

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS OF EDUCATION – SEMANTICS' COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES

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Abstract. Education is a service and it fully obeys to the laws of marketing. Part of the efficient marketing is advertising and other marketing communications of educational institutions. The advertising of educational services is the main topic of this article. The authors analyse in the literary review some of the most important books and articles on marketing of educational institutions and their marketing communications. The second part of literature review explores the different communicative approaches in advertising of education, based on semantics' concepts. Semiotics is the main research approach in the article. The authors analyse semantic concepts of intertextuality, meaning, denotation/connotation, satiation, invariant/variant, zero morpheme, redundancy and some others not only as semantics' concepts, but mainly as communicative strategies and approaches.

Keywords: education; marketing; communicative approach; semiotics; semantics; intertextuality; meaning; denotation/connotation; satiation; invariant/variant; zero morpheme; redundancy

Limitations of the study

The subject of this article are the semantic concepts used as communicative approaches. The reasons for this are two:

- the importance of semantic concepts as communicative approaches in marketing and other communications;
- the size of article.

USP (Unique Selling Proposition) of Article

The article is unique – so far, the scientists did not use semiotics in the analysis of advertising and marketing communications of educational services. This approach gives new perspectives for efficient scientific researches.

Acknowledgement

The authors analysed some of the world's best ads in this article. These ads prove that their authors are very innovative. The ads are from the site <http://adsoftheworld.com>

Addsoftheworld.com is the leading world data basis on advertising.

The authors are very grateful to the admen who created the ads studied in the article and to the specialists who maintain the adsoftheworld.com

Literature review

Literature review covers the following topics: marketing of education; semantics and the following semantic concepts - intertextuality, meaning, denotation/ connotation, satiation, invariant/variant, zero morpheme, redundancy.

Marketing of Universities

Terry Wu in his book "International Marketing of Higher Education" explores the international marketing of higher education and the enrolment of foreign students. The author pays much attention to the competition between universities and also to the various marketing communications of these academic institutions (Wu, 2016: 262).

"Marketing of High-Technology Products and Innovations" is one of the most important books on marketing and marketing communications of high technology products and innovations. Its authors, Jakki Mohr, Sanjit Sengupta and Stanley Slater analysed many of the most important aspects of marketing and marketing communications of these products and services. The book is also valuable for the universities because they are closely related to the high-tech products, services and innovations. (Mohr, Sengupta & Slater, 2010)

Felix Maringe and Paul Gibbs in his book "Marketing Higher Education: Theory and Practice" explore in depth how universities can compete in national and global markets; the students from the point of view of employers, etc. One of the main conclusions in the book is related to the importance of marketing for the successful universities (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009: 195).

The authors of the book "Competition in Higher Education Branding and Marketing: National and Global Perspectives" analysed the different tendencies in marketing and branding of European, American, Asian and African universities. The philanthropy and university from the standpoint of marketing and marketing communications is one of the most important parts of the book. (Papadimitriou (Ed.), 2017)

One of the main goals of the book "Marketing Strategies for Higher Education Institutions: Technological Considerations and Practices" is to explore the competitiveness of universities. The authors study in detail some important marketing aspects of universities - technological innovations, distance

education, marketing environment, foreign students, student expectations, student achievements, universities like brands, etc. (Tripathi (Ed.), 2013: 388).

Anthony Lowrie analyses key characteristics of university branding in his book “Understanding Branding in Higher Education: Marketing Identities”. It is important that the author interprets universities from the point of view of democracy, human right, well-being of citizens. Some of the important insights here are about brand identity and liberal arts education. (Lowrie, 2017)

James Burns in his book “New Strategies in Higher Education Marketing” provides valuable practical tips connected with the successful marketing of universities – not only for the prospective students but also for a wider audience. He analysed the following key variables – marketing strategies, research and communications in the field of higher education, various services and the development of universities. (Burns & Hayes, 2012)

Paul Gibbs and Michael Knapp in his book “Marketing Higher and Further Education: An Educational Guide to Promoting Courses, Departments and Institutions” thoroughly studied some of the most important concepts in higher education marketing - marketing audit, marketing and consumer research, market segmentation, pricing of educational programs, promotional advertising, direct mail and exhibitions, student recruitment, fundraising and others (Gibbs & Knapp, 2012: 153).

