

SEMIOTICA

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(RA) = Review article



Marika Finlay

The Romantic Irony of Semiotics

Friedrich Schlegel and the Crisis of Representation

1988. 14.8 x 22.8 cm. XV, 293 pages.
Cloth DM 148,- ISBN 3 11 011242 6
(Approaches to Semiotics 79)

This research monograph deals with the importance of Friedrich Schlegel's literary and critical texts, which are primarily of the ironic genre, in relation to contemporary theories of discourse-semiotics and post-structuralism.

French semiotics and post-semiotics have often been taken to be a revolutionary movement in the theory of discourse. This work attempts to demonstrate that German Romantic Irony in the work of Schlegel set out to "deconstruct" discursive and epistemological assumptions and to put forward an alternative theory and practice of discourse which anticipates some of the deconstructionist arguments in post-structuralist critical theory and practice.

Classical Saussurean semiotics is subjected to an operational and epistemological critique by showing that Schlegelian irony surpasses and resists such models and indeed is a precursor to contemporary a-representational and deconstructionist theories and practices of language.

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The last decade has witnessed the emergence and explosive growth of both a comparatively new social science paradigm — schema-theoretics — and an ancient, ever-evolving doctrine of signs — semiotics. Despite their independent histories, schema-theoretics and semiotics are each vitally concerned with the dynamics of human information processing. Moreover, the potential confluence of these perspectives holds particular promise for communication theorists and researchers. Unified here as schema-semiotics, the two form a potent framework for advancing studies focused on the structure, meaning, and uses of communication in the marketplace.

The central question of this paper is 'How does meaning get imposed, shift, and emerge in marketing communication?' Broadly speaking, marketing communication includes all forms of information exchange that seek to satisfy on the one hand marketer objectives in the planning and execution of the conception and distribution of goods and services, and on the other hand consumer objectives in the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of goods and services. Typically, marketing communication is erroneously equated with advertising, but it also includes all other forms of promotion (for instance, direct mail, press releases, point-of-purchase displays, and coupons) and salesperson-consumer interactions. The consumer may be an individual or group, representing a household or an organization.

Implicit in our focal question above is a constructivist epistemology which places the locus of meaning not in the message itself, but emanating from both the marketer and the consumer in a true discourse of marketing communication (Keenan 1978, Eco 1979, Spiro 1983). This emphasis requires that we cast off two implicit premises that have variously permeated marketing communication research and stifled more enlightened, less flagrantly biased approaches. The first sees the marketer as a puppeteer and Great Deceiver whose omniscient stratagems lead masses of credulous consumers to fulfill the marketer's grand (and usually

vile) design. Key (1973, 1976) epitomizes the keepers of this paranoid faith in which the congregation, many of whom are semi-semioticians, has grown in inverse relation to any reasonable substantiation of their claims (cf. Haberstroh 1984, Waterson 1984). Extrapolating from Sherry (1985: 3), marketing communication is undeniably 'a way of construing the world ... a way of understanding', but not by way of monologic brainwashing — rather, as dialogue for negotiated meaning. The second premise conceives the consumer as alone in a market-maze, explicable by some form of stimulus-organism-response paradigm within a linear, associationistic model of behavior. The plethora of so-called 'hierarchy of effects' models in the marketing and consumer behavior literature illustrates this myopia quite well (cf. Moriarty 1983). In essence, this paper argues for a significant step beyond neobehavioristic emphases ('How does marketing communication make consumers respond?') to a more socio-cognitive, discourse analysis perspective ('Why, how, and what do marketers and consumers do with marketing communication?').

Schema-theoretics have developed rapidly as evidence of increasing interest in the psychological 'unobservables' that neobehaviorists had formerly delimited or ignored in their theories of human behavior. Applied to the structure, content, and processes involving attitudes, memory, and cognition itself, schema-theoretics have formed the backdrop for a wide array of studies in education, the social sciences, and artificial intelligence. Similarly, in both discourse processing and text processing research, schema-theoretics have often been employed to formalize the structure and content of the discourses/texts themselves. Heretofore, however, applications to marketing communication have been limited.

Semiotics traces its origins back before Plato, and has remained over the years critically focused on the examination, elaboration, and evaluation of the ubiquitous sign. In its evolution, semiotics has developed a variety of systematic approaches to reach its goal of understanding sign systems, their inner-relations and their outer-relations within a given context. As such, the applications of semiotic analysis have been multifarious, from political speeches to proxemics, from animal communication to advertisements. Overall, semiotics offers a metalanguage for the analysis of any sign system, providing the opportunity to pull together competing theoretical and terminological distinctions under a single, powerful lexicon of semiosis. So, too, semiotics forces its adherents to reach and maintain a heightened level of self-reflexivity regarding the very signs employed in the service of research, regardless of the subject content. Hence, schemata are signs, and schema theory is componentially analyzable as a sign system. As such, a schema-semiotics can not only

broaden our insights on marketing communication per se, but also sharpen our conceptual tools of communication research — in this case, schemata.

Marketing communication is unquestionably a form of persuasive communication, but then all communication has an element of persuasion insofar as meaning is negotiated.¹ Persuasion as influence occurs in the human environment because individuals have different goals whose realization is dependent on the agreement and action of other people (cf. Reardon 1981). So it is with marketing communication, which serves as a manifest heartline of open market economies. Marketers and consumers each have goals, influencing each other by the way they engage in marketing communication and subsequent behaviors — such as modifying the product or advertising message (marketer), or voicing post-purchase complaints or simply not repurchasing the brand (consumer). Insofar as these and other behaviors also represent information exchanged, the semiotic doctrine would cast marketing communication as any form of signification between marketer and consumer, whether verbal or nonverbal. In industrial and post-industrial societies, the rise of consumerism, the expansion of media technology, and the ongoing metamorphosis of marketing philosophy and practice demand thorough and continual reevaluation of the theories, models, and methods summoned to uncover the nature of marketing communication.

