

DS1001: Sociology of Design

Session 11



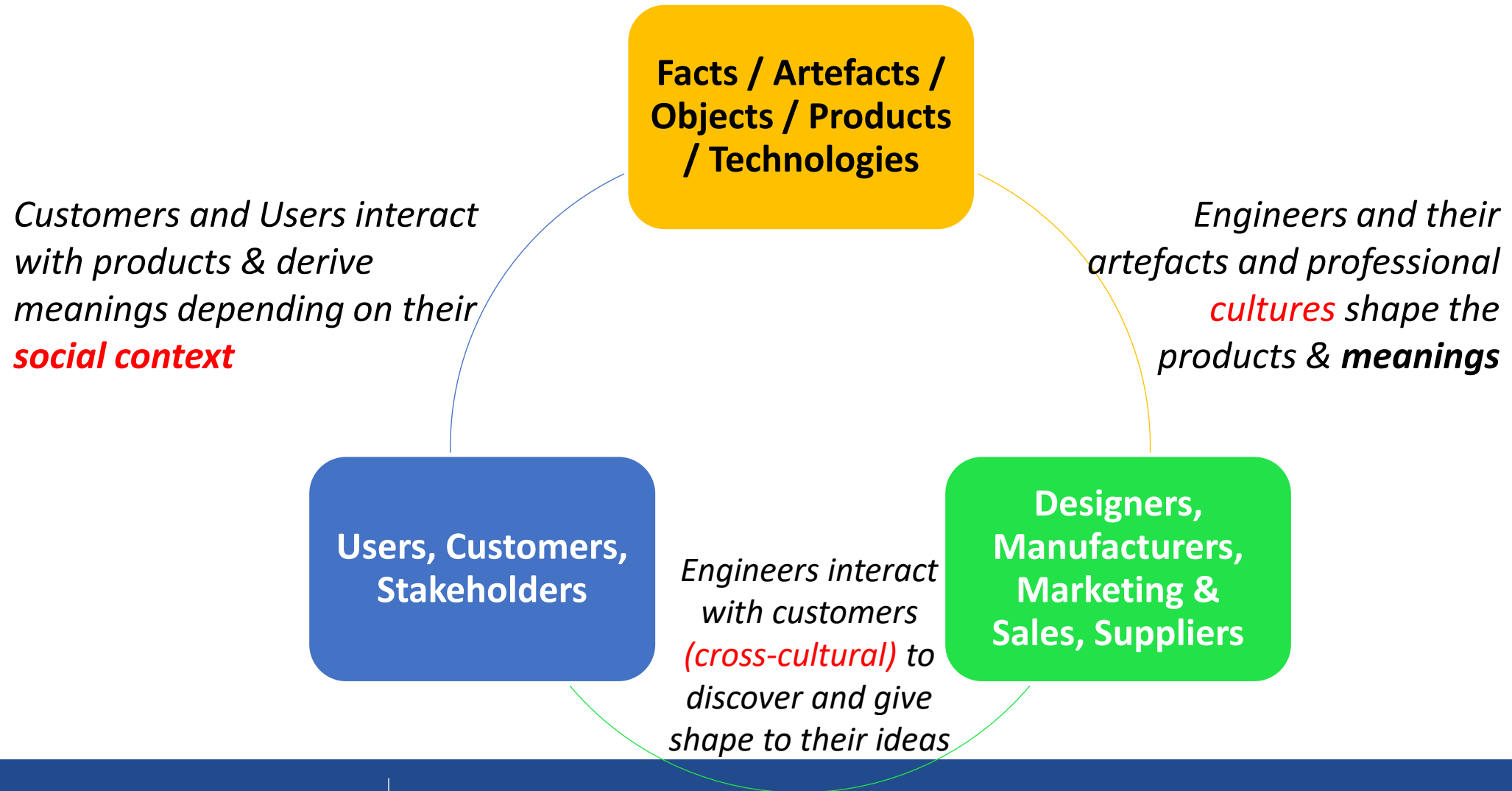
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY,
DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING,
KANCHEEPURAM

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SESSION OUTLINE

- Human interaction with objects
- Interpreting with Semiotics: Theory of Signs
- The Semantic Turn in Product Design & Role of Visual Communications

Human Inter-action -> Meaning -> Action



Matters context social the why? (1/6)

Nano: Was conceptualized as a game changer, but failed



- Byniug a car in Idnia is aascosaietd wti h siaocl satuts and ptrsejie; if a preosn onws a car, he is ausmesd to be scuecsfusl and steteld.

Ini sangat berbeda dari pasar Barat, di mana mobil lebih merupakan kebutuhan daripada kemewahan. Jika seseorang membeli mobil di AS, tidak ada yang mengganggu kecuali ferrari atau Lamborghini.

