 1. SEMIOTICS OF TOBACCO CONSUMPTION**

Overall, Part 1 serves to provide the dissertation with a theoretical foundation in semiotics. Covered are the main theories developed by Saussure and Peirce. The semiotic rationale continues with selected theories applicable to the studied field, namely markets as defined by their two main operational functions of marketing and commerce. The theoretical findings of the great semioticians Barthes, Greimas and Lotman are presented. The cultural and historical context of tobacco consumption follows, as well as the scope and smoking culture of the tobacco business today. The idea of this exposition is to provide knowledge about the industrial background of the study, to scrutinize its culture and consumption, and thus to present the issues under study as a dynamic sector leading to market development, cultural and market environment change, the latter representing a good area for the application of a research method. Part 1 concludes with semiotic analyses related to the entire tobacco industry. 'Mythology and Mythic Sign

of Tobacco Consumption', based on Barthes' theory, 'Semiotic Square of Male and Female Cigarette Brands', based on Greimas' theory, and 'Semiosphere of Tobacco Consumption', based on Lotman's theory, are developed.

## **1. INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCE OF SEMIOTICS**

### **1.1. DEFINITION AND PURVIEW**

Semiotics is an interdisciplinary science of humanities. Etymologically, the term is derived from the Greek word "semeion" which means "a sign", "a mark". It studies various aspects of signs and sign systems in the world given by their composition, structure, code, cultural context, interpretation, meaning, and communication. The process of creating and interpreting signs is known as semiosis, a fundamental concept in semiotics. Undoubtedly, the explanation of the creation of sign meaning is the main subject of semiotic research.

According to this approach, humans, like all living things, communicate through the use of signs or semiosis. So communication in its various forms, carried out for different reasons through different communication channels is among the main interests of semiotics.

The foundations of an autonomous science of signs were laid by the concepts of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), known as the fathers of semiotics. Given their fundamental role and contributions to semiotics, due attention is given to their theories of signs.

#### **1.1.1. Ferdinand de Saussure**

Saussure determines the sign as a binary structure composed by the two undivided parts signifier and signified, which relation results in the effect of signification. In addition to the theory of the sign, the sub-course covers an introduction to Saussure's key concepts, including "langue" (language) and "parole" (speech), the synchronic and diachronic study of language.

#### **1.1.2. Charles Sanders Peirce**

Peirce determines the sign as a triadic structure composed by the three undivided parts: representamen, object and interpretant. Peirce is also famous with his tripartition of the types of signs seen as icons, symbols and indexes, presented in the dissertation, too.

## **1.2. CONTRIBUTION OF THE THEORIES OF ROLAND BARTHES, ALGIRDAS GREIMAS, YOURI LOTMAN**

### **1.2.1. Roland Barthes and the Mythology**

Barthes worked within the Saussurean tradition. While Saussure dealt with the denotative feature of the sign, Barthes and other scholars further developed it by directing the interest towards the connotative features. Barthes calls the connotative level "myth". He studies the hidden ideology, mostly of the bourgeois culture distributed as myths through the power of connotative meanings. According to Barthes, myths operating through varied codes represent bourgeois ideology as natural, proper and inevitable

[Danesi 2004:219, 273]. Identifying myths and denaturalizing their meaning, leading to ideology revealing is a central field in the semiotic work of Barthes.

He also determines the myth as a secondary semiological system. There is respectively a first system that is the sign created by the signifier and the signified as in Saussure’s theory. Barthes calls the first system a language, and the second – a myth, that uses the first one in order to create its own system. In the mythical sign, the whole sign from the first system becomes a signifier. The second element of the myth is the signified, called a concept. And the third element is logically the result of the preceding two in combination – the mythical sign, called meaning [Barthes 2005:285-292].

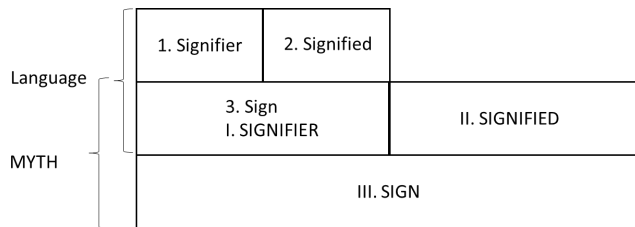


Figure 3, The Mythic sign

### 1.2.2. Algirdas Greimas and the Semiotic square

Greimas developed the famous semiotic square, which has wide practical application. It is a theoretical model that explains the method of meaning generation. It is based on the principles of opposition and difference that are conditions for signification. According to the model, if there is no difference, sense cannot be produced. Meaning is generated based on relations that originate among the concepts. There are three basic relations: of contrariety, of contradiction and of complementarity.

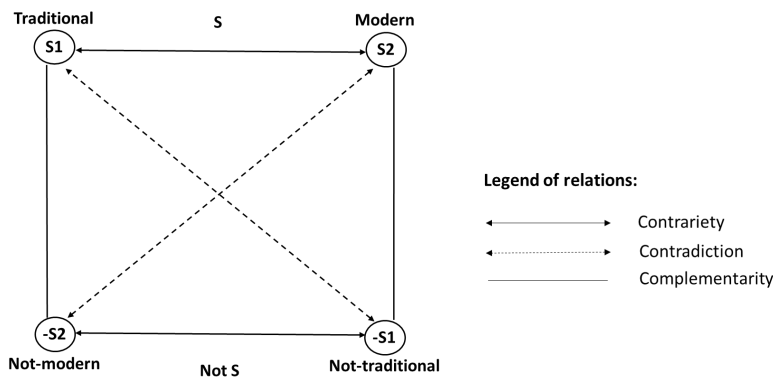


Figure 4, The Semiotic square

### 1.2.3. Yuri Lotman and the Semiosphere

Lotman determines the semiosphere as “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, not the sum total of different languages; in a sense the semiosphere has a prior existence and is in constant interaction with languages” [Lotman 1990:123-4]. The model of semiosphere is inspired by the nature and entity of the biosphere. The semiosphere is the semiotic view and functioning

of social life. As Bankov specifies about the relation between the two spheres and their uniquenesses “The Biosphere provides the resources for survival of the genetically constituted individual, and the Semiosphere provides the conditions for survival of the socio-culturally constituted individual” [Bankov 2022:6]. The semiosphere is constructed by the elements center and periphery, boundaries and translation (dialogue), explained in the presentation of the model along with its other important features.

Normally, there is a sphere within the semiosphere that dominates with its advantages and represents a trendsetter and an example. So it influences the path of development to the others (the evolution of global culture is due to the rapid development of certain spheres, among which technologies, in particular the Internet, the social media, and others).

### **1.3. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE SEMIOTIC THEORY**

Mythology. Marketing deals a lot with mythologies through the use of connotative meanings in brand development and management. As shown in Part 2, the strong brands on the market (in Vincent’s terminology, “legendary brands”, and in Holt’s terminology “iconic brands”) owe their success to the mythological concepts they employ. For these trademarks it would not be exaggerated to say that branding is based on mythology since we observe the latter in all areas of brand development and execution.

Semiotic square. Thanks to the fundamental contribution of Jean-Marie Floch (2001), the Greimasian square helps marketers in analyzing and understanding the competitive environment of the product category about brands, pack designs, advertising, trade channels, to detect market positioning and best niches for development.

Semiosphere. By means of its ability to structure and bring order, the semiosphere model can be used for analyzing and understanding trends and dynamics concerning versatile aspects and processes of the market environment.

## **2. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF TOBACCO CONSUMPTION**

### **2.1. THE MEANING OF TOBACCO IN THE AMERINDIAN CULTURE**

Tobacco is a sacred plant for the Amerindian society. It was granted a unique position in the life of Amerindians and became an inseparable part of their everyday. Natives perceived tobacco in a holistic way. They employed the weed in all their practices – beliefs, healing, social activities and cultivation.

Amerindians are those who developed the technology for consuming tobacco. They had experienced all possible methods for utilizing it and practiced all main among them, namely smoking, chewing, and snuffing. Definitely, smoking was the most common way of tobacco consumption. For Amerindians smoking was a cosmology act but not just a process without any meaning attached to it. Smoking provided a way of praying and the smoke was the mediator of longings [Burns 2007:3, 9-8].

### **2.2. THE EUROPEANIZATION OF TOBACCO AND SPREADING AROUND THE WORLD**

Europeans were the discoverers and the main disseminators of tobacco across rest continents. In Europe the tobacco habit received a solid ground for development and gained quick popularity. As Jordan

Goodman says “Magellan’s circumnavigation of the globe was a remarkable achievement. Tobacco’s was no less so” [Goodman 2005:36].

Within no more than 50 years after Columbus’s voyage (who firstly encountered and tried tobacco), tobacco appeared formally in Europe. A century latter it was either cultivated or consumed almost everywhere around the world [Goodman 2005:36; Burns 2007:37]. How did the evolution of tobacco happen and what determined its great universal success? Generally, the answer to this question lies in a combination of reasons having a compound character of economic, medicinal, and social context. Also, as stated by Goodman, in order to understand why tobacco was so successful, we need to explore the European cultural context of the XVI century. So, the most significant reasons are hunger and ways of suppressing it, search for medical plants and panacea, support by the European authorities and the court, novelty of smoking [Goodman 2005:37-49].

### **2.3. TOBACCO CONSUMPTION BEFORE CIGARETTES – MODES, RITUALS AND FASHIONS**

Before the cigarette invention and its penetration, tobacco was consumed by smoking pipes and cigars, snuffing and chewing. We could say that smoking pipe was rather universal, snuffing – a European practice, chewing and cigar – an American practices. Another way of smoking has been hookah, characterizing Asia. Each usage mode of tobacco plays the role of a sign for self-expression or a group ritual and thereby, participates in the symbolic system and culture.

#### **2.3.1 Smoking pipe**

During XVII century, the pipe was the main mode of tobacco usage and a symbol of smoking. Pipe was widely spread across Europe, North America, as well as other parts of the world. And cigar remained confined to Spain and Portugal, till the end of XVIII century [Goodman 2005:62-4]. Smoking pipe was a ritual usage, while rites represent a sign of advance, equalizing civilization.