Schema theory

Although the term 'schema' dates back at least to Kant (1963 [1787]), and conceptually even earlier to Vico (Hawkes 1977), as an explanatory concept in social science, schema-theoretics first received concerted attention from Head (1920), Piaget (1926), and Bartlett (1932). For these later researchers, schemata were hypothesized constructs intended to stand for clusters of experiential information stored in memory and defined according to their common elements. Thus, schemata embody a theory about how knowledge is represented in the mind. The theory has also led to claims about how that representation facilitates the use of knowledge in specific ways. With the common elements standing for generic categories of experience, schemata promote the synthesis of abstract knowledge for the purpose of processing new information of the same category. According to Rumelhart,

A schema theory embodies a *prototype* theory of meaning. That is, inasmuch as a schema underlying a concept stored in memory corresponds to the *meaning* of that

concept, meanings are encoded in terms of the typical or normal situations or events which instantiate that concept. (1984: 163)

Schemata are active computational devices capable of evaluating the quality of their own fit to the available data. That is, a schema should be viewed as a procedure whose function it is to determine whether, and to what degree, it accounts for the pattern of observations.... Thus, to the degree that schemata underlying concepts are identified with the *meaning of those concepts*, a schema theory is *both a prototype theory and a procedural theory of meaning*. (1984: 167)

Bartlett (1932), for example, showed that people read folktales with the aid of folktales schemata they have developed over time, and that these schemata aid in the recall of recently encountered folktales. One of his chief contributions was his demonstration of reconstructive memory processes whereby, when asked to recall a story shortly after reading, people consistently produce idiosyncratic elaborations as well as portions of the original story. For Bartlett this effect provided direct evidence of an abstract cognitive schema serving as an elaboration plan. Fifty years later, Bransford and Franks (1971; see also Franks and Bransford 1972) reconfirmed Bartlett's early work; they further demonstrated that, when confronted with a recognition test to distinguish just-read information from new information (the latter likely nonetheless to have been evoked during reading by an instantiated schema), people are repeatedly unable to distinguish what the text provided from what their prior knowledge provided.

The gulf from Bartlett to Bransford and Franks roughly demarcates the explicit reign of behaviorism and associationism in the social sciences generally, and in psychology particularly. Research on any aspect of human nature which might possibly have required mentalistic or abstract concepts like schemata was effectively halted. In truth, even Bransford and Franks did not initially refer to schemata, but to less precise 'semantic holistic ideas'. Nonetheless, with the impact of Chomsky's (1957) *Syntactic Structures*, Miller's 'translations' of Chomsky's ideas into the psychologists' nomenclature (1962, 1965), Neisser's pioneering work (1967), Dooling and Lachman (1971), and Bransford and Franks (1971, 1972), the road was paved for the resurgence of the schema concept.

Around 1975 the schema concept reappeared simultaneously in the areas of artificial intelligence research and memory research in psychology. In the former, researchers have been striving to develop knowledge representations of complex concepts, situations, and events as necessary prerequisites for the creation of intelligent machine systems. Typically these knowledge structures have been called 'frames' (Minsky 1975, Kuipers 1975, Winograd 1975), 'scripts' (Schank and Abelson 1975,

1977), 'memory organization packets' (Schank 1980), or related forms of schemata (Schmidt 1976, Moore and Newell 1974). In the Bartlett tradition, many memory researchers have focused on the knowledge representations that contribute to story comprehension and recall (Rumelhart 1975, Rumelhart and Ortony 1977, Kintsch and van Dijk 1978, Mandler and Johnson 1977, Thorndyke 1977, 1978, Mandler 1978, Stein and Glenn 1978). These researchers have shown how the activation and utilization of story schemata promote understanding, encoding, and memory retrieval for new stories. In general, these schemata incorporate information on how story events are structured, how those events combine in sequences to construct episodes, and how complete stories are formed from sequences of episodes. And though the term 'schemata' is common among text comprehension researchers, along with the related terms in AI research, others such as 'scenario' have also been used (Sanford and Garrod 1981).

Schema-theoretics are now common currency in an ever-expanding range of research published in such diverse journals as *Cognitive Science*, *Poetics*, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, the *Journal of Reading*, the *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Semiotica*. Schema-theoretics are being applied to an increasing number of related information processing environments, including text processing (Kintsch and van Dijk 1978, Yekovich and Thorndyke 1981, Graesser 1981, Freundlieb 1982), self-perception processes (Markus 1977), other-person-perception processes (Tsujiimoto 1978), event processing (Bower et al. 1979, Abelson 1981), reasoning processes (Fielder 1982, Kardes 1985), and artificial intelligence (Schank and Abelson 1977, Carbonell 1981). A small but growing number of researchers in persuasion (Schmidt and Sherman 1984), industrial marketing (Leigh and Rethans 1984), consumer behavior (Bozinoff and Roth 1983, Leigh and Rethans 1983, Crocker 1984), and semiotics (Lewandowska 1979) — the background domains of this paper — have used schema-theoretics. A few have addressed promotion and advertising research with a schema-theoretic focus (Thorson and Snyder 1984, Thorson and Rothschild 1983, Puto 1985, Gardner and Strang 1984, Montanari et al. 1979, Lewandowska 1979).

Given such an array of applications, it is not surprising that not all schema-theoretic formulations are alike (Rumelhart 1984). Nevertheless, a number of shared premises among the varied formulations constitute a foundation for a general schema-theoretic of human memory. These common assumptions are taken principally from, but also expand upon, a valuable review of schema-theoretics by Thorndyke and Yekovich (1980):

1. Memory schemata represent stereotypical, generic abstractions of their related referents, such as events, people, and stories. Besides the

constituent properties themselves, the schemata may also include information (rules) about the interrelations between the properties as well as how the schemata are to be used.

