

## **Course Outline: Semiotics: Strategies for Media and Brand Communications**

**Course Instructor: Dr. Seema Khanwalkar**

**Course Sessions: 20**

### **Course Brief**

This course proposes to introduce basic concepts and applications of Semiotic theory to students of brand and marketing communications. Semiotics is a field of study involving many different theoretical stances and methodological tools. Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. Whilst for the linguist Saussure, 'semiology' was 'a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life', for the philosopher Charles Peirce 'semiotic' was the 'formal doctrine of signs' which was closely related to Logic. Contemporary semioticians study signs not in isolation but as part of semiotic 'sign systems' (such as a medium or genre). They study how *meanings* are made: as such, being concerned not only with communication but also with the construction and maintenance of reality. Semiotics represents a range of studies in art, literature, anthropology and the mass media rather than an independent academic discipline. Semiotics is important because it deals with two important aspects of human life – reality as a system of signs (reality is constructed and we have a role to play in it as we interpret it) and Meaning as actively created according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions that is usually taken for granted. Meaning, is not readily available to us and to understand how it comes to us through constructed codes is intellectually empowering as we begin to understand how to deconstruct different realities in human life.

### **Semiotics and marketing communications**

Brands create value for themselves from the meanings and symbolic relationship that is forged between them and their consumers. Purchase decisions are made when consumers see meaning in brands and a lot has been written about the impact of brand meaning on market value. Semiotics as a discipline engages with the production and circulation of meaning and in its applied form to marketing communications in the last three decades has proven to be of immense value as a method of analysis and also as a method that can help refocus and reposition brands in the future. Practitioners have demonstrated the use of semiotics to the full spectrum of brand management that includes:

-research, market segmentation, brand positioning, creative strategy and the design of products, packaging, and retail sites

### **Course Objectives:**

This course will take students through the basics of Semiotic theories, concepts and research methods with a view to apply the same to practices in media and the marketing discourses

The aim is twofold:

- To understand the value of semiotics as an interpretative method

- To see its value when used in the planning process that can help strengthen the symbolic value of brand communications and the media

## **Course Sessions**

### **Session 1: Introduction to Semiotics- the philosophical foundations**

#### Readings:

- Danesi, Marcel (1994a): *Messages and Meanings: An Introduction to Semiotics*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press (Pages 3-11) PDF version available online
- Sebeok, T.A (2001): *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics*. University of Toronto Press, Canada. (Chap 1: Basic Notions) PDF version available online
- Danesi, Marcel (2007): *A Quest for meaning: A Guide to Semiotic theory and practice*, University of Toronto Press. (Pages 3-26)
- Barthes, Roland ([1964] 1967). *Elements of Semiology* (trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith). London: Jonathan Cape, Pages 23-32)

### **Session 2: Basic Concepts in Semiotics – ‘Signs’ (understanding from theoretical perspectives)**

#### Readings:

- Chandler, Daniel (online book), *Semiotics for Beginners*. (Section on ‘Signs’)
- Cobley, Paul (ed),(2001) *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*, Routledge, London (Pages 3-28)
- Innis, Robert (1985). *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*. Indian University Press. (Ferdinand de Saussure: The Linguistic Sign, P.47 and The Sign Character Page:66)
- Danesi, Marcel (2007): *A Quest for meaning: A Guide to Semiotic theory and practice*, University of Toronto Press. (Pages 28-51)

### **Session 3: Modality and Representation in Semiotic theory**

#### Readings:

- Danesi, Marcel (2007): *A Quest for meaning: A Guide to Semiotic theory and practice*, University of Toronto Press. (Pages 121-140)
- Chandler, Daniel (Online book), *Semiotics for Beginners*, refer to section on Modality and Representation

### **Session 4: Basic Concepts – Structure (Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic)**

Readings:

- Danesi, Marcel (2007): A Quest for meaning: A Guide to Semiotic theory and practice, University of Toronto Press. (Pages 52-74)
- Chandler, Daniel (Online Book), Semiotics for Beginners, Refer to Sections on Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic analysis, Paradigms and Syntagms
- Barthes, Roland ([1964] 1967). Elements of Semiology (trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith). London: Jonathan Cape, Pages 58-70

### **Session 5: Analytical session – Exercises in Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic analysis**

Readings: Any of the above mentioned

### **Session 6: Fundamental principles – Denotation, Connotation and Myth**

Readings:

- Chandler, Daniel (online book), Semiotics for Beginners. Section on Denotation, Connotation and Myth.
- Barthes, Roland ([1957] 1987): Mythologies. New York
- Mythologies by Roland Barthes [translated by Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang, New York, 1984] Pages 107-145
- Barthes, Roland ([1964] 1967). Elements of Semiology (trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith). London: Jonathan Cape, Pages 89-95

### **Session 7: Semiotic Codes – Encoding and Decoding**

Readings:

- Danesi, Marcel (2007): A Quest for meaning: A Guide to Semiotic theory and practice, University of Toronto Press. (Pages 75-96)
- Corner, John (1980): 'Codes and Cultural Analysis', Media, Culture and Society 2: 73-86
- Fiske, John (1989): 'Codes'. In International Encyclopedia of Communications, Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 312-6
- Chandler, Daniel (Online book), Semiotics for Beginners. Refer to Section on 'Codes'
- Hall, Stuart ([1973] 1980): 'Encoding/decoding'. In Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.): Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79 London: Hutchinson, pp. 128-38
- Wren-Lewis, Justin (1983): 'The Encoding/Decoding Model: Criticisms and Redevelopments for Research on Decoding', Media Culture & Society 5(2): 179-97

### **Session 8: Intertextuality and multiple references**

Readings:

- Chandler, Daniel (Online book) Semiotics for Beginners. Section on Intertextuality
- Adolphe Haberer, INTERTEXTUALITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, LITERATÛRA 2007 49(5)
- Martin, Elaine, Intertextuality, An Introduction. The Comparatist, Volume 35, May 2011, pp. 148-151 (Article)

### **Session 9: Semiotics in the world of markets and consumption – overview of theories of symbolic consumption**

Readings:

- Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok (Ed) (1987) Marketing and Semiotics: New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale, Mouton de Gryuter, New York. Pages 3-31.
- Oswald, Laura R (2012), Marketing Semiotics: Signs, Strategies and Brand Value, Oxford. Chapters 1 and 2

### **Session 10: Semiotics as an interpretative research paradigm in the marketing world – the basic analytical frames**

Readings:

- Laura Hidalgo Downing, Text World Creation in Advertising Discourse. Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses 13 (2000)
- Cook, Guy (1992), the Discourse of Advertising. Routledge, London. Chapter: 1 – Ads as a Discourse type
- Mick, David Glen & Laura G Politi (1989): 'Consumers' Interpretations of Advertising Imagery: A Visit to the Hell of Connotation'. In Elizabeth C Hirschman (Ed.): Interpretive Consumer Research. Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, pp. 85-96
- Umiker-Sebeok, Jean (Ed.) (1987): *Marketing and Semiotics*. Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, Pages 3-31
- Williamson, Judith (1978), Decoding Advertisements, Marion Boyars

### **Session 11: The Semiotic Research and Analysis (application of the basic concepts to media)**

Readings:

- Feyrouz Bouzida ,THE SEMIOLOGY ANALYSIS IN MEDIA STUDIES - ROLAND BARTHES APPROACH - 8-10 September 2014- Istanbul, Turkey Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities
- Bignell, Jonathan (1997): *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, Pages: 81-173

### **Session 12: Theoretical paradigms and their frameworks of analysis for brand communications**

Readings:

- Oswald, Laura, R (2012), Marketing Semiotics: signs, strategies and brand values. Oxford. Pages, 1-17

### **Session 13: What entails the semiotic field of analysis?**

Readings:

- Oswald, Laura, R (2012), Marketing Semiotics: signs, strategies and brand values. Oxford. Pages, Pages 17-70

### **Session 14: Semiotics and the consumer brandscape**

Readings:

- Oswald, Laura, R (2012), Marketing Semiotics: signs, strategies and brand values. Oxford. Pages, Pages 70-98

### **Session 15: Semiotics and Brand Discourses**

Readings:

- Oswald, Laura, R (2012), Marketing Semiotics: signs, strategies and brand values. Oxford. Pages, Pages 98-125

### **Session 16: Semiotics and multicultural brand discourses**

Readings:

- Oswald, Laura, R (2012), Marketing Semiotics: signs, strategies and brand values. Oxford. Pages, Pages 125- 185
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### **Session 17: Analysis and Exercise session**

### **Session 18: Analysis and Exercise session**

### **Session 19: Analysis and Exercise session**

### **Session 20: Conclusion and overview of the learnings**

### **Course Evaluation**

Students will be evaluated in the following manner:

Class exercises and participation: 30%

Mid-term Evaluation (examination/Assignment): 30%

End-term Evaluation (examination): 40%