Smoking became the most desirable leisure activity in England, engaging people of all classes, ages, and both genders [Burns 2007:26, 28; Billings 2008:27-9-40]. In this rite of smoking, the practice of passing a pipe from one to another exemplified manners, trendiness and communication capacity. Creating a culture of tobacco consumption was so popular in XVII century that even professors of the art of smoking existed [Apperson 2006:8-11, 16; Billings 2008:29].

#### **2.3.2. Snuffing**

Snuffing became a vogue, developing in such a way across Europe that made it strongly dominating over pipe consumption. In proof of this, in the last decades of XVIII century, snuff manufacture in France represented more than 80% of the total tobacco production [Goodman 2005:67-8]. Consumption change from smoke to snuff was remarkable in the social history of tobacco. What brought that change? There were two main reasons – medical and cultural. The medical one concerned the progress and results of the medical debate on tobacco consumption. What Monardes (a Spanish doctor who provides all the necessary justification for placing tobacco at the centre of European medicine) never discussed was tobacco use by snuffing it into the nostrils. Snuff was not a subject of the controversy, as well. The cultural reason was related to the changing perceptions of respectable consumption. Snuff was associated with



respectability [Goodman 2005; Billings 2008:35]. Snuff usage, featuring aristocrats, was a graceful ritualized practice. It included delicate details, representing certain manners of established etiquette needed to be learned [Burns 2007:122; Christen, Swanson, Glover, Henderson 1982].

### **2.3.3. Chewing**

Chewing remained marginal among Europeans and hence, did not characterize Europe [Goodman 2005:65; Burns 2007:109-10]. Chewing was very typical for the Americans – even as late as 1900, it represents 44% of the total tobacco consumption. Generally, Americans worked on farms, blacksmith shops and factories during the Industrial Revolution, and manual labor meant that they could not use their hands to smoke. Once taken, the plug does not require operation until used. This made chewing much more applicable than smoking for people who built the foundations of their nation. Indeed, during Andrew Jackson's presidency, chewing tobacco became a national pastime. For that period, it is inferred that neither the eagle nor the tobacco plant were emblematic of the USA. Instead, it was the spittoon [Tate 1999:26]. Besides the physical reasons for chewing, there were mental ones, too. After gaining a political independence from England, North Americans fought for acquiring cultural identification and distanced themselves from the colonizer [Burns 2007:108, 110-15; Goodman 2005: 90]. In this way, Europe was a pipe smoking, while America - plug chewing and cigar smoking culture, as cigars were perceived as an initial cultural identification [Gabler 1998:26].

## **2.4. THE CIGARETTE INVENTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIGARETTE INDUSTRY**

The first firms that manufactured cigarettes were located in Seville. Spaniards wrapped small smokes in corn leaves and in XVII century, they replaced the organic matter with a fine paper. Spaniards called the new method of tobacco enclosure „papelate“ or „cigarillo“ [Робисек 1978:10; Brandt 2007:25-6].

In 1870's the cigarette form of smoking arrived in the US. The first cigarette factories were based in New York City and owned by Greek and Turkish immigrants. The Bedrossian brothers, one of the most important cigarette producers at that time were the first, who mixed Turkish/ Balkan tobacco (famous for its aromatic qualities) with the recent innovation in production of American tobacco, namely Bright flue-cured tobacco. With this novelty, they made an important contribution to the initial development of the emerging cigarette industry. The Bright flue-cured tobacco creates much milder taste, compared to the one coming from the previous dark air-, sun- and fire-cured tobacco [Goodman 2015:97, 228].

More consumers tended to prefer cigarettes over traditional methods. The new mode was innovative – with a milder taste, of smaller size, easier to light, with less time to smoke, making them much more convenient to use [Pampel 2009:8-9]. Cigarettes were also clean, trendy and increasingly cheap [Amos, Haglund 2000]. So, for most Europeans and Americans, it took some time to switch to the new mode, but they eventually became cigarette smokers in the period around the Second World War [Hilton 2000:124-5]. The new form continued to sweep so that towards the end of 1980's at least 80% of the total tobacco consumption favored cigarettes [Goodman 2005:95]. Reasons that explained their invasion and domination over the global tobacco consumption were military conflicts, the use of production technologies and new methods of marketing.

#### **2.4.1. The influence of military conflicts**

Soldiers were keen on tobacco. "If you can't send money, send tobacco", said George Washington in an answer to citizens, asking how to support soldiers' efforts during the American War of Independence [Burns 2007:94, 160; Christen, Swanson, Glover, Henderson 1982]. Smoking was perceived as a much better choice than alcohol and prostitution. So, in government communications during the WWI the phrase "necessary comfort" in relation to cigarettes was most frequently used [Pampel 2009:14].

Many physicians were not against smoking. Government, civil organizations, famous and ordinary people helped fighters by procuring them cigarettes. The business also partook. Manufacturers looked at the war as a tool for cigarette distribution and sizeable consumption growth. In their minds, it could turn a non-smoker into a casual smoker, a casual smoker into a heavy smoker, and a heavy smoker into a nicotine addict [Burns 2007:157-160, 164, Tate 1999:74, 79].

#### **2.4.2. The influence of marketing**

One of the primary ways of advertising was via branding. Name was the one sign of product recognition but the more effective one was the use of a symbolic figure. The United States and Britain were the nations which first used branding strategies. The latter was evidenced by trade cards, nationwide ads and gifts to consumers and dealers. The cards were issued in series and collected by consumers, that made them a cultural vector for tobacco [Goodman 2005:98-9].

James Buchanan Duke was an early manufacturer who achieved remarkable success through using advertising techniques. Duke perceived that advertising for mass consumption required techniques for mass production which was a central driver of his business. His marketing strategy was to employ intensive advertising and promotion, focusing on premiums, coupons and cards [Goodman 2005:99-01, Brandt 2007:31-2]. The tools of Duke for mass advertising were extremely successful. This is proven by the fact that until 1885 the demand for cigarettes surpassed the technical capacity of production. The first cigarette-making machine was invented in 1881 by James Bonsack, but exploited by Duke. Duke gained exclusive rights to the machine, reduced production costs and kept low selling prices. This way he secured the leading position of his American Tobacco Company [Goodman 2005:100-1, 227-9; Burns 2007:135; Tate 1999:24-5]. In 1911 American Tobacco was accused of monopolistic practice that caused division of the US cigarette market and establishment of the newly restructured American Tobacco Company, Liggett and Myers, P. Lorillard and R.J. Reynolds. Duke, seen as the leading figure in shaping the modern tobacco business retired soon after this division. He invested his wealth in a small college, which is today's Duke University [Pampel 2009:11-2].

In 1913 R.J. Reynolds launched the brand Camel that reached extraordinary market results. There were several main factors that brought the success of Camel: its cigarette was mainly a blend that made it uniquely mild, offered only in packs of 20 sticks, and applied different advertising policy, namely a public advertisement in newspapers, by avoiding the use of the popular premiums or coupons. These were the three major factors that revolutionized the cigarette industry and shaped its new face. The other tobacco players responded to Reynolds' challenge. Liggett and Myers pushed their flagship brand Chesterfield. And American Tobacco Company launched the new brand Lucky Strike. These fundamental Camel responses resulted in a market, constructed by the three main brands Camel, Chesterfield and Lucky Strike. The fight

for a strong market position was mainly carried on by advertising competition, known as a cigarette war in advertising [Goodman 2005:102-3].

There are of course general factors supporting the cigarette growth in America and worldwide. Such are industrialization and urbanization [Rudy 1970:111, 122]. Those who smoked cigarettes were heroes, sophisticated and modern people, living an urban lifestyle. In terms of brands, "The celebrity was the person with a pack of Lucky Strike or Camel or Chesterfield in his shirt pocket and needed no more impressive credential for his time or place", illustrates Burns [Burns 2007].

#### Smoking cigarettes and women emancipation

Cigarette business was rapidly growing in America. Initially, men were the general cigarette users in US. One of the reasons for this was the completely masculine cigarette image during the WWI. However, women emancipation, in combination with companies' efforts in repositioning cigarettes made cigarettes a ladies choice, too [Amos, Haglund 2000]. The cigarette was perceived as a badge of emancipation, a symbol of the emerging new woman of the 1920's [Pampel 2009:15-6]. The campaign "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet" was legendary for the aggressive way companies fought for gaining cigarette smokers and women. According to the concept of the creator of Lucky Strike, George Washington Hill, cigarettes had to be as generally enjoyed as candies. This idea was exploited by the pioneer in public relations Edward Bernays, using all-round marketing techniques - showing the attractiveness of slim figures, the means to achieve them, the inclusion of cigarettes in dessert menus, etc. [Burns 2007:178-182]. Such a way of doing marketing raised questions about essential general influences what is the consumer culture, infers Alan Brandt in his Pulitzer Prize book "The Cigarette Century". Questions about manipulating the whole society arose, reinforced by the cigarettes, viewed as "a popular icon of the consumer culture built on the edifice of mass marketing" [Brandt 2007:75].

#### The medical debate and the anti-smoking movements

A quick background review shows that the health effects of tobacco have been debated since its introduction in Europe. The medical discourse in XVI-XVIII centuries was taking place without clarity about plant constituents and thus, discourse did not progress. In XIX century though, the tobacco discourse changed radically as a result of the huge progress in chemical investigations. In 1828 the scientists managed to isolate nicotine - the active alkaloid in tobacco, which marked that time as crucial in the history of the plant. Nicotine was defined as an extremely poisonous substance. During XX century, the progress of the debate depended on the evolution of medicine, which professional group grew remarkably. In the first half of the century, most medical men did not consider cigarettes dangerous when smoked moderately. They were focused on other diseases that led to a fatal end faster. Important feature could also be the fact that many doctors were smokers [Pampel 2009:16]. However, perceptions of tobacco-related etiology began changing when the Western world understood that cancer, and mainly lung cancer was prevalent among smokers [Goodman 2005:119-4].