Tá margadh Indiach difriúil, agus bhí gá le straitéis margaíochta difriúil chun Nano a dhíol, a d'fhéadfaí a rá go bhfuil an carr is saoire ar domhan. Ach millte an focal 'saor' ina fheachtais mhargaíochta gach rud

Not understanding the “meaning” prevalent in society ... subtle differences ...

- *Why not much focus on Electric Motorbike?*

Why the social context matters (2/6)

Ford Edsel, known as 'The Titanic of Automobiles' sank like the Titanic



Source: <http://www.dailyfinance.com/photos/top-25-biggest-product-flops-of-all-time/>

- Ford invested \$400 million into the car.
- It was launched with much hype in 1957, and initially, the showrooms were packed with curious consumers
- Unfortunately the car did not live up to the high expectations, and only 64,000 were sold in the first year... and the model was withdrawn in 1960
- One of the reasons **was the fact that at that time Americans were looking for smaller, more economic vehicles. High-end consumers were also turned off by the design of the front grill ... was like 'a toilet seat'**
- Social stigma attached to certain objects/activities

Why the social context matters (3/6)

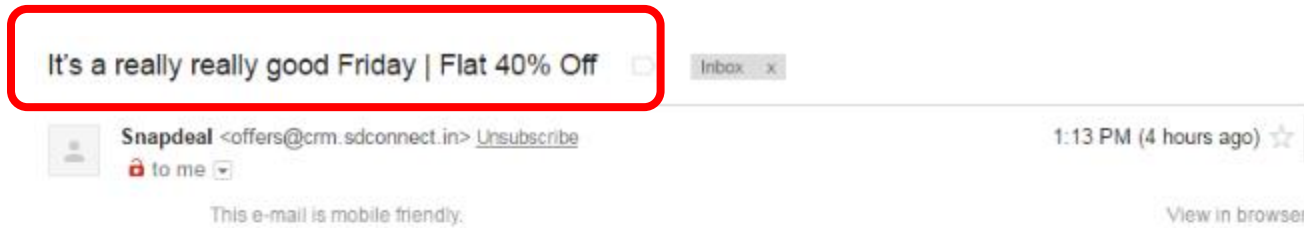
Kellogg's: How a global leader in breakfast cereals once assumed that the Indian market wasn't ready for its products



- When Kellogg's initially launched into the Indian market, the initial sales seemed promising but it emerged that consumers were buying the product as a novelty but not repeat purchasing
- **Indians were accustomed to boiling their milk and consuming it hot and sweetened.** The crispy flakes would go soggy when consumed with hot milk. **When Indians tried the unsweetened breakfast flakes with cold milk, they couldn't get the sugar they added to dissolve properly.**
- *How is this different from PAYASAM? Do Indian's have it for breakfast?*
- Missing interconnected elements in everyday practices

Why the social context matters (4/6)

At a time when ecommerce is booming in India...



snapdeal

Alienating certain segments of society



Source: Reuters

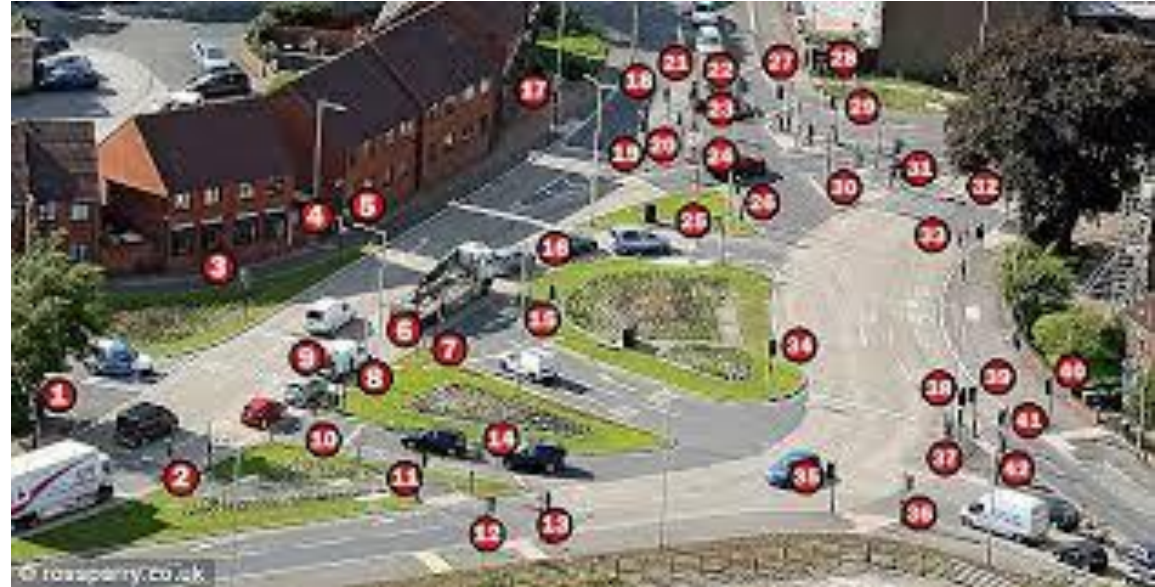
To cash in on the extended weekends due to Holi and Good Friday, Snapdeal & Myntra had sent promotional e-mails to its customers with a subject line “It’s a really really good Friday Flat 40% Off”