The author, Øyvind Helgesen, in his article “Marketing for Higher Education: A Relationship Marketing Approach”, explored in depth important aspects of Relationship Marketing – the retention of students in their universities. The RM approach means that the higher education marketers and marketing communicators must create and constantly maintain the necessary conditions for RM. The important concepts in this article are relationship marketing, reputation, student loyalty, student retention, student satisfaction, student value, etc. (Helgesen, 2008)

Successful marketing of education also depends on intercultural characteristics of students. Professor Irina Koleva analysed in her article “National Policies and Priorities in Intercultural Education (Reflective Aspects)” different approaches by which the educational system stimulates the socio-cultural competences of students. Some of the key concepts in the article are multicultural education, sociocultural competence, and so on. (Koleva, 2013)

Qualitative marketing of education and of universities also depends on the psychological and pedagogical approaches and strategies used. Professor Irina Koleva, in her article “The Reflective Approach: Methodology, Paradigms and Facts”, analyses in depth the advantages of the reflexive approach in education and the following key concepts – reflexive approach, reflexivity, awareness, etc. (Koleva, 2016)

Social nets are important part of the marketing communications of education. Nicola Vangelov in one of his scientific articles analyses the main characteristics of social nets during specific social events, namely – social media, social networks, Facebook, Google, Twitter, Youtube, etc.¹⁾.

The author in the article “Impact of the social networks on the communication of the organizations” explores the main features of social nets and their advantages and disadvantages in terms of different communicative variables. The specialists on advertising of universities and other educational institutions can use his findings and create efficient marketing communications²⁾.

Semantics. Semantic Concepts. General Theory of Semantics

The book by Kate Kearns is one of the leading scientific researches in semantics’ theory. The author analyses in depth some of the most important notions in this field – generalized quantifier theory; referential opacity; lexical conceptual structure; semantic composition; narrative time; etc. (Kearns, 2011: 288).

Cliff Goddard’s book “Cross-linguistic Semantics” examines how different languages express one the same phenomenon – depending on the specific language and on some additional language characteristics. The model of natural semantic meta-language is one of the most important in this study (Goddard, 2008: 356).

Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality is the key one in Allen’s research. The author analyses intertextuality from the standpoints of various theories – structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, feminism, etc. The author also explores this concept in the works of the world’s famous linguists and semioticians – Saussure, Bakhtin, Kristeva, Barthes, Bloom, etc. (Allen, 2011).

The authors of the book “Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History” examined thoroughly the different theories of intertextuality and its basic stylistic figures – allusion, chronotope and intertext, etc. (Clayton & Rothstein (Eds.), 1991).

The book “Theories and Practices” is one of the best researches in the field of intertextuality. Its authors analyse in depth such important concepts as intertextuality and ontology; autobiography as intertext; irony and politics of reading; intertextual relations; intertextuality in cinema, etc. (Worton & Still (Eds.), 1991).

Denotation and Connotation

Author Allan Keith in his article “The Pragmatics of Connotation” studies in details the concept “connotation” depending on different cultural contexts. One and the same sign – word, image, and so on may be with positive or negative connotations depending on the different communicative contexts (Allan, 2007).

Semantic satiation (semantic saturation)

Authors Xing Tian and David E. Huber in their article conducted 4 experiments in order to explore some important aspects of semantic satiation. They analysed important aspects of semantic confusion. Some of the key concepts in this article

are semantic satiation, discounting, repetition, lexical representation, semantic processing, semantic retrieval and others (Tian & Huber, 2010).

Invariant/Variant

Edward Keenan and Edward Stabler in their article “On Language Variation and Linguistic Invariants” analyse different aspects of language variations and linguistic invariants. The goal is to abstract the main structural universals in the respective grammars. Some of the key concepts in this article are the following – linguistic universals, linguistic invariants, language variation and others. (Keenan, & Stabler, 2010)

Zero Morpheme

Aone Chinatsu in one of his articles analyses zero morphemes in unification-based combinatory categorical grammar. The communicators can use zero morphemes more efficiently in different linguistic contexts with the help of proposed algorithm based on this concept.

Redundancy

Isabella Chiari, explores how redundancy works in artificial languages in one of her articles. The author interprets redundancy from semiotics’ standpoint. The reason is that this semantic concept is omnipresent in all sign systems, not just in the verbal one. Some of the key concepts in this article are the following – natural and artificial languages, international languages, language construction, etc. (Chiari, 2007).