### **2.4.3. Product development and advertising in the postwar period**

The 1950's were the most difficult years for the American tobacco industry. Society reacted to the harmful consequences of tobacco and so consumption fell. This was the first time in XX century when cigarette usage declined which caused a shock in the tobacco industry. To this situation, the cigarette business responded by three main directions of product developments - filter-tipped and lighter cigarettes, multi-branding and gendered brands. Expectedly, the industry also increased the use of advertising to optimal level. It is reported that in the 1950's, the tobacco business spent a higher share of its gross profit on ads than any other American business in that time, or probably ever [Goodman 2005:108-9; Burns 2007:206-210]. It utilized new ways of advertising. Such example is the pervading into cinema productions, to portray the desired positive cigarette image. [Burns 2007:209-210, 187-8]. Through product placement, companies exploited the tremendous opportunities of the movie industry as a commercial channel. As defined by Prof. Bankov, this is the technique of the visual suggestion, where "by showing one thing it is suggested by much more effective way the meaning of anything else" [Bankov 2017].

Presented in numbers, the amazing growth in cigarette consumption jumped from 1,400 sticks smoked by the average American in 1954 to 4,000 in 1963 [Burns 2007:215]. All this brings us to 1964 – the turning year of tobacco industry, shaping its new and evolutionary future.

#### **2.4.4. At the borderline between the past and present of tobacco evolution**

On 11 January 1964, the US Surgeon General Luther Terry announced the milestone report "Smoking and Health". The report presented a thorough and rigorous investigation into the hazards of tobacco use. As Luther Terry clarified, the release of the report was "a culmination of growing scientific concern over a period of more than 25 years" [Terry 1985]. The report revealed that smoking contributes considerably to developing lung cancer, and causes cancer of the larynx, oral cancer, cancer of the oesophagus, tobacco amblyopia, respiratory ailments, peptic ulcers, cirrhosis of the liver.

All sizeable and continuous tobacco warnings and prohibitions, implemented today originated as an outcome of this report. Their enforcement did not happen right away and took some time. However, perspective towards strengthening tobacco health was clear. As a result, attitudes towards cigarette consumption were definitely changing. On 11 January 1964 more than 50% of American men and 33% of American women smoked cigarettes. And with the start of the new millennium, these average numbers represented 25% and 21% respectively [Burns 2007].

### **3. TOBACCO BUSINESS NOWADAYS: SCOPE AND SMOKING CULTURE**

#### **3.1. GLOBAL TOBACCO MARKET SIZE**

According to Euromonitor International, nowadays the trend of development of cigarette volumes is negative. Motives for the observed trend can be direct and indirect. Current consumers strive for healthy living which tendency influences their product choice. This global trend should be an indirect motive for the lessening cigarette usage, and to the direct motives, we can add:

- The enhancing industry regulations and bans, making a straight connection with the unhealthy effects of smoking cigarettes, and trying to convince smokers to quit;

- The new product developments (NPD) in tobacco and more particularly, the development of next generation products (NGP), mainly provoked by the health aspect and regulations;
- Continuous cigarette price increase.

### **3.2. CIGARETTE COMPANIES AND PROFILES**

The global cigarette sales are extremely concentrated among the big tobacco manufacturers. This section provides a quick overview of multinational companies in terms of their scopes and development strategies according to the latest industry trends.

### **3.3. BRANDS AND ADVERTISEMENT**

The bestsellers in the market are examined, which review shows on the one hand the high concentration of sales among the TOP 20 brands in the market, and on the other, the serious globalization of the cigarette industry. The following is an analysis of advertising based on an advertising as well as pack design audit of top selling brands, that I conducted in 2020 (Appendix 1). The point of sales is the most possible place of organizing communications, whereas if billboards (and street furniture) are allowed they are definitely no less exploited. Advertising is performed in a way that builds up an emotional connection with the consumer. Simultaneously, product quality must be even more important for a sensitive product like cigarettes. Because of this, cigarette advertising makes an impression also with the functional benefits delivered through incorporation in emotional experience. In continuation, the analysis reveals the communication codes used.

### **3.4. PRODUCT SEGMENTATION**

Product segmentation is a very valuable marketing insight. It defines consumer preferences, product portfolio and opportunities for new developments. The main categorization of cigarette segments is based on the criteria: blend, strength, format, filter, flavor and number of sticks per pack. An introduction to the main specifics of each segment follows in the dissertation.

### **3.5. THE HEALTH ASPECT AND INDUSTRY REGULATIONS – A CORE IN TOBACCO MARKET EVOLUTION**

Tobacco is regulated by governments, World Health Organization (WHO), European Union (EU), US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and others. One of the most important international conventions in the area is the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), developed in response to globalization of tobacco and in force since February 2005. The agreement has 168 signatories and is one of the most widely spread treaties in the United Nations (UN) [WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control].

The EU itself has two directives, dedicated to tobacco control – the Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) and the Tobacco Advertising Directive (TAD). TPD controls the production, presentation and sale of tobacco and related products. In terms of cigarettes, it prohibits production of flavored cigarettes, small packages, limits ingredients, requires 65% health warnings labeling on packages, and etc. TAD on the other hand, bans the cross-border tobacco advertising and sponsorship in all media, except televisions (the latter was earlier prohibited): print media, radio, internet and sponsorship of events, involving several Member

States [EU European Commission Tobacco]. In order to realize even stronger restriction in tobacco, we should also mention plain packaging. It represents a totally unbranded pack that includes only the brand name. Plain packaging is adopted in Australia, France, United Kingdom and Ireland [Framework Convention Alliance].

The current review should make clear the serious control and restriction to the industry and its enhancing character. This, as well as the strive for healthy living and other consumer culture trends challenges the market and as a result, companies from the sector search for ways to survive and preserve their businesses. So, today we are witnesses of the invention of next generation smoking products.

### **3.6. NEXT GENERATION PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT – A RESULT OF CHANGING CULTURAL AND MARKET ENVIRONMENT**

It is acknowledged that most of the health risks coming from cigarette usage are caused by the toxic substances in the smoke, produced by the burning process of tobacco. In 2009, PMI announces its new R&D center in Switzerland, dedicated to the development of a reduced-risk products. PMI has developed four platforms of next generation products. The Company calls these developments reduced-risk products (RRPs), coming to say that they are less risky for the health. Among all platforms, IQOS, based on tobacco heating technology is the strongest. IQOS distribution has been expanding globally – from 38 markets in 2018 to 64 markets in 2020 [PMI, Tobacco Tactics 2023].

BAT has been investing in next generation products development which as per company definition include electronic cigarettes, tobacco heating products, and others. These alternatives to traditional cigarettes BAT recognize as potentially reduced-risk products. The company's flagship brands from this group are Vuse (rebranded from Vype in 2020) and glo. Similar to IQOS, glo is a heating tobacco product. Market coverage of glo has been improving in order to reach around 25 countries nowadays.

In the heated tobacco category, the solution of JTI is Ploom TECH, based on a hybrid technology, and of IMP it is Pulze, launched just in the last years.

In the so defined new future of tobacco industry, besides the four multinational companies, others have been provoked to also work on NGPs development in order to preserve market positions and competitiveness. Due to the changing competitive environment, IQOS has lost some market share. However, it remains the strongest brand globally, accounting to 61% in 2021 [Tobacco Tactics 2023].

Following is a communication analysis of the pioneer and bestseller IQOS, based on advertisement, product and point of sales audit of NGPs, implemented in 2020 (Appendix 2).

## **4. SEMIOTIC ANALYSES OF TOBACCO CONSUMPTION**

The following three semiotic analyses of the tobacco consumption are based on the knowledge gained from the previous two sections of the thesis: "Cultural and historical context of tobacco consumption" and "Tobacco business nowadays: scope and smoking culture".

### **4.1. MYTHOLOGY OF TOBACCO CONSUMPTION**

We have observed a profound mythology of tobacco and its usage ever since it appeared in the culture of the Amerindian societies. Across the Native Americans and thereafter, the Europeans it was believed that tobacco is a panacea. It was famous with attractive callings like panacea, holy herb, sacred weed, Herbe Medicee and others similar to it, in fact played a role in advertising it which led to its vastly acceptance. A very important role of tobacco dissemination was played by its ambassadors. These were medicine people, nobles, royalties, and certain personalities like Nicolas Monardez, the French ambassador in Lisbon Jean Nicot, the English courter Sir Walter Raleigh who glorified the qualities of the plant and propagated its consumption. Later on, during XVIII century, the panacea perception supported the shift from smoking pipe to snuffing in Europe. However, the main reason for the vast dissemination of the new consumption was cultural. At these times, very valuable became respectable consumption. Taking snuff was seen as such consumption, and so the myth about refined and elegant usage, creating an image of respectable behavior was encoded in the snuffing.

Influenced by the military circumstances till the WWI, cigarette producers firstly developed a masculine image of cigarettes, suggesting bravery, trendiness, convenience, refinement through smoking cigarettes. Along with the emergence of women emancipation though, cigarette companies immediately directed their commercials towards the new gender tendency. The image of the new woman they created was slender, chic and mildly seductive. These qualities described the independent woman, and to smoke a cigarette became a symbol of emancipation. The mythologizing of cigarette consumption is exemplified by legendary activities what is the case with the campaign "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet". In this particular example, all possible marketing techniques were employed so that the mythology about cigarettes incarnated in sweet foods had become real.

And so continued the business efforts in the postwar period, the latter defined as the most difficult for the industry due to the revealed harmful consequences of smoking. Television, movies, celebrities were highly engaged as new publicity methods.

Nowadays, brands are trying to preserve and gain new smokers through emotional and functional influence. Highlighted is the emotional connection with consumers. However, the functional side being very important for cigarettes is strongly exploited in a mythic way, too. Such are the cases of slogans that follow.