2. Memory schemata are hierarchically organized in a system wherein properties of varying specificity are related. Usually, upper-level properties are the most basic, 'always true' information, whereas lower-level properties can be situation-specific or nonexistent in that those information positions (slots) in the schemata require a given actual instance (experience) to supply them with data. Otherwise, those slots remain open.
3. Memory schemata specifically are employed to organize incoming information by matching sensory input to the information positions in the schemata. Instantiation of a memory schema involves copying the general schema stored in memory and attempting to match it to the incoming data.
4. Memory schemata develop inductively over the course of repeated experiences with examples of the generic referent — for instance, going to fast-food restaurants, reading fairy tales, etcetera.
5. Memory schemata serve important functions for efficient information processing, especially under impoverished information conditions. Schemata are essentially clusters of expectations to which incoming sensory information is matched; when necessary, schemata properties also serve as replacements for information missing from the environment. Thus, prediction guides the interpretation of incoming information and provides the framework for inferencing processes as well. For example, on being told that a product is on sale, people usually infer (via an 'on sale' schema) that the price of the product is lower now than it was fairly recently and that the lower price will likely only be available for a limited time period.

More thorough reviews of schema-theoretics can be found in Srull, Lichstein, and Rothbart (1985), Brewer and Nakamura (1984), Hastie (1981), Taylor and Crocker (1981), Thorndyke and Yekovich (1980), and Tannen (1979).

Schema-theoretics have been most prominently described and researched as cognitive-domain memory structures. However, some researchers, like van Dijk (1982), have also related schema-theoretics to attitude structure. Furthermore, numerous text-processing researchers (for instance, Kintsch and van Dijk, Graesser, Thorndyke, and Yekovich) regularly discuss text bases, which are hierarchically structured lists of propositions that stand as the systematized semantic of a given text. These text bases are themselves a form of schema-theoretic; thus, the approach is as well-suited to actual messages and texts as it is to human cognitive

and affective systems. In short, schema-theoretics are sufficiently robust to consider their collective application to a latitude of human information processing environments — to both internal and external aspects. Moreover, despite limited use in marketing communication research, schema-theoretic approaches offer substantial insights for improving our understanding of how both marketers and consumers, as discourse participants in open market economies, create, exchange, and alter the meanings inherent in marketing communication.

Three systems of schemata are proposed here for integration into a variant of the basic model that underpins most marketing communication research: knowledge systems schemata, goal systems schemata, and text or message systems schemata. Figure 1 depicts the communication model with the three schemata systems. The broken lines indicate where in the model the schemata impact the process. Note that, for simplicity, the *noise*, *feedback*, and *feedforward* aspects of the model have been left out.

Prior knowledge schemata

Knowledge systems schemata are the sort discussed most often in schema-theoretic research, including the previous section of this article. These schemata represent the world knowledge that both the marketer and the consumer(s) bring to the communication event. Although prior knowledge related to products, advertising, consumption processes, and so forth

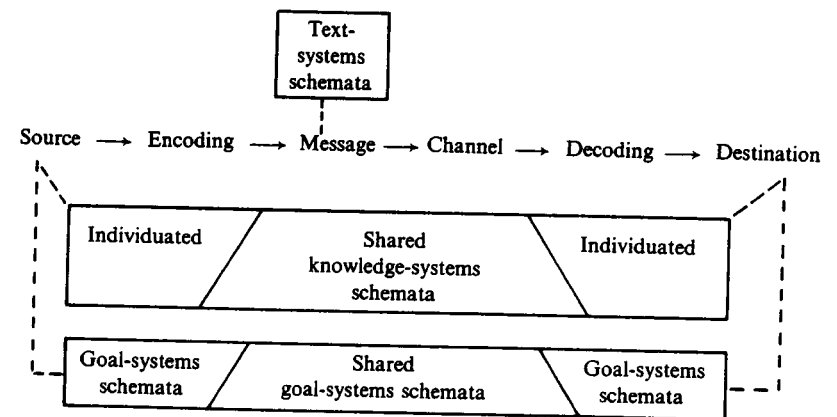


Figure 1. Basic communication model with schema-referents (but without the model components noise, feedback, and feedforward).

has long been recognized as a major moderator of consumer behavior (cf. Bettman 1979), few researchers have made careful attempts to model the structure and content of relevant prior knowledge. For example, in studying the effects of technical wording in a camera advertisement, Anderson and Jolson (1980) measured their subjects' past experiences with cameras according to subjective judgments on a Likert-type scale. While experience is considered the major builder of memory schemata, clearly prior knowledge must be more thoroughly and more objectively specified in future research.

Schema-theoretic researchers in human memory have demonstrated not only the influence, but the necessity of prior knowledge as a framework for guiding perception and cognition. For consumer researchers, the contents of these schemata are sociocultural as well as individuated knowledge, and are constructed mainly from experiences with the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of products/services as well as information obtained in marketing communications. Crocker (1984) has recommended distinguishing between schemata that are derived from what people are taught as they grow up (abstract-based schemata) and those that are derived from direct experience (instance-based schemata).

So far our focus here has been exclusively on the knowledge systems of the consumer, the 'destination' in the communication model. This is a bias that is rampant in marketing communication research. Yet, as Figure 1 suggests, to varying degrees marketers share in the sociocultural knowledge systems of the consumers for whom they intend their communications. However, there are times when, for instance, a marketer is hired to design and implement a communications campaign for a subcultural domestic market or an international market with which the marketer has limited shared knowledge systems. From such scenarios many anecdotes have emerged as evidence of communication gaffes, some resulting in unintended insults and losses of considerable financial investments (Ricks et al. 1974; Elkin 1969). Still, there has been virtually no systematic research on the jointly held and divergent knowledge systems of marketers and consumers. As a result, little is known about how these knowledge systems interact and contribute to marketing communication topics such as how product brochures and manuals are created, how some advertisements increase brand awareness more effectively than others, and how product-related or brand-related beliefs are altered by some sales personnel and not others.