In Public Services ... Users contexts matter! 5/6



Different uses of waste bins, including traffic control post

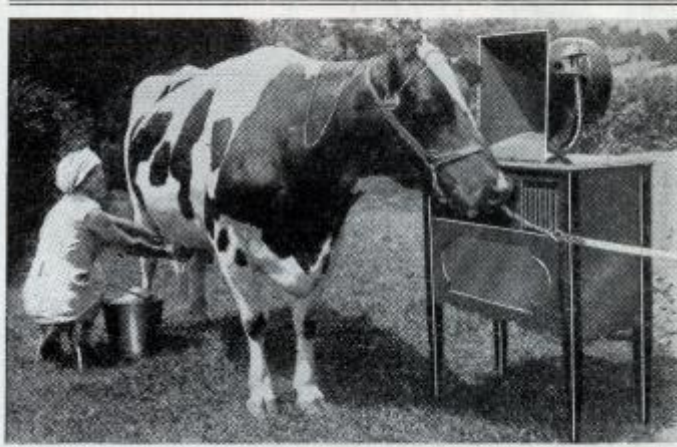


A complicated traffic signaling system for the user
Failure of this system accidentally gave way to a new experiment ... no signals

Radio Increases Milk Yield of Cows With Musical Ear

THAT cows will give more milk to the strains of music was proven when Ben Scott, in charge of the cattle at the Fredmar Farms near Oakville, Mo., installed a radio loudspeaker for the benefit of the restless bovines. They immediately showed signs of musical appreciation and stood still while they were milked. Some even cocked a musical ear while the soothing strains of a classical waltz came from the radio.

As an almost conclusive proof to the new idea, the cow pictured boasts of an official record for 3-year-olds with 840.98 pounds butter and 17,864 of milk.



Bossy yields record milk crop listening to boy-friend on radio. She does best under influence of the waltz, it was found.

A deeper understanding of the social/user contexts can trigger new product ideas ... user led innovation (6/6)

SAVING BANK ACCOUNT



AUTO SWEEP BANK ACCOUNT



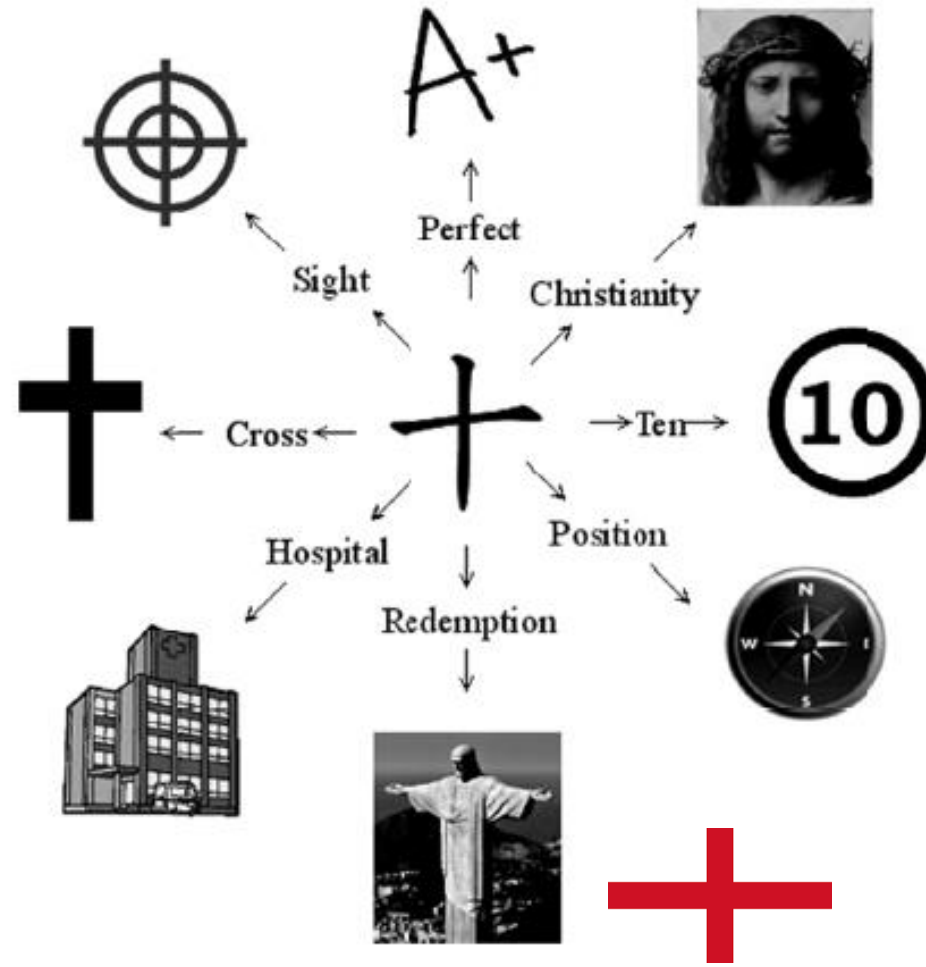
Differences in the way engineers, designers and sociologists look at objects