- "Click to change" (Esse) – a capsule that change the smoker after clicking;
- "Shell pack capsule" (Corset) – a capsule product in a unique pack associated with a pearl, signifying that one looks and feels brilliant;

The codes around which brands create mythology of their usage are innovation, technologies, modernity, confidence, determination, boldness, city lifestyle, luxury, success, individuality, freedom, enjoyment, socializing, product quality, taste, refinement, flavour, freshness, pleasure, natural usage, internationality, fashion, elegance, femininity, style.

Based on the analysis, I suggest a mythic sign of tobacco.

Language	Tobacco <b>1. Signifier</b>	Tobacco plant and products (e.g. cigarettes) <b>2. Signified</b>
	<b>3. Sign</b> Tobacco plant and products (e.g. cigarettes) <b>I. SIGNIFIER</b>	<b>II. SIGNIFIED</b>
MYTH	A source of supernatural power, panacea, peace keeper, royal, fashion, refinement, masculinity, women emancipation, freedom, urban lifestyle, confidence <b>III. SIGN</b>	

Figure 6, The mythic sign of tobacco consumption

#### 4.2. POSITIONING OF MASCULINE AND FEMININE CIGARETTE BRANDS ON THE SEMIOTIC SQUARE

The current semiotic square includes all Top 20 global brands by volume percentage share, without China National Tobacco Company. Additionally included are typical feminine brands since on a global review they appear with smaller shares and thus, do not rank in Top 20.

The square is formed by the four concepts S1 – Masculine, S2 – Feminine, -S1 – Non-masculine and -S2 – Non-feminine, that define the areas of unisex, local, typical feminine and typical masculine cigarette brands. By means of the semiotic square, we discovered differentiating meanings for each segment that should be a highly valuable insight, unlocking marketing actions. So the Unisex brands highlight functional benefits, mingled with emotional experience. Vice-a-versa is the positioning of the Typical feminine brands, that highlight emotional experience, with valued functional benefits. The Typical masculine brands, on the other hand, are vectors of tradition and heritage, connected with the future. The local brands lastly, grouped by the complementarity of non-masculine and non-feminine stand out with their local heritage and specifics with regard to blend and cultural features, reflected in the brand identity.

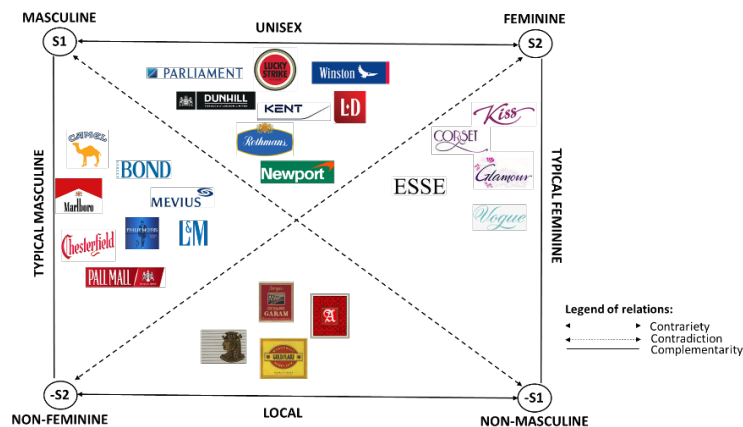


Figure 7, Positioning of masculine and feminine cigarette brands on the semiotic square

#### 4.3. SEMIOSPHERE OF TOBACCO CONSUMPTION

With the Lotman's model of semiosphere, I identify seven spheres of tobacco culture and consumption: Amerindian culture, European culture, Culture of smoking pipe, Culture of snuffing, Culture of smoking cigarettes, Health consequences and bans, and Culture of usage transformation. With this model we have managed to structure and trace the evolution of tobacco culture, and study it holistically through the interaction and communication between the spheres. We identify which the dominating



sphere is in a specific time, what makes it more powerful and turns it into a trendsetter for the other spheres, and how it influences and changes the language about tobacco consumption.

The semiosphere of tobacco consumption was revolutionized by the cigarette invention. The applied marketing and production methods established the first steady brand players in cigarettes – Camel, Chesterfield and Lucky Strike. Since then, the brands themselves have been the direct speakers of cigarettes and trendsetters of tobacco industry. The completely reshaping language of tobacco consumption was communicated and established by the powerful influence of the advertising tool. The cigarette ads spoke about premiums, trade cards, mild blend, refine taste, masculinity, independency, Camel, Lucky Strike – a grammar that did not characterize the old usage forms and culture they created. The new language was strongly influenced by the medical field, too, complementing it with everlasting grammar, exemplified by the health risk, nicotine and cancer.

It is very important to point out that nowadays, the harmful effect of tobacco usage is undisputed. In this regard, the dialogue between the regulatory institutions and tobacco business is led in a mature and responsible way. Governmental and health organizations set the rules in terms of bans and regulations and tobacco companies function within the allowed frames respecting the rules. Therefore, we observe a shared language between the two parties of the dialogue – a language defined by the institutions in their role of a speaker and adopted by the companies in their position of a receiver. A very significant outcome from the shared language is business development in the area of next generation products. Ambitions and promises of the global producers towards NGPs are enormous, and their realization will lead to a new revolutionary change in tobacco industry.

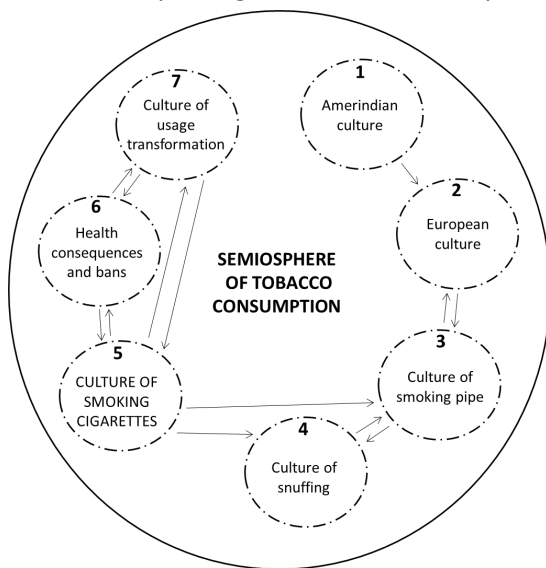


Figure 8, Semiosphere of tobacco consumption

**PART 2. MARKETING SEMIOTICS AND RESEARCH SOLUTIONS**

In comparison to the previous part, Part 2 is transitional, regarding theoretical and practical developments. With this part, I mainly strive to introduce the semiotic studies on the brand and the traditional research solutions, applicable in the business sector of the fast-moving consumer goods. The present solutions are logically all applicable to tobacco and cigarettes - the product category we have chosen to illustrate with work and efficiency of research tools and analyses, through respective examples and clarifications. Accentuating on semiotic tools, the whole part commences with a short understanding of consumer culture and marketing semiotics, as a theory of the semiotic tools.

## **1. MARKETING SEMIOTICS**

### **1.1. CONSUMER CULTURE**

For the better understanding of consumer culture, we shall try to explain the "Consumer practices semiotization", a terminology introduced by Bankov in his book "Consumer Society". The semiotization of consumer practices is expressed in the transformation of goods and services in signs. It happens by means of advertising, media and fashion's system that inscribe symbolic meanings such as prestige, style, trendiness to the products. So, nowadays consumers construct and express their identity through the goods and services they choose to use. At the time of consumerism people change goods and services very frequently not because they have lost their functionality but because they have lost a symbolic value due to fashion's system influence. Thus, driven by added value in consumer communications, people pay for the symbolic value the products are charged with. This is how consumers buy much more for the need of their identity and image rather than for the real usage the goods and services are intended for. Identity is such a feature that needs to be constantly nourished. And so, semiotization is the main driver of overconsumption [Bankov 2009:19-20]. Consumption of symbolic values refers to all products. Tobacco products not only do not make exception but are a strong example of this consumption manner. For the young and people of active age, the smoked cigarette brand speaks for their social status and image. Because of this, smokers are attracted by trusted and prestigious brands, with heritage and effective consumer communication.

In this section I have also included theories for the creation of consumer culture, and typologies of studying consumer culture, the latter being strategically used by marketers in gaining consumers and building strong relationships between brand and user. VALS (Values and LifeStyle) is an example of such typology.

### **1.2. SCOPE OF MARKETING SEMIOTICS**

Marketing semiotics deals with revealing, generating and explaining meanings in the process of branding and brand management. The subject of marketing semiotics is the connotative meaning, building culture [Noth 1988]. Marketing semioticians search for codes in the structures of textual and visual languages that they further decode, taking into consideration the respective culture and conventions, characterizing it [Valentine 2007]. "The aim is to be stepped in under the surface and to be generated deep insights about the consumer on levels the consumers themselves are not completely aware off", says the founder of Space Doctors Malcolm Evans for the commercial semiotics [Evans 1999].

Semiotics may contribute to the implementation of all marketing activities and all phases of the planning process [Oswald 2015, Ciulia Ceriani/ Baba Consulting]. These are: marketing research and analysis; follow cultural trends; develop brand strategy and plan; develop new products and optimize brand portfolio; execute brand positioning; execute consumer communications.

Next in this section I try to explain the nature and value of marketing semiotics through the models of:

- Mark Batey: Brand meaning framework;
- Jean-Marie Floch: Valorization;
- Laura Oswald: The Semiotic dimensions of brands;
- Laurence Vincent: Brand mythology system.

As my thesis further proceeds with a deep dive into the semiotic studies of the brand, other models and developments in the field are going to be presented here.

## **2. SEMIOTIC STUDIES OF THE BRAND**

The object of study of semiotic research are "communications, consumption environments and popular culture", analyzed through specialized semiotic tools and models [Valentine 2007]. The materials to be analyzed – brand and category communications, the product in popular culture, the competitive context, are collected through desk research. In this regard, Valentine elucidates that semiotic work is done on two simultaneous levels: digging into the cultural context that defines consumer attitudes and scrutinizing the advertisements and other forms of brand communication to define what they mean. While Valentine highlights the pure desk-research approach of semiotic data collection, Oswald includes consumer research also for primary insights gathering.