Iconic Metaphors

Paul Ricoeur in his book “The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language” studies the different language concepts in relation to the various aspects of metaphor, namely analogy attribution, changes of meaning, connotation, denotation, context, mimesis, polysemy, etc. This book is probably the world’s leading research on tropes. (Ricoeur, 2004)

Metaphor is the most important semantic and stylistic concept regarding the ad creativity. George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s book “Metaphors we Live by” is one of the leading world studies on metaphors. Due to this the book is quite valuable for the creativity in different marketing communications. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Evripides Zantides in his article “Visual Metaphors in Communication: Intertextual Semiosis and Deja Vu in Print Advertising” analyses visual metaphors in advertising in relation to semiosis and its use in marketing communications. He examines in detail how metaphors attract the attention of customers and how they increase ad efficiency (Zantides, 2016).

The article “Conducting Multimodal Rhetorical Analysis of TV Ads with Atlas.ti 7” is an important study on theory of tropes. His author analyses in depth the verbal-

visual tropes (metaphors, metonymies, hyperboles, lithotes, etc.) in hundreds commercials (Rossolatos, 2014).

The same author in his article “Rhetorical Transformations in Multimodal Advertising Texts: From General to Local Degree Zero” examines the isomorphism of visual and verbal tropes and how metaphors, metonymies and other stylistic figures interact in multimodal ad texts (Rossolatos, 2013).

The authors of the book “Aspects of Metaphor” are among the leading specialists in this field. They explore some of the most important characteristics of tropes – metaphors, metonymies, similes, similarity and their verbal and iconic interpretations (Hintikka (Ed.), 1994).

Research methods

Semiotics and its branch – semantics are the basic research methods used in here.

Analysis and results

Semantics (σημαντικός “significant” – from Ancient Greek) is the linguistic and semiotic branch which studies the different aspects of signs’ meanings.

Semantics consist of two parts – semantic concepts and stylistic figures.

Every semiotic concept and (respectively, any semantic concept and every stylistic figure) is also communicative strategy or communicative approach - from the standpoint of rhetoric and theory of communication.

This is the purpose of article – to analyse the semantic concepts (intertextuality, meaning, denotation/connotation, satiation, meaning, invariant/variant, zero morpheme, redundancy) as communicative approaches in marketing communications of universities and other educational institutions.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a notion which defines the inter-connections between different texts. Intertextuality shows how the authors create the new texts using the already generated ones. The stylistic figures of intertextuality are allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche, parody, etc.

Music school advertises lessons using famous Michelangelo’s fresco (Fig. 1):



Fig. 1

The Lord breathes Adam's soul - in the original fresco. The teacher, as the Lord, breathes the soul in the guitar – in the intertextual ad (Fig. 1). This way the admen ascribed divine status to the promoted school.

The admen demonstrated their creative potential in two ads of art history courses with the following ad headline – “We have all the information you need.” and with two famous paintings:

- “A Family” of Fernando Botero. (Fig. 2a);
- “American Gothic” of Grant Wood (Fig. 2b).



Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b

The communicators used the intertextual communicative approach on a formal level.

The ad appeals in these two ads define their content characteristics. (The ad appeal is the main motivational drive which attracts the consumers to the product – in this case the educational services.)

The police arrested the families of both portraits (photo replicas of paintings), and malicious officers question them. These two identical stories interpret in ironic way the ad headline – “We have all the information you need”.

The admen communicated here courses of art history. Experienced university lecturers (masked (metaphorized) as detectives) will know sooner or later the whole truth about the paintings and the students will learn everything concerning these famous artefacts.

The meaning

Linguists designate this concept as the content of sign. We study the meaning of signs in different languages during our entire life. This process is important especially with regard to the foreign languages acquisition.

The Biblical Myth of Babylon Tower manifests in interesting way how important are the meanings for the effective communication. The admen used this myth to advertise language school (Fig. 3):



Fig. 3

The Tower of Babel is a metonymy that expresses how the illiterate people destroy understanding and communication. The Biblical Myth of Babel Tower narrates the one of the stories of Lord. He ordered to the arrogant builders of this tower to use only their own languages without knowing the lexicons (meaning of words) of the other builders:

The Tower of Babel

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel – because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.³⁾

The communicators promote linguistic school in this ad. The artisans will learn the necessary languages with its help and they will jointly complete the unfortunate tower.

The admen used the communicative approach of the "eradicated meaning" in the following two ads of universities (Fig. 4a, 4b).



Fig. 4a



Fig. 4b

They created these ads using one and the same module:

– The communicators rearranged the letters of the main words in order to hide their meanings.

– The right words are in the ad headlines – “If you do not see the achievement, enrol in graduate programs now” (Fig. 4a) and “If you do not see the opportunity, enrol in graduate programs now” (Fig. 4b).