A crucial challenge continues to be the data collection and specification of schemata. Work by Bower, Black, and Turner (1979), John and Whitney (1982), Leigh and Rethans (1983, 1984), and Puto (1985) suggest

that people are capable of providing fairly thorough lists of prototypical and idiosyncratic information about various knowledge domains. Early research of this kind has principally centered on event-based referents like eating at a restaurant, going to the dentist's office, attending a lecture, or buying an automobile. Besides listing the information steps to these events, people are able to evaluate the relative importance of each step, and to arrange the steps in the order in which they would be expected to occur. As such, a type of schema — usually called a 'script' — is elicited. What these researchers have found through subsequent cross-validation tests is an impressive level of agreement on certain schemata among homogeneous groups of people. While some marketing communication researchers who have evoked schema-theoretics have *assumed* that consumers have shared schemata (Thorson and Snyder 1984, Thorson and Rothschild 1983), others have actually demonstrated the fact (John and Whitney 1982, Puto 1985).

Unfortunately, a distinct bias exists in schema-theoretics toward the consumer. Few researchers have 'gotten on the inside' of marketing firms to study the complex process (including instantiated knowledge systems) that unfolds in the creation of marketing communications. One exception is anthropologist William O'Barr (1979), who has worked for nearly a decade with a major New York advertising agency as a participant observer and interviewer of the agency staff. The insights from his work are expected to be published soon (O'Barr, personal communication, 1985).

More work is needed in the area in order to better understand the 'source' of marketing communication and the comparatively complicated process that must evolve before an encoded message (such as an advertisement or a sales presentation) is actually put into a channel (medium). For example, Figure 2 is a flow diagram provided by Millum (1975) which shows how a print advertisement is usually created, along with its ideas, themes, and messages. The point of calling attention to such a diagram is to underscore the obvious, which is usually ignored in similar marketing and advertising studies: the 'source' in the marketing communication process is often several people with intermingling roles who share and change their knowledge systems as they collectively function as the communication source. Schema data collection techniques like those already referred to, as well as other forms of prior knowledge specification (cf. D'Andrade 1976, Jones 1981, Cicourel 1982, Olson and Reynolds 1983, Langer 1984), can help fill the knowledge-systems gap existing on both ends of the marketing communication model. Without confronting and coming to terms with both the marketer's and the consumer's knowledge systems, as instantiated in the discourse of marketing commu-

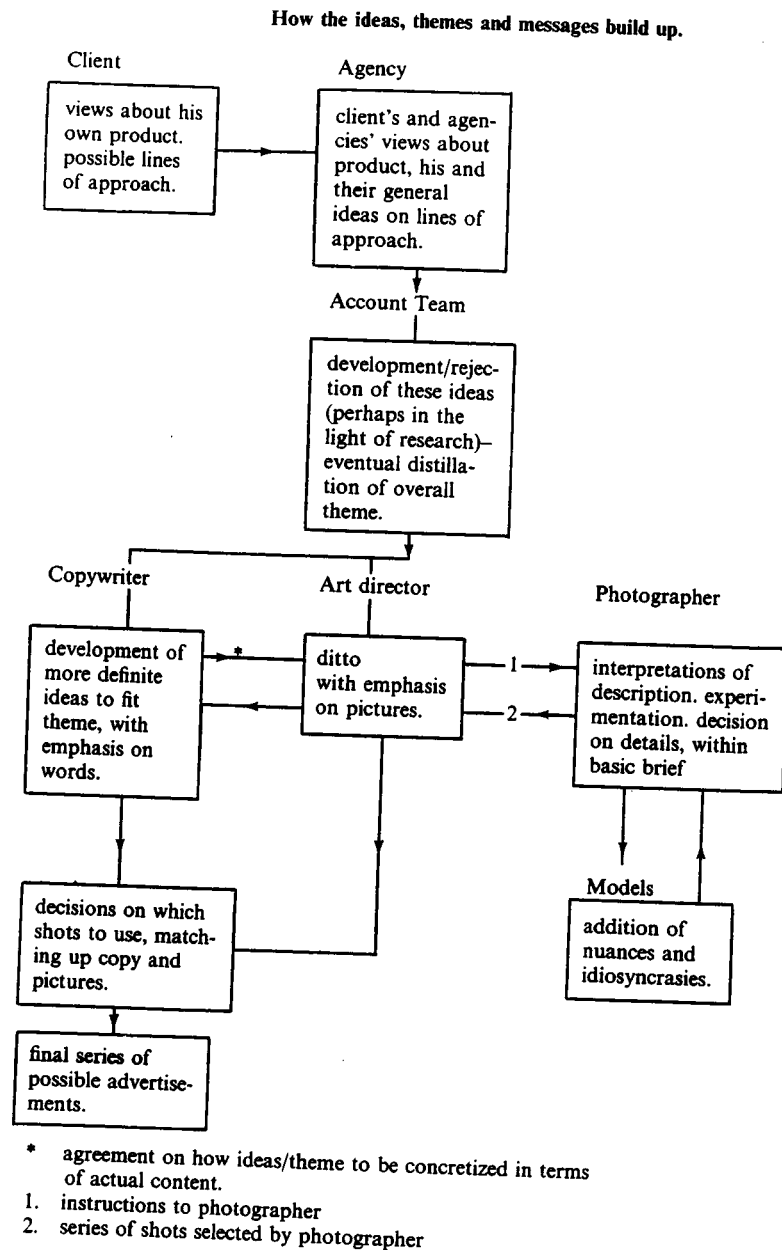


Figure 2. Steps in the creation of a print advertisement. (From Millum 1975, reprinted with permission from Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, NJ.)

nication, we will remain in the dark ages of guesswork about what effect prior knowledge (or lack of it) has on the marketing communication process.