The present section aims to introduce the general semiotic approach in brand research regarding the main solutions it provides. The tools that are presented are the following: Discourse analysis, Brand mythology, Decoding and recoding, ZMET and Trends observation. A specialized work in the field is the book of Dimitar Trendafilov "Semiotic studies of the trade mark" (2017).

### **2.1 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

The discourse analysis studies texts. Texts have a structure, links to other texts and non-textual signs such as images, organization and most of all a purpose. The latter is composed by intentionally and strategically used codes while the mentioned structure, links, organization serve that process. The purpose represents a message to be delivered to a certain target group of consumers. Bearing this in mind, the discourse analysis is applied in order to decode the message and so to interpret and reveal its meanings. In marketing, object of work of the present tool are all brand aspects, containing and transmitting meaning about it and thus, taking part in creating the brand image and associations.

The exposition further includes meaning construction, levels of discourse analysis, meaning deconstruction and phases of the analysis.

Concerning the field of business, my understanding is that meaning is created on the three levels of: brand meaning, product category meaning, and total market meaning. The brand meaning is composed by its individual identity. It is the smallest territory of meaning. The next two levels represent collective meanings. The one of the product category is created by the common meaning of the identities of all

brands (e.g., in cigarettes, Marlboro, Winston, Rothmans, Vogue). Thereafter, the whole market meaning is created by the collective meanings of all sub-categories that shape it (e.g., in tobacco industry, cigarettes, smoking tobacco and pipe, electronic cigarettes, NGP and others). It is the biggest territory of meaning.

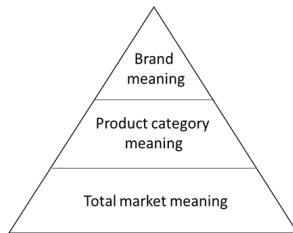


Figure 14, Levels of meaning creation

Results from discourse analysis serve as a base for a brand strategy development, referring positioning and repositioning as well as other marketing activities.

## 2.2. BRAND MYTHOLOGY

In the thesis so far we have reviewed the theoretical base of myths in the work of Barthes. We then analyzed the mythology of tobacco consumption and developed its mythic sign. And with a pragmatic aspect, we reviewed the brand mythology system of Vincent for managing legendary brands.

In the today's world, the domain where myths reside the most are the legendary brands, infers Vincent [Vincent 2002]. Brands convey myths to consumers through storytelling and brand elements. In a storytelling inspiring individuals and imagery are mythologized with heroic features and so used to convey the brand myth. The American author Phil Causineau discovers six myths as a source of inspiration: the myth of the creative struggle, the myth of time, the mythic power of mentorship, the myth of travel, the myth of the city and the myth of sports [Causineau 2001]. The same applies to the many legendary brands - theme of their mythologies is one of the mentioned mythic areas [Vincent 2002:70-1].

Brand mythology is the subject of an in-depth study by Douglas Holt. According to Holt, myths differ in profundity. The most successful brands perform identity myths and this is how they turn to iconic brands. Identity myths face alerts that people perceive as their personal anxieties. They help people to overcome these anxieties [Holt 2004:29-31, 72].

Holt says that "Identity brands compete in myth markets, not product markets" [Holt 2004:77-8]. This statement witnesses the extreme importance of mythology in managing a brand. It means Marlboro, Davidoff and Lucky Strike, as examples of identity brands in Cigarettes to compete and collaborate with technology, sports, films, music in the fight for the most effective myths for their brands and image. Myth markets are not stable since they are under the influence of cultural disruptions. So this could be one of the semiotician's research jobs - to support brands in deciphering new myth markets and finding the most appropriate myth.

Based on Holt's findings, this point also explores building blocks of the brand market, managing the myth and the cultural brand management process.

Semioticians study brand mythology through models and techniques we have reviewed. Through these scientific solutions issues in mythologies are identified and fixed or full mythological concepts are created.

### 2.3 DECODING AND RECODING

In Decoding and recoding, the code is the centerpiece element and thereof I commence constructing this analytical tool by bringing out what a code is in the context of communication, where this analysis is applied. I explain the role of the code through the model of communication, developed by Roman Jakobson. "Senders must know what audiences they want to reach and what responses they want to get. They must encode their messages so the target audience can successfully decode them", say Kotler and Keller [Kotler and Keller, 2016:562-3].

By implementing Decoding and recoding, the semioticians apply the three codes' classification of dominant, residual and emergent codes, introduced by Raymond Williams. The typology is related to time, where dominant refers to the present time, and residual and emergent to the past and future respectively but each of the two have the same time relation to the current time, as well [Williams 1977]. In my view, the three categories can be enhanced by another one - of everlasting codes. These manage to remain up to date and attractive any time that makes them universal. In cigarettes, examples of everlasting codes are the concepts of pleasure, confidence, refinement, elegance. Having this in mind, to the typology of the three categories of codes, I suggest adding the category of everlasting/ immutable codes, as follows:

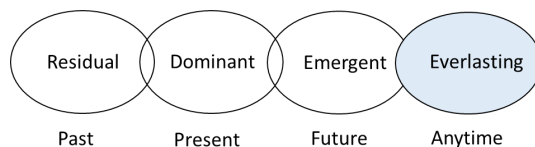


Figure 18, Update of the codes classification

In tobacco, the need of adding the everlasting codes is also defined by the strong influence of regulations over the industry. Hence, creative of marketing is put in a frame that defines and limits the opportunities for using particular codes in commercial communications.

Knowing the codes around which the ad is created, the study of Decoding and Recoding reveals how far meaning of codes is properly transferred through the ad messages and further, how far it is properly "translated" by consumers as expected.

### 2.4. ZMET

"Most of what people know, they do not know that they know-and what they say may not be what they mean-since most thoughts and other important cognitive processes occur unconsciously" [Zaltman G, Zaltman L 2008:XI-XII]. Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) is especially developed to answer challenges coming from the statement in citation, that could not be solved by using some of the standard qualitative research methods. We think by means of metaphors and metaphorizing things shape our thoughts. Thus, in order to understand the thoughts, feelings and behavior of customers and

managers, researchers should study metaphors that engage their minds and process of thinking. Zaltman's view is that the basic assumptions about thoughts and behavior of respondents, underlying current research techniques should be reconsidered, and techniques improved by deeper representation of

In comparison to the traditional qualitative methods, metaphor elicitation technique is much more disquisitional. Developing a consensus map is a ZMET output. It consists of elicited main constructs and the connections between them, the latter explained with visuals. ZMET supports the decision-making of all major marketing activities - NPD, positioning, communication, packaging, brand and corporate perception and image [Zaltman 1997; Zaltman G, Zaltman L 2008:XIII-XIV].

## **2.5. TRENDS OBSERVATION**

The development in a certain direction over time is called a trend. Trends have a positive or a negative direction of development, and while going to one of the two, it may also have flat periods. Key in Trends observation is the time they are identified and adopted. In doing business this is a major tool in the fight with competition and so identifying and adopting proper trends is of great importance. It could be exemplified with the corporate politics of PMI and IQOS development, in particular. That PMI sets the powerful motto of "Designing a Smoke-Free Future" says everything about the company's attitudes towards trends, their precise and timely identification and adoption, so that today's product investments are the future return. PMI's major response to long-term trends in the tobacco sector is IQOS, launched on the market in time accordance with introduced new severe bans to cigarettes. This way PMI took the leading position in the newly shaped tobacco industry, represented by the next-generation products.

Besides explaining the nature of the trend and why it is important to observe trends, this section also covers explanation of the difference between trend creators, setters and influencers, types of trends and phases of trends observation.

The business practice of observing and following trends defines what a successful company is. Many companies have lost market shares due to trends ignorance or no resources to align their businesses with the new trends. In general, the corporate culture towards trends and how far they are tracked and followed can impact a whole business, to lead to a business loss or a business win.

## **3. TRADITIONAL MARKET/ MARKETING STUDIES**

### **3.1. RETAIL MEASUREMENT SERVICE**

This survey (RMS), also called a retail audit, measures product sales to consumers - sales out. It is based on information collected from points of sales. This is the best research solution that figures out the actual results of efforts in terms of achieved market share – how much we and competitors take from the market. Retail measurement provides quantitative information for the market sales of the companies, their brands and products. It shows total market sizes and how each company and its propositions perform by various facts, including: volume sales and share, value sales and share, numeric and weighted distributions. RMS has a vast marketing application, and it partakes in the following activities: brand monitoring, product launch, set sales targets, brand strategy and plan.

### **3.2. HOUSEHOLD PANEL**

Household panel (HP) also registers the realized sales out but not by stores auditing and collecting the information that way. Instead, the object of research for the achieved sales is the consumer, and more particularly, the consumer in his role as a shopper. The households in the panel receive from the research agency diaries or handheld scanners. The member responsible for the household purchases logically should have the commitment to fill in the diary or scan the purchases based on the receipts. An advantage of the household panel is that it also collects socio-demographic and other data about the respondent, which can then be crossed with purchase data.

### **3.3. CONSUMER RESEARCH**

Regarding methodology, the research solutions reviewed so far provide the so-called quantitative information. Thus, insight is given in the form of percentage value. Quantitative and qualitative are respectively the two general methodological classes in investigation. In qualitative, in contrast to quantitative, we do not deal with numbers. Instead, we deal with words. A qualitative study is conducted when the case to be solved needs discovery of new facts we are unaware of. And when we want to measure the discovered information in order to figure out levels of importance, we do it through quantitative study. So qualitative and quantitative classes have opposite nature and bring different consumer insights and application.

The so-called consumer, or customer, or ad-hoc research is very intrinsic to brand study. The object of research of this branch is the consumer directly, regarding its thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, behavior. Marketing needs that can be studied through it are very many. Among all, in FMCG, including cigarettes practice shows that much more frequently surveyed are the topics of Product test, Pack design test, Brand positioning and image, U&A and Brand health, Consumer segmentation and Communication effectiveness.