Admen also communicated Rosetta Stone online school using semantic concepts in the following two ads (Fig. 5a, 5b):

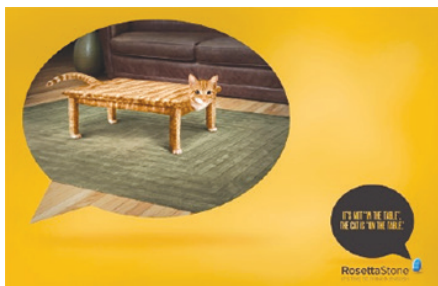


Fig. 5a



Fig. 5b

The similar English prepositions “in” and “on” often confuse the foreigners, who don’t know well English. Admen actualized the incorrect use of these prepositions and metaphorized the ad images:

– The table is as a cat – the admen expressed in this way the wrong expression “The cat is in the table” – instead – “on the table”;

– The ducks are in front of computers – they expressed in this way the wrong phrase “The ducks are on line” – instead – “in line”.

Stylistic figure metaphor is the most important device with respect to ad creativity. The admen do almost all of creative ads with its help.

Denotation and Connotation – Meaning with and without Emotions

Communicators can reduce or increase the level of emotionality in signs. Linguists define “denotation” as a sign with non-emotional content, and “connotation” as a sign with some degree of emotionality.

Admen continually connote the content. They achieve this in many ways – for example with the help of communicative approach of stylistic figures. This way the admen actualize the so called “semantic disruption” which liberates (boosts) the ad creativity.

Satiation – the Saturation of Communication with the Same Signs and Meanings

Semantic satiation expresses (denotes) how communicators saturate the texts with the same or similar signs.

This is quite necessary in some communicative situations – for example, when air traffic controllers transmit vital information to the pilots in the air. The saturation in other communicative situations, however, can destroy the effectiveness of the communication. The reason is that the saturation strangles creativity.

One of the key tasks of experienced marketing communicators and artists is to reduce semantic satiation and disrupt the grey communications, making them highly creative (colourful). The admen achieve this with the help of different semantic concepts, including the notion of “vague (fuzzy) meaning”.

The communicators used this concept in three ads of distance university education (Fig. 6a, 6b, 6c).



Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b



Fig. 6c

They used three world-famous faces – these of Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi and Charlie Chaplin.

Admen, however, metaphorized (“diluted” with the help of a raster to some extent) the faces, editing them with the help of “vague meaning” concept.

The customers can distinguish the faces only if they are not so close to the outdoors. This way the very creative admen illustrated (interpreted) the notion “distance learning”.

Invariant/Variant

The invariant is the abstract designation of the thing, abstracted from its numerous actualizations.

The variants are the various (sometimes numerous) implementations (manifestations, updates) of the communicated phenomenon.

The admen used the term “invariant/variant” in ad for language school (Fig. 7):



Fig. 7

They used one and the same book in English (The Wizard of Oz) and in French (Le magicien d'Oz).

The invariant in this case is the book in English – in the language of its author and of its first publication. The variants are books in the other languages – in this case the book in French, or in Russian, etc.

The readers, however, thanks to the advertised school can read the book in English (the original language of the book). That is, there is no need to publish the book in other languages. It also saves nature, because the book does not need so much paper. It's no accident that part of the ad headline claims “Save Trees”.

The admen used the same approach in two ads of university (Fig. 8a, 8b):



Fig. 8a



Fig. 8b

The communicators demonstrated the students after completing different university specialties – such as musical education, medical education, and so on.

The students in these ads are in two variants – at the beginning of their studies and as professionals. This is the reason why in the second variants they are with professional cloths, with their instruments and with the specific hairstyles.

Zero Morpheme

The zero morpheme is only a content which is not packaged by any sign.

The zero morpheme has no phonetic form. That is, there is a content which, however, haven't sign package from linguistic point of view. The suffix is missing – in the most cases.

Some scholars interpret the notion of “zero morpheme” not only by linguistic, but also from semiotic standpoint. The reason is that this concept also applies to all signs – images, colouremes, vestems, etc.

The stylistic figures of “zero morpheme” concept are synecdoche and ellipse. The synecdoche (from ancient Greek συνεκδοχή – “simultaneous understanding”) is a stylistic figure which expresses the whole phenomenon by some of its parts (pars pro toto) or vice versa (totum pro parte).

The scholars interpret this notion also from a semiotic point of view. The reason is that it applies to all other sign systems – for example, to images, etc.

Admen often handle the concept of “zero morpheme” as communicative approach. This means that they express the communicated phenomena economically.