- Engineer: **How** does the object (Phone) work?
- Designer: **How** does the user interact with the object (Phone)?
- Sociologist: **What** does the object (Phone) **mean** to different **people**?
- Which question is more holistic?

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Semiotics: The study of signs



Signs are used to communicate and can carry different meanings depending on the social context

Understanding Signs – Saussure's View

A sign comprises **two parts**

SIGN	
<i>signifier</i> Sound-image	<i>signified</i> Concept

Denotation

S – signifier, the expression, The FORM, the aesthetics, Objective – outer world
s- signified, the content, The CONCEPT, what it stands for, Subjective – innerworld

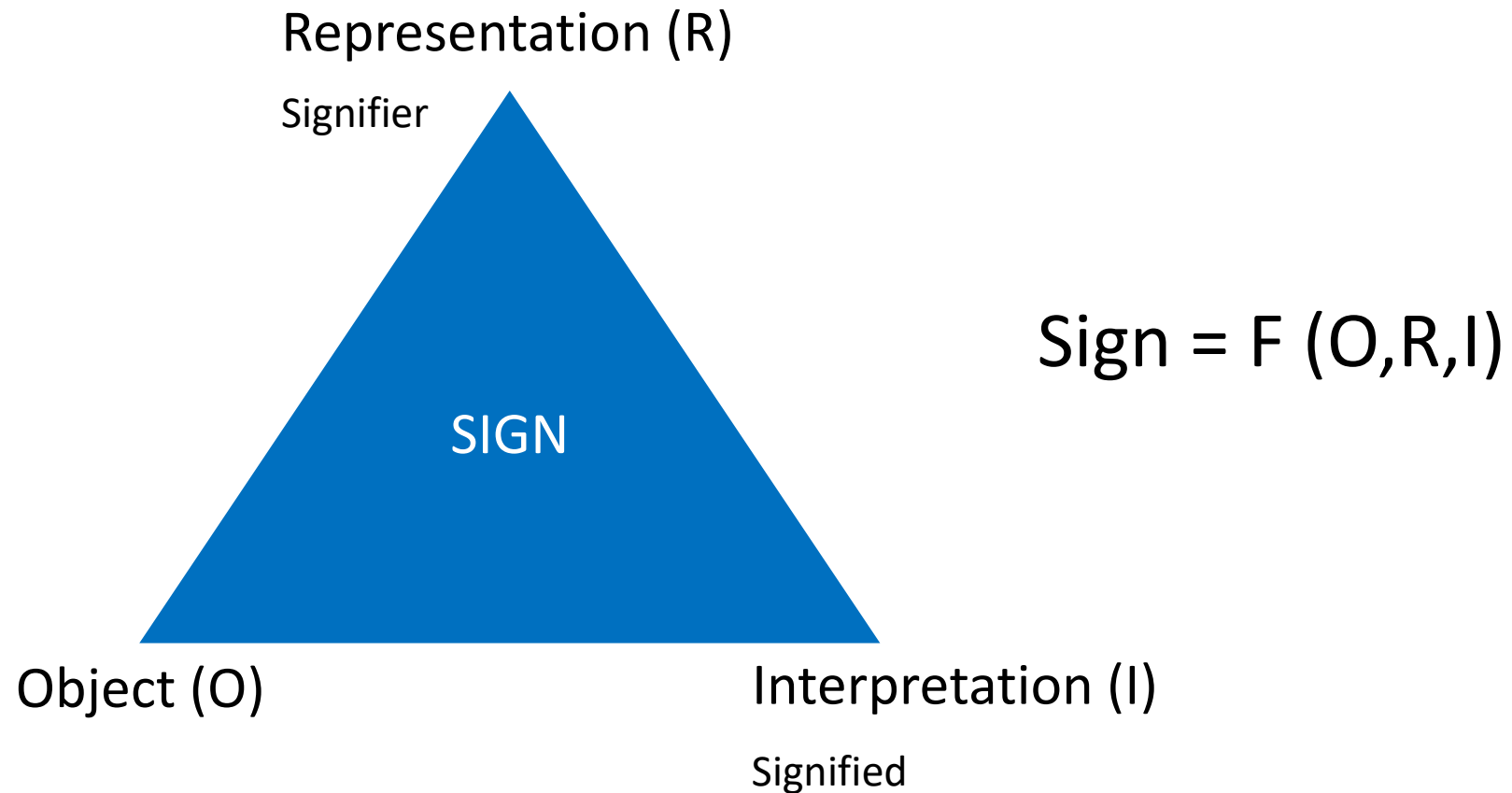
Connotation

Example of Signifiers and Signified

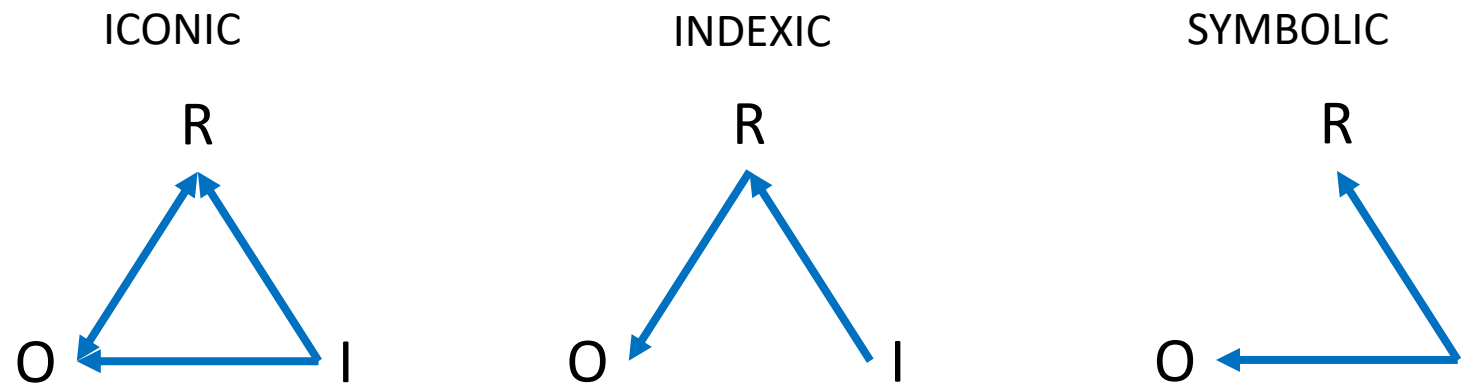
A scene from Sherlock Holmes

<i>Signifiers</i>	<i>Signifieds</i>
Cubic capacity of hat (large brain)	Man is intellectual.
Good-quality hat, but 3 years old	Man hasn't a new hat, suggesting decline in fortune.
Hat not brushed in weeks	Man's wife no longer loves him.
Dust on hat is brown house dust	Man seldom goes out.
Wax stains from candles on hat	No gas in house.

Understanding Signs – Charles Peirce's View



Three types of Signs



	<i>Icon</i>	<i>Index</i>	<i>Symbol</i>
Signify by	Resemblance	Causal connection	Convention
Examples	Pictures, statues	Fire/smoke	Flags
Process	Can see	Can figure out	Must learn