#### **3.3.1. Product test**

Product test is conducted to obtain quality evaluation of the taste. In the cigarette category, indicators the product is tasted against generally are: overall taste, strength (tar, nicotine), tobacco plant quality, aroma, aftertaste, ease of smoking, filter function, burning speed, capsule function. Other essential criteria of testing are purchasing intention and comparison with consumer's most often brand (MOB) of smoking.

#### **3.3.2. Pack design test**

As one of the major purchase influencers, the packs are a frequent area of brand research. Studied indicators in a pack design test are: overall like of the pack, open likes and dislikes, evaluation of individual design elements, evaluation of brand image associations. General are the connotations like high product quality, good value for money, trustful product, suitable for people like me, while specific for the cigarette category are the connotations like luxury, stylish, elegant, modern, fashionable, refined, fresh, cheerful and etc. Similar to product testing, essential criteria of evaluation are purchase intention and comparison of the new design against the current and the one of consumer's MOB. This presentiment concerns having a developed pack design and testing it via quantitative survey. However, it may also be required a research

and consumer opinion for the need of a pack design creation (ideas generation). As a type, it is a qualitative survey.

### **3.3.3. Brand positioning and image**

Brand positioning is a crucial part of marketing work. In research, brand positioning represents how consumers perceive the brand, what is their attitude to it and hence, brand positioning is its place in consumer's mind. The study gives insights about brand associations, relations with the other brands, personification, symbols meaning and messages meaning as understood by consumers. All these aspects together create the image of the brand. Addressing cigarettes in particular, we should mention that image is very influential and decisive in brand choice. Ideally, Brand positioning and image is a qualitative study, conducted through focus-group discussions.

### **3.3.4. Usage and attitudes (U&A) and Brand health**

U&A and Brand health particularly is a principal research solution, together with Retail measurement. In the combination U&A and Brand health, the first is a source for in-depth knowledge of consumer attitudes, behavior, usage repertoires, and others, while the second – for advanced analyses, such as brand equity index, developed through more compound statistical calculations by using the collected U&A facts. Methodologically, this is a quantitative survey, normally conducted as a tracking one. Addressing a new market, the most efficient research approach should be U&A to be preceded by a qualitative phase.

Brand health - characteristic for the global research agencies is that they develop proprietary research products. All of them have proprietary brand health solutions they take pride in. Ipsos BVC (Brand Value Creator) rejoices at good popularity and I have chosen this solution in order to explain shortly the nature of brand health advanced analyses.

### **3.3.5. Consumer segmentation**

It is a very powerful research tool, used for marketing activities directing according to consumer segments and their characteristics. Segmentation is based on a statistical cluster analysis. The most advanced segmentation takes into consideration socio-demographics, values, lifestyle, brand usage, purchase attitudes. In cigarettes, values and lifestyle statements for examples are "I try to quit smoking", "I avoid smoking at home", "I like to try new cigarette products", "I prefer foreign cigarettes", and others.

### **3.3.6. Communication effectiveness**

Developing and organizing consumer communications represents a very high share of the whole marketing activities. There are two approaches to studying communication and more particularly, advertisement in research. These are pre-launch and post-launch testing referred. So is the marketing application of Communication effectiveness study – for advertising concepts development and results evaluation and thus, assuring most effective future campaigns.



## **PART 3. ANALYTICAL INTEGRATION AND A CASE STUDY OF THE BRAND CORSET**

With the development of this part, I strive to go beyond the individual research instruments and to introduce the analytical integration of information. Based on my research experience, I present the most typical case studies of the integrated solutions and develop a research program for each, implying data and insights to be linked. I suggest two levels of integration: Deep dive and Advanced analytics. We then review the expertise of analytical integration in two directions: amongst the traditional market/ marketing studies and of semiotics with the traditional studies. Finally, I develop and suggest a research model with integrated semiotic analysis as the final theoretical outcome, and apply it to a case study for the cigarette brand Corset.

### **1. ANALYTICAL INTEGRATION OF RESEARCH SOLUTIONS**

#### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

In the previous two sections we reviewed the semiotic studies of the brand and the traditional market studies, both individually where we focused on the semiotic studies, trying to reveal their inestimable role and function in brand management. Each study has individual research objectives and methodology that hardly overlap. So, semiotic analysis, qualitative consumer research, quantitative consumer research or retail audit measurement provide totally different insights that do not allow one study to address a mixture of needs.

However, practice has shown plenty of complex case studies that need more work to be initiated and as a next step, their data, and analyses to be linked so that the right solutions may crystalize. So, the present section aims to reveal the integrated solutions across individual methods and analyses - amongst the traditional market/ marketing studies, and of semiotics with the traditional studies.

The Marketing Information System (MIS) is a topic covered across the marketing textbooks. MIS is composed by the three components internal data, marketing intelligence and marketing research. The system functions on the principle of integration – between its three corpora and within each corpus, too. By linking insights from the three components, MIS professionals can develop priceless analyses that generate ideas, provide solutions, reveal market opportunities and this way drive company business.

About the component of marketing research, we define it as a sector that provides abundance of opportunities for the development and application of integrated solutions and thus, we view it as a leading information source in marketing and decision-making process. Motivated by this finding, we will now proceed with the two directions of integration.

##### **1.1.1. Case studies of the integrated solutions**

As mentioned, the integrated solutions address more complex case studies or activities that cannot be solved by approaching a single research. Dealing with such cases and activities is a daily routine for the marketing and sales department, that is especially valid for the international and other big companies, having ambitious missions. Among the most spread case studies and activities, listed randomly are: new market entry, new product development, market share negative trend, brand positioning or repositioning,

brand health issues. For each of the mentioned case studies and activities, I propose a research program with regard to: research topic, typology of the type of research and insights provided. Following is an example for the case study “Market share negative trend”.

No	Research topic	Typology	Insights
1.	Market analysis	RMS	Detailed analysis to show product category state, product segments state, levels of decrease by regions and trade channels, distribution, new product launches, price changes, growing/ declining brands and products.
2.	Brand health	CR	Brand equity index state, barriers, category perception, brand perception, relationships brand - consumer, advertising effectiveness.
3.	Product receipt improvement/ Advertising effectiveness improvement/ Redesign as solutions	Semiotics & CR	Development aligned with semiotic findings and ready concept tested among target users.

Table 5, Research program for a case study “Market share negative trend”

The suggested research programs prove the need of development and applicability of the model of analytical integration of research solutions.

### 1.1.2. Levels of integration

1. Deep dive is related to solving case studies by looking through final analyses from different surveys. 2. Advanced analytics is performed by using data, obtained by the samples of at least two surveys as a base for next data processing, whose result is the integration of the initial data for the aim of reaching an advanced analysis. This level should allow quantitative information only. As a qualitative study, Semiotics is applied at the Deep dive level.

### 1.2. INTEGRATION AMONGST THE TRADITIONAL MARKET/ MARKETING STUDIES

For a research company, to have capabilities for developing advanced analyses, including data integration, it should provide diverse surveys in order to have the output information for further processing and analyses. Nielsen (recently rebranded to NielsenIQ), the biggest research company worldwide is a great example for a spectrum of studies. In choosing the research agencies, which integrated solutions to present, I have considered two criteria: product portfolio and agency position in the EAOMAR ranking. So, in this sense, other than Nielsen, another selected research provider for examination is Ipsos.

#### 1.2.1. Methodology and data validation

In this point I review the quality and reliability assurance in short only since the objective of my thesis is not the technical part of carrying out research, but its application regarding meeting business needs.

#### 1.2.2. Nielsen expertise

Nielsen may suggest integrated solutions, supporting marketing and trade needs in brand management, pricing, segmentation, assortment optimization, promotion optimization, shopper insights and other activities, driving the business. I have decided to review solutions in brand management, as well as segmentation, needed for brand strategy development.

#### Integrated brand health management system

In cooperation with Prof. Kevin Keller, Nielsen develops the proprietary product Winning Brands - a 360° study of brand health. The research company integrates its brand health solution (Winning Brands, quantitative research) with brand choice mechanisms (DeltaQual proprietary product, qualitative research), category overview (RMS), purchase behavior (consumer panel) as well as other possible fusions (shopper research, BuzzMetrics). With its holistic approach, this brand health management system supports market share growth. Seen as "the deep-dive diagnostic solution", according to Nielsen, it corrects off-target launches, reinvigorates brands, drives re-positioning and new strategies, maintains brand portfolio, which means that it partakes in milestone activities, deciding future of the brand [Nielsen 2009].

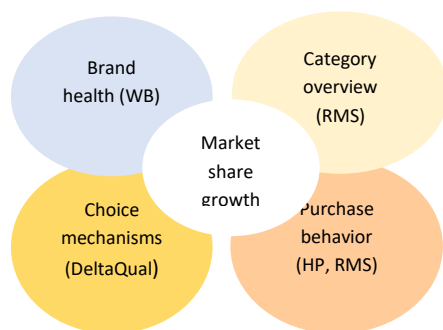


Figure 21, Integrated brand health management system, Source: Nielsen

#### **1.2.3. Ipsos expertise**

##### CENSYDIAM

Within consumer research, very essential is the linkage of findings from the two major methodological corpuses, qualitative and quantitative research. This linkage is an objective of the proprietary solution of Ipsos called Censydiam. It is a consumer centric study that questions whether the brands deliveries meet the real needs of people and starts with exploring consumers' deeper needs and motivations, and their connection to brands. Ipsos frames human motivations through the two oppositional dimensions personal and social, and so establishes the Censydiam wheel of 8 core motivations, that are: enjoyment, conviviality, belonging, security, control, recognition, power, vitality.

For activating brand growth, Censydiam involves the two methods, qualitative and quantitative.

- Qualitative: identifying category motivations, delivers expressions of consumer needs and brand perceptions, delivers fresh insights on category unmet needs, contemporary consumer stories;
- Quantitative: metrics for attitudinal equity, current and future drivers of brand equity, sizing and profiling of motivations.