Goals schemata

Among contemporary disciplines like psychology, computer science-artificial intelligence, and sociolinguistics, *goals* have also come to play a central role in theory development and research on information processing and communication. Moreover, consumer researchers like Bettman (1979), Olshavsky (1985), and O'Shaughnessy (1985) have suggested that the acquisition, development, and activation of goals significantly influence specific consumer behaviors, whether toward products/services or toward information. With respect to printed information, for instance, Just and Carpenter (1980) have argued that the reader's goals guide understanding more than any other factor.

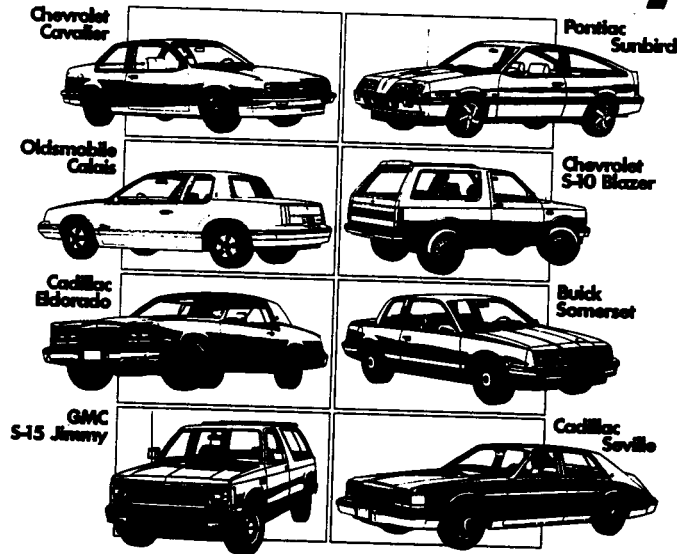
In both promotion and sales management research, the communication planning process is nearly always modeled with 'goal setting' as the first step. Of course the overriding goal of advertising and sales presentations is usually to sell something, whether a product, a service, an idea, etcetera. Commonly, though, researchers identify a goal typology whereby marketing communication is intended to inform, persuade, or remind.

As noted earlier, the primary reason persuasion occurs — in fact, is necessitated — is that communicants often have differing goals. Yet, given this fact in conjunction with the emphasis on goals in information processing theory, it is surprising to find few empirical studies where the marketer's and/or the consumer's goals are explicitly focused upon as important moderators.

The proposal here is that the goal systems of the marketer and the consumer can be modeled as hierarchical structures in a schema-theoretic sense. Carbonnel (1981), Schank and Abelson (1977), and others studying artificial intelligence have made similar suppositions which have subsequently proven useful for computer science applications. The argument here recommends research beyond trivial, unilevel goal assumptions like 'the goal of advertisement *x* is to sell automobiles' or 'the consumer's goal in reading brochure *z* is to identify the features of a personal computer system'. These unilevel goal specifications are not today, if they ever were, relevant to the complex nature of marketing communication in the late twentieth century.

Figure 3 is a recent automobile-related advertisement that shares many characteristics of advertisements from the last several decades: picture of

8 ways to make it a memorable May



8.8%

ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE

If you've been thinking about buying a new car or light truck, make your move in May. And save with 8.8% GMAC financing. This special 8.8% rate is available for terms up to 48 months to all qualified retail buyers at participating GM Dealers. You must take delivery out of stock by May 31, 1985.

Dealer financial participation may affect the final negotiated price of the vehicle. Fleet sales and leased units are not eligible for this offer.

Let your General Motors Dealer show you how you can save on these exciting GM models with 8.8% GMAC financing.

We're proud to be an *Equal Credit Opportunity* company.

It's as easy as...



Figure 3. (Reprinted with permission from the General Motors Acceptance Corporation.)

the product(s), a reason-why approach to the message argument, an attempt to create a sense of urgency via a limited offer program, etcetera. Unquestionably, the superordinate goal of this advertisement is to sell automobiles, with several subgoals, such as informing the consumer of selected facts about the limited offer and convincing the consumer that acquiring one of the automobiles is fairly easily accomplished. On closer scrutiny, one also confronts the announcement 'We're proud to be an Equal Credit Opportunity company', which, while adding to the general selling goal, appears intended to communicate that the company meets legal requirements regarding the avoidance of discriminatory practices in making loans for its automobiles. Moreover, the 'proud' company avoids such discrimination willfully — therefore, it hopes to be seen as a socially responsible company. The chief point to this brief example is that even advertisements of apparently traditional legacies have become multilevel in their goal structures.

To advance related research and capture the complexity of today's marketing goal structures, these goals can be modeled as hierarchical tree structures (a schema-theoretic) either according to the hypotheses or insights of the researcher or in conjunction with strategies articulated by the marketer. The goals of the automobile advertisement in Figure 3 can be modeled in this manner (Figure 4). Certainly, Figure 4 is only exemplary; as a general framework, it is adaptable to any marketing communication research. For instance, many imagistic, less verbal advertisements for highly symbolic products like jewelry, clothing, and automobiles have a superordinate goal of selling a product, with secondary goals of 'catching the reader's attention' via pictorials, symbols, etcetera and 'summoning positive emotions' in relation to the product. Unfortunately, published empirical research rarely includes discussions of advertising goals to the level of specification proposed here, despite the widespread recognition of the role such goals play in communication.