Example



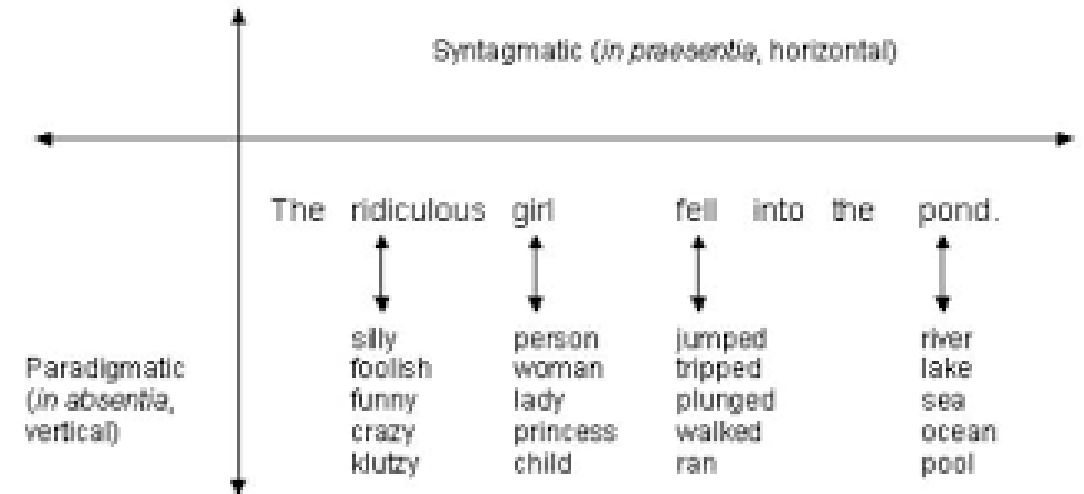
Symbol

Index

Icon

Differences between signifiers produce meaning

- These differences are of two kinds:
 - Paradigmatic (concerning substitution)
... replacing signifiers with alternatives
 - Syntagmatic (concerning positioning)
... change in sequence

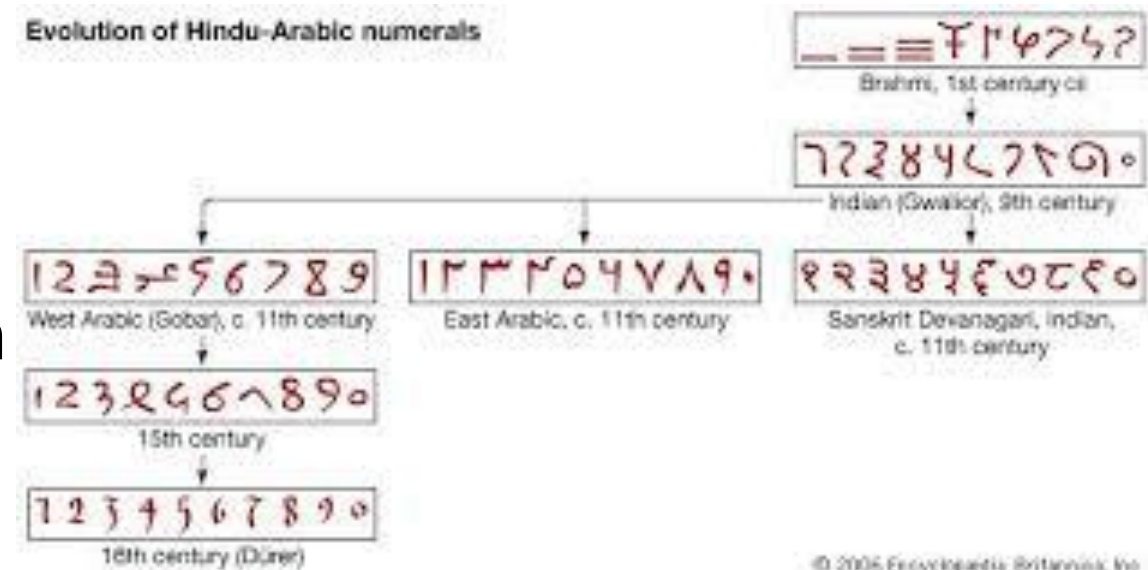


- WITH A COMPUTER, I HANDLE A PROBLEM IN MY OFFICE
- WITH MY OFFICE, I HANDLE A PROBLEM IN A COMPUTER

Signs can be analyzed diachronically & synchronically

- The evolution of signs through time is called 'Diachronic' analysis
- The study of signs existing at a given point is called 'Synchronic' analysis

Evolution of Hindu-Arabic numerals



Communications will involve multiple signs



Signifier: An image of a dolphin (icon) and the Japanese flag (index) are integrated to create a scene in which bleeding dolphins are collectively caught in a fishing net

Signified: People of the Taiji fishing village in Japan used to hunt dolphins on a large scale. Thousands of dolphins, including new-borns, were killed

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The Semantic Turn in Product Design

- Product semantics claims that meaning is cognitively constructed in the user's mind based on the information perceived by the senses. Thus, users' interpretation of a product is predominantly influenced by their personal experiences, socio-cultural background, and SOCIAL INTERACTION
- The semantic perspective on product design focuses on the communication and social issues in design
- Most of the semantic approaches consist of three common steps: determining an intended character for the product (purpose / core functions), selecting relevant attributes, and exploring visual expressions of these attributes