### **1.3. INTEGRATION OF SEMIOTICS WITH THE TRADITIONAL MARKET/ MARKETING STUDIES**

In the area of research integration, semiotics is seen as a research method, applied in combination with a consumer research or more particularly, a qualitative study [Valentine 2007]. Why linkage between these two methods? David Glen Mick answers this question in the following way: "Because consumers behave based on the meanings they ascribe to marketplace stimuli. And yet consumer researchers, with few exceptions, have characteristically avoided detailed and systematic inquiry into meaning processes" [Mick 1986]. Semiotics as a method of studying the diverse signs on the market is a recent discovery by consumer research [Mick 1986, Noth 1988]. Despite its recent application, according to Valentine growing is the application of the semiotic approach among other research types, where FMCG and international companies are among the leading domains. In market research industry, it has also been a part of new techniques and methodologies establishment [Valentine 2007]. And rather vice-a-versa the opinion is of Oswald, according to which the semiotics is not applied at a satisfactory level to the marketing practises, including advertising research, brand positioning, creative development, segmentation [Oswald 2015].

The core objective of the current point is to show how semiotics practically integrates with consumer, as well as other possible research types and to try to identify any other opportunities of linkage.

First of all, semiotics and consumer research connect in two ways: semiotics is used as a tool to analyze the collected consumer data and consumer research is conducted either as a part from the semiotic study in order to supplement the insights collection, or as a part of the whole marketing research process in order to verify semiotic findings. Semiotics is predominantly integrated in qualitative explorations but semiotic and quantitative methods can integrate effectively, as well, especially in measuring and verifying the findings from the semiotic analysis. I tried to investigate research projects with semiotic integration, and a list with examples follows further in this point from the thesis.

#### **1.3.1. Potentializing and actualizing meanings**

The group of scholars Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel and Brannen make a review of marketing and consumer research founded on semiotics. The authors are deeply convinced in the high value and advantage of integration between semiotics and consumer research. In their view, each of the two research sources benefits from this analytical approach. We completely share this view and reasons for integration.

The work of the four scholars helps us in two respects. First, it structures and organizes all marketing and brand aspects that need application of the semiotic method for studying and analyzing the signs they are built by and the meanings they bring. Second, it provides good examples that aim to illustrate the integration between semiotics and consumer research. The authors classify the studies in one of the four consecutive meaning stages: potentializing and actualizing meanings in the object (e.g., product design), around the object (e.g., package, brand name and logo, advertising), of being and buying there (e.g., the retail environment) and actualizing meanings through experiences, ownership, and usage (e.g., free time). Potentializing meanings refer to the marketing efforts to define imminent meanings the target consumers to be led to. And actualizing meanings, to the free meanings, generated by consumers, regardless of whether they match the potentializing ones or not [Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel and Brannen 2004].

### **1.3.2. Examples of integration**

#### Shopping attitudes of second-generation ethnic consumers

The methodology selected for this research is the combination of ethnographic interviews and the semiotic square of Greimas. The interviews are analyzed through content analysis. The Greimasian square is selected due to its ability to solve conflict between two opposite positions, as existing in the subject of research. In particular, the authors apply the Spatial location semiotic square, based on the contrariety relation "Here - There". The present target group hesitates between the two dimensions, which makes this specific square suitable for the study. The value of the integration approach is at the core of this project initiation and realization [Silhouette-Dercourt, de Lassus and Darpy 2014]. However, the authors have two remarks in regard to the used methodology and the integration approach. The first concerns the use of only one analytical instrument (the semiotic square), which approach limits the complete reading and understanding of the consumer experiences. The second remark makes a connection with a next phase of this research, aiming to quantify and segment the market. A quantitative survey would measure the shares of each identity position, purchase intention, preferred products and brands as well as other findings to provide needed clarity about consumer segments. The two remarks lead to a more insightful and actionable research, that makes us to support them.

#### "Semiotics fused with digital media analytics, why wouldn't you? The new age of qual and quant"

This is a development, presented on the 2019 annual conference of ESOMAR. Mills and Souda combine semiotics with digital media analytics, and defines it as a tool to measure "reality" (that is digital world) rather than to extrapolate data to the universe/ general population. In this fusion, the authors see each of the two fields serving to compensate for the weaknesses of the other [Mills and Souda, ESOMAR 2019]. In order to describe this fusion, Mills and Souda apply it to a study of political discourse in UK, underscoring that the tool is completely relevant to studying multi-national brands, from which almost all of their work ensues. The authors structure the discourse and derive meaning (qualitative insights) by approaching the Semiotic square of Greimas. Through the square structured hypotheses are defined in order to be prognosed new and future territories as a final insight. Measuring the discourse (quantitative insights) commences with converting the Semiotic framework into an algorithm to categorize the enormous number of conversations in the digital media. Categorization is the key. It quantifies the narrative over time. Measuring the qualitative insights goes through several steps, one of which is "the marry" between semiotics and quantitative information. On this step, the Semiotic map is again used so that data are structured. It is achieved by superimposing the quantified themes across the components each of the four territories has been divided on [Mills and Souda, ESOMAR 2019].

### **1.3.3. Optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis as the final theoretical outcome**

Relying on the concept of research integration and its application, we can infer that most of the marketing issues, requiring research normally need more than one study for the accurate understanding and solving of the issue. In this regard, I have developed an optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis. It includes five steps, with the following specifics:

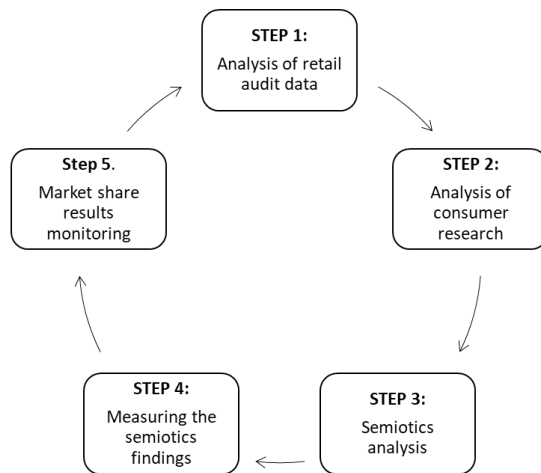


Figure 34, Optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis

### Step 1. Analysis of retail audit data

This is the source that can clearly show if there is any issue with the brand, and how significant it could be. In the field of integration, my investigation shows that the semiotic method has been linked with consumer research only. In this regard, the participation of semiotics in a common research tool with RMS should be something new.

### Step 2. Analysis of consumer research

Contribution here can be diverse. That diversity we may try to classify in two main types of insights: testing concepts and studying brand usage and health. Together with the retail audit, the latter clarifies issues if any, along with its other applications.

### Step 3. Semiotic analysis

With their quality to interpret and understand the deep meanings, the tools for semiotic analysis are inestimable marketing research solution. They can make a strong contribution to important decisions related to concepts development, new launches, advertising analysis, positioning and repositioning.

### Step 4. Measuring the semiotic findings

This is a recommended step. Different scenarios are also possible, according to the business case. For example, steps 2 and 3 may change ordering, and semiotics will precede consumer research. In such a case, referred to concept development and study, semiotics partake in the development stage, with outcomes reached by the created concepts. Then it will normally continue to the tests among consumers, which is also a natural way to provide semiotic findings evaluation, too.

### Step 5. Market share results monitoring

This step comes logically, especially across big companies that set challenging sales targets. So, after implementing a new project, such as package redesign marketing and sales professionals are interested in share impact and monitor it.

## **2. A CASE STUDY OF THE BRAND CORSET**

## **2.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

### The brand Corset

Corset is a young cigarette brand. It was developed in 2010 and first offered on the Bulgarian local market. It is a superslim product, initially composed by the two SKUs Corset Lilac and Corset Pink. Following the company's expansion on the global market, today Corset can be found on 4 continents and 50 countries. This footprint makes Corset a leading export brand of its owner KT International (KTI).

In the competitive and restrictive conditions of the cigarette market, Corset has been fighting for consumer approval and a market share. In this regard, especially from 2016 KTI undertook vital activities, referred to portfolio development and brand culture reconsideration.

### Research objectives and methodology

I have studied Corset on the Bulgarian market, where the brand has been selling the longest. Especially since 2016, the superslims product category has been growing tendentiously. Prior to that, Corset had a very small market share, while following the onset of the category progress, our brand did not contribute significantly to this growth. This situation raised questions about barriers hindering the growth of the brand (cultural and/ or other) and reasons for progress of rival brands. Simultaneously, the young brand Corset has taken on the challenging mission to be an international player. All this makes the research contribution more valuable as well its approach of implementation. I apply a holistic research approach, where the semiotic method and analysis make a major contribution. By following the Optimal research model, the semiotic analysis is preceded by RMS and CR data review.

## **2.2. ANALYSIS OF RETAIL AUDIT DATA**

The RMS data analysis aims to review the dynamics in the superslims category and Corset performance by the indicators distribution, portfolio and price. In 2018, the results for Corset reveal that the higher price does not appear to be an obstacle towards brand purchase, and that its portfolio could only be a driver towards brand desire and purchase. Corset, Dunhill and Davidoff have reached a mid-distributional level. So, our brand has a good accessibility. However, it still can strive towards vaster distribution.

## **2.3. ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER RESEARCH DATA**

Based on consumer experience, we aim to provide primary information for the semiotic analysis and to find what is the cultural understanding and positioning of Corset in the consumer's mind, as well as brand awareness and product quality. Due to registered low awareness to Corset, this indicator appeared an obstacle to the usage of the brand. Two out of three respondents evaluated positively the overall product quality of Corset, which result did not indicate a problem with the blend.

### Brand culture

According to surveys till 2017, the brand Corset did not have the desired positive image. The identified negative perceptions concerned the brand name itself, world and beliefs of Corset, signified through the pack design. The first pack of Corset invoked two main perceptions: an extraordinary encoding of sexuality and kitschy design. Both create a brand culture, that is not in favor of growing Corset's market share.