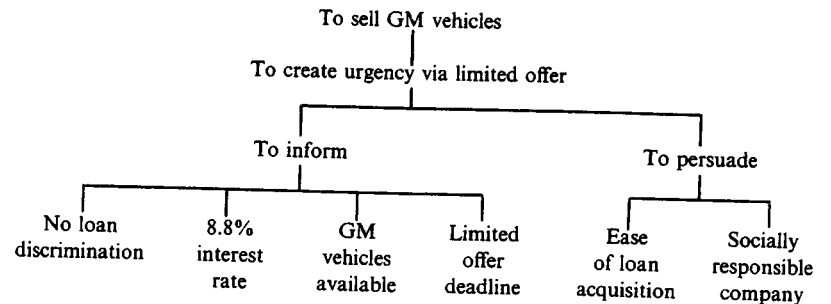


Figure 4. Goal schema of the General Motors ad (Figure 3).

The second-hand smokescreen.

For decades, public and private organizations have waged a massive campaign to discourage cigarette smoking. For most of that time, the target of this effort has been the smoker.

Recently, however, the emphasis has undergone a major shift. Today there are scientists who claim that cigarette smoke in the air can actually cause disease in *non-smokers*. We hear a great deal about "second-hand smoke" and "passive smoking."

But is this new approach wholly motivated by concern for the non-smoker, or is it the same old war on smoking in a new guise?

These doubts are raised when we recall statements like the following, by a spokesperson for the American Lung Association:

Probably the only way we can win a substantial reduction [in smoking] is if we can somehow make it nonacceptable socially.... We thought the scare of medical statistics and opinions would produce a major reduction. It really didn't.

Obviously, one way to make smoking "nonacceptable socially" would be to suggest that second-hand smoke could cause disease. So it is not surprising that we are now seeing a flurry of research seeking scientific support for these suggestions.

Many independent experts believe the scientific evidence on passive smoking is questionable. But a zealous group of anti-smokers are using this issue in their campaign against tobacco as if the claims were established scientific fact.

We deplore the actions of those who try to manipulate public opinion through scare tactics. As the late, respected pathologist, Dr. H. Russell Fisher, stated in testimony submitted to a Congressional hearing on passive smoking:

...[I]n the absence of any scientific proof of harm from atmospheric tobacco smoke, we are dealing with a social question and not a medical one. In this regard it should be noted that, since fears and phobias can lead to ill health, those who urge policies based on fear and not scientific facts could be making a medical problem out of a social one. This is indeed a strange prospect to see coming from the efforts of members of the medical profession.

We are not ignoring the fact that cigarette smoke can be bothersome to many non-smokers. But we believe this problem is best solved not by governments but by individuals, and not with more rhetoric but more common sense and courtesy.

Of course, if anti-smoking advocates want to work for the abolition of smoking, that is their right. We only wish they would come out from behind their second-hand smokescreen.

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company

© 1988 R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO CO.

Figure 5. (Reprinted with permission from R. J. Reynolds Tobacco USA.)

To fortify this argument for more explicit goal specification from the source's viewpoint, Figure 5 is provided as an example of the multiple complexities in today's advertisements which are not mirrored in those of yesteryear.² The R. J. Reynolds advertisement reflects the dense information content and editorial tone emerging in many so-called 'aditorials'. These advertisements not only incorporate goal structures very different from more traditional product-oriented, sales-goal advertisements; their goal structures are also more subtle, if not more intricate.

Specifying such goal systems is not an uncomplicated task, especially if the researcher prefers the goal data directly from the marketer. Again, approaches like O'Barr's may be the most fruitful, though they often require years of matured trust. In the absence of the opportunity to collect goal systems data directly via interviews and structured questionnaires, the researcher can hypothesize the goal system, as many are accustomed to doing.

Up to this point we have concentrated exclusively on the goal systems of marketers, or sources in marketing communication. Consumer behavior research on goals has focused on topics like information search, preference formation strategies, and decision processes. Though most marketing researchers are apt to acknowledge the importance of consumer goals in the processing of communication, most do nothing more. As consumers ourselves, we engage in marketing communication according to diverse and not always unilevel goals: for entertainment, for diversion, for information gathering, out of mere curiosity, to fulfill a request from a spouse or child, to reconfirm a prior preference or purchase, etcetera. Surely a consumer may activate several of these goals or others, some subordinate or coordinate.

The proposal here is that consumers can self-report their information processing goals sufficiently well for marketing communication researchers to begin the task of integrating those goals into more comprehensive research. These goal systems, like their knowledge systems counterparts, are likely to include common and idiosyncratic aspects that are applicable to prototypical marketing communication events. Moreover, these goals can be schematicized to reflect the super-, sub-, and co-influences of the primary goal and subgoals in the system. The consumer goal schemata can be derived through structured and unstructured data collection techniques springing from the seminal work of researchers cited in our earlier discussion of knowledge systems.

In summarizing these remarks on goal systems, we have argued that (1) goal systems have been acknowledged but understudied as significant influences on both the marketer's creation and dissemination of messages and the consumer's perception, integration, and uses of marketing

messages; (2) the schema-theoretic framework can accommodate the elevated specification and complexity of goal systems required to adequately reflect contemporary marketing communication; and (3) without more thorough modeling of both marketer and consumer goal systems, research in the area will remain both shallow and flawed. Finally, researchers need to investigate the simultaneous impact of marketer and consumer goal systems on the marketing communication process. For example, what are the cognitive, affective, and conative consumer responses when marketer and consumer have shared goals, or hold divergent goals? As straightforward as these questions are, they have yet to be addressed.

Text schemata

The schema-theoretic approach can also apply to the verbal communication or text of marketing communication (cf. Spiro 1983, in relation to educational research/texts). Such an approach facilitates a formalization of the marketing message and a method of measuring message integration processes on the part of the consumer.