Three ads for Mediterranean university are the typical examples in this respect (Fig. 9a, 9b, 9c):

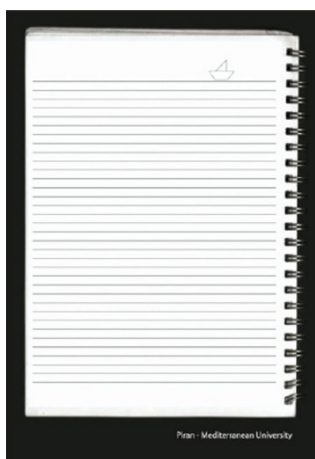


Fig. 9a



Fig. 9b



Fig. 9c

Admen used here one the same module consisting of:
– blank sheet of a notebook – one of the signs of learning and of the education respectively;

– three highly restricted signs – element of boat, metaphorized waves and shark fin – all of them expressing the idea of sea.

All three ads are minimalistic, that is – synecdochal and elliptical.

The admen used the same approach in two ads for fitness club (Fig. 10a, 10b) with the following headline “Draw your new body”:



Fig. 10a



Fig. 10b

That is why the communicators erased some parts of the bodies which the people in fitness club must shape (“draw”) additionally by themselves.

This is a typical example of the stylistic figure synecdoche and ellipse.

The classic “zero morpheme” approach is the leading one in the following three ads (Fig. 11a, 11b and 11c) as well:



Fig. 11a



Fig. 11b



Fig. 11c

There are no words in any of the three ads. They disappeared everywhere - both from the magazine, the newspaper and the comic book.

The reason is that anyone who does not know English in these cases is illiterate. That is why the British Council will help the unfortunate people to learn English.

Redundancy

The communicators can express something very economically, and they can do the same thing with as many signs as possible.

Redundancy is a concept which expresses the phenomenon of signs' abundance.

Functionalism, for example, as architectural style from the 1930s of last century is very economical (a redundant) – without any ornaments, sculptures, murals and with the most simplified constructions – corresponding to the concept of “zero morpheme”. Baroque and Rococo as architectural styles are redundant – with many ornaments, sculptures, paintings and complicated (the atricalized) constructions.

The admen used the communicative approach of redundancy in the following three ads of distant and customized learning (Fig. 12a, 12b, 12c):



Fig. 12a



Fig. 12b



Fig. 12c

They applied the same module in all three ads, consisting of:

- redundancy communicative approach – a myriad Protestants are after the Salem witch to burn her (Fig. 12a); countless African cannibals chase the European traveller to eat him (Fig. 12b); countless vampire zombies look for the innocent human person to drink his blood (Fig. 12c);

- stylistic figure metonymy - admen replaced students with witches, protestants from the 17th century, cannibals, zombies, etc.;

- stylistic figure contrast – admen opposed the many students to the very few who prefer to choose freely how to study;

- the stylistic figure metaphor-personification – communicators metaphorized the chart-cake attributing to it characteristics of human crowd;

- the appeals of black humour – the death is integral part of the three ads.

One of the most typical features of postmodern marketing is customization. It means that the companies do not make the goods (products and services) for everyone but for the particular customer – depending on her/his needs, preferences, desires, etc.

The same applies to the marketing of educational services. Some schools and universities give to the students the possibility to determine freely and by themselves when and what to study, etc.

Future research

The analyses in this article concern only some parts of semantics with regard to its communicative aspects. Future studies in this field must include styles, as well as the notions of the following semiotic branches – alphabetics, syntactics and pragmatics.

The analyses from the standpoints of marketing narratives are also quite perspective. Very valuable are also the studies of marketing communications of education from the point of view of various ad appeals used.

Conclusion

Education is one of the most important fields from the standpoint of society. Good education is an integral part of every civilized and prosperous society and it improves significantly the image of these societies and generates considerable profit.

Educational products from economic and marketing standpoints are just the same as all other services. This means that the marketers must market and communicate them in the best possible way – in order to make these services effective and profitable.

Important part of marketing of education is advertising and other marketing communications. The authors analysed here some important aspects of semiotics regarding the advertising of educational services. Semiotics is quite important in this respect and it helps a lot for the effectiveness of these communications.

The same applies to the theory of narratives, archetypes, and so on.

NOTES

1. Vangelov, N. The role of social networks during a protest – examples from Bulgaria and the world. <https://www.newmedia21.eu/analizi/rolyata-na-sotsialnite-mrezhi-po-vreme-na-protest-primeri-ot-balgariya-i-sveta/>
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3. Holy Bible, Genesis 11:1 – 9. [<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+11%3A1-9&version=NIV>].

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