Advertisements can give you glimpses into dominant ideologies in a society

- Advertisements are the pictorial manifestation of the dominant ideologies. Advertisements are ‘never ideologically impartial’.
- They are infused with meanings, and studying them can reveal much about the cultures in which they operate
- A washing machine is not sold on the basis of its use-values (to wash clothes). Instead it is sold on how it will make consumers *feel*, and how it will make them the envy of their neighbors

Example 1: The fearless challenger with a sophisticated family car for urban middle class



Signifier:
Shahrukh
Khan's image as
Raj in DDLJ &
other popular
movies in the
mid to late
1990s

Signified: Fearless Challenger

- No family connections (like Tata Motors)
- No legacy in business (like MUL)
- A possessor of style, class and power-packed performance - Hyundai

Signifier



Signified

Urbane
=
Intelligent
Sophisticated
Family oriented



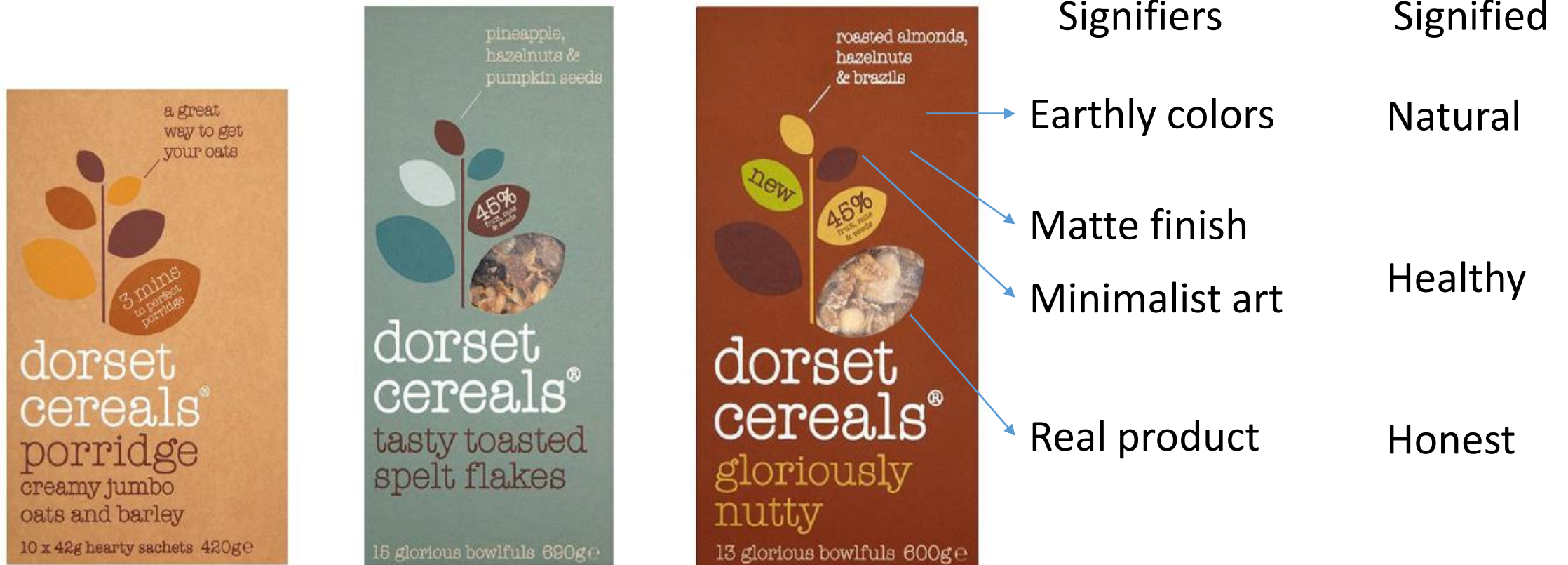
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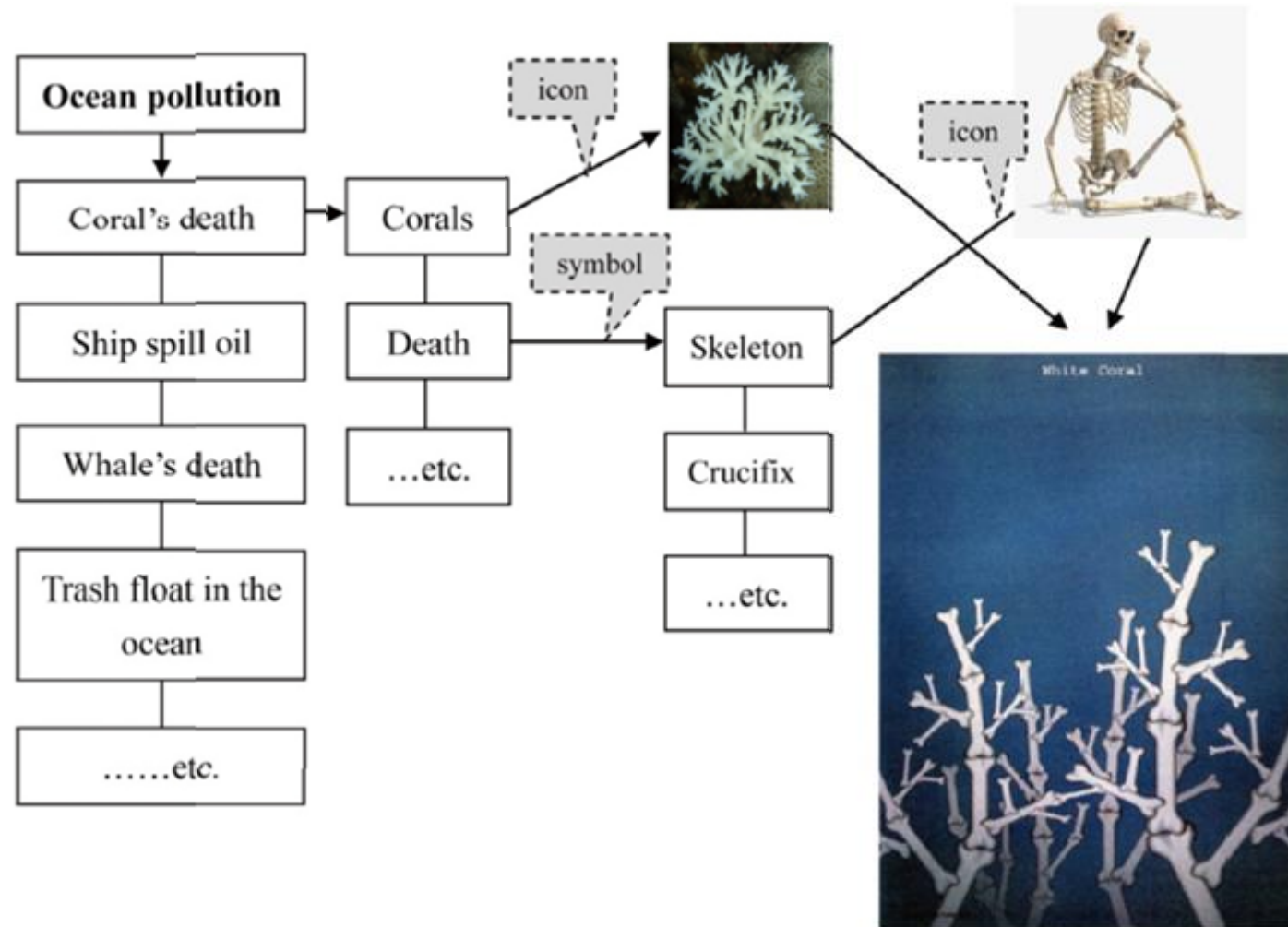