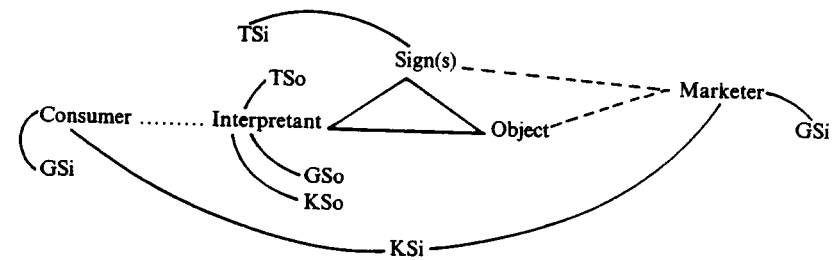
Probably two of the more renowned researchers of text comprehension are Kintsch and van Dijk (1978); they have argued that verbal information is integrated and stored in memory according to propositional units which appear in the text. The micropropositions, usually consisting of a verb or other relational terms (for instance, *and*, *or*, *when*, *where*), represent the lowest level of the text, and may be combined to form clusters that approximate the sentence level in language. Some clusters serve as the text's main ideas (called macropropositions). Thus, a given text can be formalized according to its micropropositions and clusters; the completed formalization is often called a text base or a schema. Kintsch and van Dijk derive hypotheses from their model which relate the memorability of particular propositions in the text to such factors as their location or repetition in the text. Hence, this form of schema-theoretic — namely, formalizing a referent text system into a hierarchical structure — is as applicable to internal constructs like knowledge and goal systems as it is to external constructs like the texts of sales presentations or advertisements.

Recent articles by Thorson and Snyder (1984) and Thorson and Rothschild (1983) have introduced the Kintsch and van Dijk model to marketing communication research. Using Kintsch and van Dijk's theoretical perspectives and findings from prior research on their model, Thorson and her colleagues have confirmed a number of predictions about consumer recall of advertisements.

One major advantage to this approach is that it emphasizes the well-known fact that the message encoded by the source is never the same as the message decoded by the destination. By propositionalizing the message in the Kintsch and van Dijk fashion, and then taking consumer recall protocols after exposure to the message, researchers can gauge the extent to which the encoded message is congruent with the decoded message — a measure itself of how the knowledge and goal systems schemata are also isomorphic. In all, the schematization of marketing communication texts and the collection of recall protocols provide an extra level of formalization, along with current theory about natural language processing, that is often lacking in marketing communication research.

Schema-semiotics

Unlike semiotic studies of advertisements as sign systems (Williamson 1978, Umiker-Sebeok 1979, Hall and Saracino-Resh 1979, Wernick 1983), the focus here is on the broader context of any marketing communication process. One of the immediate advantages of blending semiotics with schema-theoretics is that the metalanguage obtained cuts across terminological and model differences in the schema-theoretic field. Figure 6 depicts the heralded trinary relationship at the foundation of



- i = input (before communication or semiosis is completed)
 - o = output (after communication and semiosis is completed)
 - KS = knowledge-systems schemata
 - GS = goal-systems schemata
 - TS = text or message-systems schemata
- Curved lines indicate where schemata relate in the model.
Dotted and broken lines link the consumer/interpreter and advertiser to the basic model.
Straight solid lines indicate trinary relations in basic model.

Figure 6. Basic semiosis model with schema-referents.

semiotics, as principally derived from Peirce and Morris. The figure includes the three schemata discussed previously; in most respects this framework is parallel to the basic communication model. The *object* is usually a product or service, but it can be any referent the communication signifies, including social causes, ideas, persons, etcetera. As an advertisement, a sales presentation, or a point-of-purchase display, the marketing message may include indexical, iconic, or symbolic *signs* which variously interrelate to facilitate the communication event. The *interpretant* of the model is often confused with the interpreter or the interpretation by the interpreter. Morris took a neobehavioristic perspective and regularly referred to the interpretant as a response disposition formed from habitual stimulus-response experiences. The perspective here is more general, emanating from Sebeok (1976) — namely, that the interpretant is a reaction in relation to the object as mediated by the sign. Thus, the interpretant-as-reaction can be cognitive, affective, or conative, all well known to marketing researchers as dependent-variable domains related to marketing communication research (cf. Ray 1973, Smith and Swinyard 1982). Although the schema-theoretic approach has historically emphasized the cognitive realm, the semiosis model of Figure 6 promotes a framework for integrating virtually any dimension of the marketing communication process, from the source to the destination, as a dynamic spiral of signification.

When schema-theoretics are fully incorporated, the semiosis model takes on an extra layer of specificity which can, as argued earlier, be empirically investigated. The text or message systems schemata are shown in Figure 6 as inputs and outputs — that is, before and after initial interpretants occur. In fact, the text-schema output, as a recall protocol, is itself an interpretant. The text-schema input is in accordance with such propositional models as Kintsch and van Dijk's.

The knowledge systems schemata are again represented as shared and individuated. However, in the semiosis model, input and output modes are introduced. That is, the knowledge system can be specified schema-theoretically before and after signification; the knowledge system output is also a form of interpretant. To the extent that the consumer's knowledge system schemata have not changed, the message has either not affected the interpreter or perhaps reinforced the pre-existing knowledge system (cf. Crocker 1984). The knowledge system output for the advertiser is not included in Figure 6 only because the influence of feedback in the communication model was not stressed earlier. However, it is clear that results from marketing campaigns and market research, as they reflect the interpretants of the marketing discourse process, can be utilized as feedback to affect changes in the knowledge system of the marketer.

Finally, the goal systems of the marketer and consumer(s) fit into the semiosis model quite easily as precursors to signification and marketing communication. The interpretant can also be the goal systems of the consumer as altered or reinforced by the communication. As with the knowledge systems, the goal systems output for the marketer is not emphasized, though again those goals could change in designing new communications, after the various forms of feedback on the interpretants of prior marketing communication are taken into consideration.

Besides the fusion of semiotics with schema-theoretics for studying marketing communication, semiotics can contribute in other important ways to schema-theoretics generally. From Morris's work and de Beaugrande's (1980, 1982) text processing theoretics, the semiosis model entirely and the schemata systems individually can be described and studied from syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives. To the point, schemata are signs themselves since they stand for something to somebody; more specifically, they are iconic signs to researchers as the etymological origin of schema suggests (from Greek, meaning 'diagram').