Following in the thesis is the personification of Corset and a cultural overview against the main competitor Ome.

KTI redesigned the pack of the brand entirely. Evaluated in the end of 2018 (quantitative research), this current packing of Corset reached brand culture results, acceptable across consumers. Opposite to the controversial connotations of the originating design, the present one invoked femininity/ elegance, style, contemporaneity, innovation.

## **2.4. ADVERTISING ANALYSIS OF THE BRAND CORSET**

### **2.4.1. Decoding the cultural codes in the advertising of Corset**

Based on the communication content of the ads, identified are two periods of ad campaigns of Corset: until 2016 and since 2017. Until 2016 the brand narrative of Corset deployed the codes provocation, mystery, attraction, seduction, sexuality. The analysis interprets the meaning of the colors, the imagery and elements, the slogans, the linen corset, and the behavior of Corset woman. This detailed reading proved main findings from consumer research – that the brand culture is a reason for the lack of progress of Corset due to deployed controversial image of the brand users could not want to associate with.

Since 2017 we have observed a temporary and an intermediate brand narrative of Corset. The intermediate narrative aimed to communicate the redesigned pack of the brand due to the need of package type change, in accordance with EU requirements. The new design, that added the clarity Flat Pack to the name, aimed to represent improvement in regard to delicacy, sophistication, style, elegance to result in brand image and positioning positive perceptual change, as well. The intermediate narrative had two main codes that were style and iconicity. The overall sensation the new Corset woman embodied was of a retro fashion icon.

The current narrative of Corset develops on two plots, linked through fashion as a pivotal code of the up-to-date image and positioning of the brand. This narrative communicates the implemented full redesign of the packing design of the brand and the development of the line extension Corset Shellpack. Corset Flat Pack is inspired by fashion, and Corset Shellpack escalates fashion. The fashion-centered ad campaign of Corset is supported by another text, composed by the names of the cities Paris, Milan and Dubai. Following in the thesis is interpretation of the sign of femininity, the fashion connotations of the mentioned cities and separate analysis of Corset Flat Pack and Shellpack. The latter finds that with the current cultural positioning, the brand Corset could be on a right track. However, finally decisive are the retail audit results - market sales and share, that should be tracked (Step 5).

### **2.4.2. Typology of the advertising codes of Corset**

In this point I have classified the advertising codes across the four categories of codes residual, dominant, emerging and everlasting. There are some codes that have always defining the cultural scope of Corset. Such are the attractive look in one or other individuality of Corset woman and the self-confidence she has owned. Iconicity on the other hand is the top of the pyramid. It is always live, a brand mission, requiring a long way to be passed, and connecting efforts across different times so that iconicity is gained.



### 2.4.3. Valorization model through Corset advertising

According to Jean-Marie Flosch's valuation model, the ads of Corset are two types: utopian and ludic. The two valorizations together, occupying the right side of the square reveal the strong affective nature of Corset's ads and the recreation of the brand mythology.

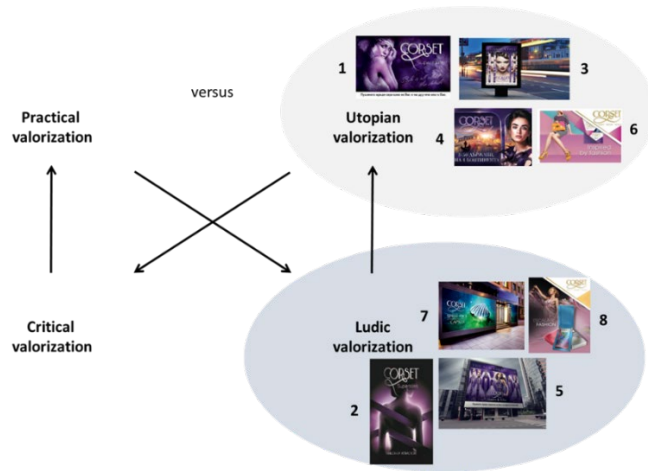


Figure 35, Valorization model through Corset advertising

## 2.5. MYTHOLOGY OF THE BRAND CORSET

### 2.5.1. Brand mythology system by Vincent

The narrative, worldview, agents and culture of the brand are analysed. We can say that the brand Corset has managed to establish its solid foundation, making it able to answer the fundamental questions like "Who am I?" and "What is important for me in life?". Corset can be very stylish and elegant, unique, a trendsetter in the fashion industry. Corset values creativity and innovations, and through this thinking it looks to the future and its own progress. Corset proves its convictions by participating in specialized events such as Sofia Fashion Week. Symbols of Corset: The unique package and design of the Shellpack series that certainly has the qualities to be loved.

## 2.6. COMMUNICATION ANALYSIS OF THE SUPERSLIMS CATEGORY

### 2.6.1. Decoding the cultural codes

We identify four cultural territories of the superslim brands: Fashionable, Art, Business and Classical. As shown on the square, they derive from the meanings of the concepts Original versus Traditional and Current versus Timeless. The analysis justifies the positioning of each brand in the territory it falls in.

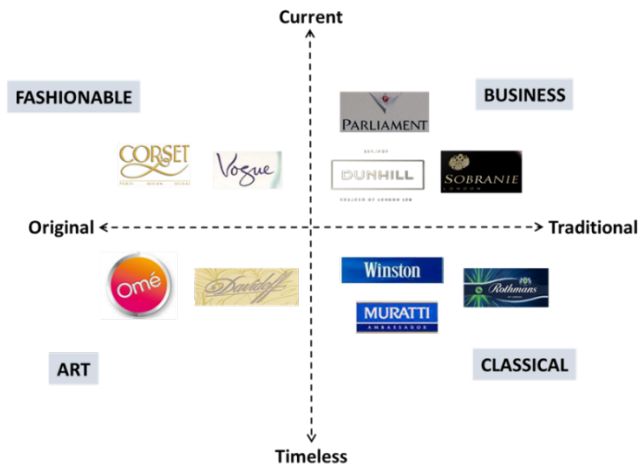


Figure 36, Positioning of the Superslims brands in the semiotic square

In conclusion, the Semiotic square for the product category shows that first, the main competitors of Corset are Vogue, Ome and Davidoff, and second, our brand is fighting for identical myth markets with the specified three brands. In parallel to the time before 2016, Corset has managed to establish a cultural positioning, that is relevant in the context of the competitive market review. With the former values, the brand could not be mapped in any of the four territories. While with the present image of a fashion icon, Corset has won a stable competitive positioning. Furthermore, since this is a relatively new experience for the brand, more time is needed to prove and establish its current state as well as RMS data and Brand health track as a part from the brand culture management process.

## **CONTRIBUTION OF THE DISSERTATION**

### **1. Optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis as the final theoretical outcome**

The development of this model is supported by the initial development of research programs for main case studies in marketing and sales. The suggested programs concerns: new market entry, new product development, market share negative trend, brand positioning/ repositioning, and brand health issues. For each case study, the program considers a research topic, typology of the type of research and insights provided. Relying on this development, the concept of integration and my findings in this analytical field, I have identified the need of developing of an optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis. It includes the following five steps:

- Step 1. Analysis of retail audit data
- Step 2. Analysis of consumer research
- Step 3. Semiotic analysis
- Step 4. Measuring the semiotic findings
- Step 5. Market share results monitoring

In the field of integration, my investigation shows that the semiotic method has been linked with consumer research only. In this regard, the participation of semiotics in a common research tool with RMS should be something new.

## **2. Semiosphere of tobacco consumption**

Considering the tobacco industry in particular, this could be the first attempt to apply the model of the semiosphere. With the Lotman's model, I identify seven spheres of tobacco culture and consumption: Amerindian culture, European culture, Culture of smoking pipe, Culture of snuffing, Culture of smoking cigarettes, Health consequences and bans, and Culture of usage transformation. With this model we have managed to structure and trace the evolution of tobacco culture, and study it holistically through the interaction and communication between the spheres. I identify the dominating sphere, what makes it more powerful and a trendsetter for the other spheres. The model shows the evolutionary impact of cigarettes on tobacco culture. It also shows a peculiar dialogue of a shared language nowadays between the institutions and the tobacco companies, where the first define bans and regulations and the second run business within the allowed way. This shared language has led to the invention of next generation products and to the culture of transforming tobacco.

## **3. Typology of codes**

In the semiotic tool "Decoding and recoding" we reviewed the typology of dominant, residual and emergent codes. In my view, the category of everlasting codes can exist, too. These codes manage to remain up-to-date and attractive any time that makes them universal. For example, in cigarette consumption, everlasting are the codes of pleasure, confidence, refinement, elegance. In tobacco, the need of adding the everlasting codes is also defined by the strong influence of regulations over the industry. Bans put the creative of marketing in a frame that defines and limits the opportunities for using particular codes in commercial communications. Having this in mind, to the typology of the three categories of codes, I suggest adding the category of everlasting codes.

## **4. Levels of meaning creation**

In the semiotic tool "Discourse analysis" we dealt with meaning construction. Concerning the field of business, my understanding is that meaning is created on the three levels of: brand meaning, product category meaning, and total market meaning. The brand meaning is composed by the individual identities of each brand. It is the smallest territory of meaning. The next two levels represent collective meanings. The one of the product category is created by the common meaning of all brands (e.g., in cigarettes, Marlboro, Winston, Rothmans, Vogue). Thereafter, the whole market meaning is created by the collective meanings of all sub-categories that shape it (e.g., in tobacco, cigarettes, pipe, electronic cigarettes, heat not burn and other possible products). It is the biggest territory of meaning.

5. Another contribution should be the explanation of how the reviewed research tools work by relating them to the cigarette industry through examples about trends in the industry and brand features. This is

applied across all tools from the two categories Semiotic studies of the brand and Traditional market/marketing studies.

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2. **Asimova, Sevim.** Mitologia na tjutjuna v Amerindijskata kultura, in “Diskursite na tjutjuna”, Sofia: Nov balgarski universitet, 2017
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