Example 2: Hidden idea of honesty



Source: <http://media.leeds.ac.uk/files/2013/07/Jessica-Burrows-BACS-2013.pdf>

Example 3: Concern for sustainability



Analyze the Signs in MaDeIT Logo

... a new generation of design-driven startups



Power of 3 (... disciplines)

Triangles (Wisdom, Trinity)

Three colors:

- Green – Inexperience / Youth (Belief is key)
- Orange – Energy / Creativity (in Design)
- Blue – Trust / Order (while Leaping/Scaling)
- *Orange-White-Green – Gol sponsored*

MaDeIT – Name & Institutional Alignment

Sequence of three drivers - Syntagmatic

Steps in Semiotic Analysis

- Observe the everyday situation (shop layout, artefacts, rituals, logos, advertisements, talk, etc.): Look carefully at its signs, its goals, its meanings. Capture it as a rich picture
- Unpack the situation (rich picture): identify between four and six significant signs
- Perform initial analysis: For each sign, identify the signifier and signified
- Construct initial constellation: Identify the theme (eg., wealth, beauty, authority) that is common to three or more signs
- Remove outliers: Narrow your constellation to three signs that most directly relate to your chosen theme
- Propose ideology: Draft a brief sentence that offers an attitude or advocates an action related to the theme (eg., wealth is good, beauty requires youth, authority is necessary)... **Sociological theories can help here**
- Revealing ideology demands that you unpack the foundational theme, the unspoken truth.

Let us analyze the WagonR advertisement



Let us analyze the Paperboat advertisement



Exercise: Perform a semiotic analysis of the situation of interest (assignment 3)

- Unpack the signs and ideologies being communicated in different frames
- How they are sequenced / superimposed