Syntactic analyses concentrate on sign-sign relations or the structure of sign systems. For example, syntactic analyses would pose such questions as: Are all schemata, in fact, hierarchical, or are some homo- or heterarchical (cf. Yekovich and Thorndyke 1981)? How do schemata differ along vertical and horizontal dimensions (cf. Crocker 1984)? How do schemata combine and, when they combine, does one become superordinate? If so, can this dominance be altered? If so, how does this process occur?

Semantic analyses focus on sign-object relations. With semantic analyses, questions about schema-theoretics would be: Does the meaning of schemata derive from the dominance of upper-level aspects of hierarchical schemata — that is, aspects of the schema-referent that are always considered true? If the schemata for the same object for a homogeneous group of people are quite similar, does that imply that the object necessarily means the same thing to each person? In other words, do identical structure and content in several schemata (for example, for a personal computer) guarantee identical meanings of those schemata?

The semantic analysis of schemata also raises crucial questions about schemata as research metaphors. In this paper, schemata have been related to memory, goals, and texts. And while the discussion here, as elsewhere, has characterized schemata as tree-like structures, they have also been described as networks, plays, theories, and parsers (Rumelhart 1984). Undoubtedly, there are rich theoretical implications in such metaphors, but there are also surpluses and deficiencies of meaning that

can mislead or otherwise compromise insightful application of schema-theoretics (cf. Ward and Reukert 1984, Morgan 1980). Semioticians are sensitive to the intricacies of metaphor and metonymy and of taxonomies of signs in ways that can aid schema-theoreticians in understanding their representations of such complex phenomena as memory and texts. In a provocative article alleging widespread abuse of concepts of representation in cognitive psychology — an indictment that, from a semiotic perspective, shadows all human inquiry — Palmer writes that

we cannot properly understand our theories and models of cognitive representation without some larger, metatheoretical framework in which to view them. The concepts currently used to talk about representation are seriously confused and inadequate. As a result, we lack the insight that allows us to separate relevant issues from irrelevant ones and to see the relationships among our models and theories in a clear and systematic way. (1978: 301)

Marketing communication research as a whole is in no less a predicament regarding its various representations. And certainly, no discipline concerns itself with representation as strictly as semiotics does. Thus, judicious application of semiotics is a step toward the metatheoretical framework Palmer seeks, and one which could serve schema-theoretic analyses of marketing communication as well.

The pragmatic analyses of schemata would concentrate on sign-interpreting relations, or the use value of schemata. Taking this tactic, researchers would pose such questions as: How do schemata originate and evolve? What is the effect of no relevant knowledge systems schemata, or of ill-formed ones, when marketing discourse is engaged? How can marketers effectively evoke consumer schemata that fit the message schemata, thus improving understanding of the communication? When the message misleads consumers, is it because the wrong schema has been instantiated or because of the inclination of instantiated schemata to fill in missing but seemingly predictable information?

Semioticians often stress the fact that pragmatic analyses assume prior semantic and syntactic analyses, just as semantic analyses assume prior syntactic analyses. Keeping in mind the prepotency inherent in these stages of semiotic analyses, the syntactic-semantic-pragmatic trichotomy can act as a format for probing the structure, meaning, and uses of schemata systems employed in the service and research of marketing communication. Together with schema-theoretics, the three stages pose essential questions for future research on marketing communication.

Conclusion

The focal question of this paper concerned the imposition, shift, and emergence of meaning in marketing communication. Our response was a proposal intended less as a definitive answer than as a broad, integrative, and adaptive framework to approach the question in a manner requisite with rapidly changing economic and marketing environments. Schema-theoretics were joined with semiotics to promote a more holistic paradigm for marketing communication research.

Notes

- * This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 1985 International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies held at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Originally, the paper was titled 'Semiotics and schema-theoretic approaches to understanding persuasive communication'.
- 1. Those who would maintain that communication can be legitimately categorized as persuasive vs. nonpersuasive (for example, informational) should consult Hunt (1976).
- 2. Some readers may object to Figure 5 being called an advertisement, but it must be pointed out that advertising is usually defined as any paid form of nonpersonal communication by an identified sponsor.

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A semiotic analysis of the newspaper coverage of Chernobyl in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Finland*

REBECCA KAUFMANN and HENRI BROMS

Introduction

As a disaster, Chernobyl invaded the minds of the world's citizens unlike any other. More than a volcano, a stock market crash, or a student riot, Chernobyl received news coverage second only to that received by out and out war. As the co-Director of the Center for War, Peace, and the News Media adduced: 'A nuclear accident is ... a unique news event. Nothing else, short of a nuclear war, resembles it' (Rubin 1986: 7). The American, Soviet, and Finnish press approached the uniqueness of the Chernobyl disaster in very different ways. While the American and Soviet news coverage lost perspective of what was truly at issue — a tragic nuclear accident — the Finnish news coverage threw few stones and tried to report the facts.

The language surrounding the Chernobyl event provides an ideal opportunity in which to analyze the signifying practices of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Finland. Newspapers, in particular, expose a society's culture — simultaneously presenting foreign policy attitudes and domestic ones; simultaneously looking out while looking in. As Smith (1980: 151) summarizes, 'the ways in which information passes through a society are the key to that society's culture'.

Newspapers represent one kind of public literature in which to look at a country's collective unconscious and uncover some of the public myths — myths which structure and are structured by a country's dominant signifying practice. In the field of semiotics, several people have ventured to write a grammar of the mythical level and signifying practices. One such grammar was designed by A. J. Greimas, who divided every human action into parts of speech utilizing classical grammatical terminology (Broms and Gahmberg 1982: 21).