

REVIEW

By Prof. Ivan Yochev Boevsky, PhD, New Bulgarian University, 3.8. Economics, on the thesis of Sevim Asimova Taneva, for the PhD degree in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics)

Sevim Taneva has developed a PhD thesis on " Market Challenges of the Tobacco Industry. Integrated Research Analysis with a Focus on Semiotic Methods". The thesis is in English, 310 standard typescripts, with a scope: three parts, introduction, conclusion, bibliography and four appendices.

For solving marketing issues and case studies, analytical integration of information leading to deeper and more accurate analyses is becoming increasingly important. In this regard, research developments with a practical focus would undoubtedly support the business process of making important marketing and commercial decisions.

The main objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the analytical integration of market research methods, with a central role for the semiotic method, provides significant advantages to the researcher. To prove this objective, an integrated research model is developed and proposed. The objective thus defined is achieved through six main tasks: understanding the theory of semiotics, introducing the tobacco business sector (used in the thesis as an area for the application of research solutions and, most importantly, for the application of the proposed integrated research model), understanding the theory of marketing semiotics, examining the main semiotic tools for the study of brands, reviewing common market research and developing the integrated model as a final theoretic outcome.

The completion of the tasks was achieved within the following three parts of the dissertation: part 1, "Tobacco consumption semiotics", part 2, "Marketing semiotics and research solutions" and part 3, "Analytical integration and Corset brand research".

The candidate lays the foundations of the development through an introduction to semiotic science. The fundamental concepts in semiotics are defined by the two founding scholars: Saussure and Pearce. In this regard, Sevim Taneva discusses their main contributions (theories of the sign and others), and then presents the theoretical contributions of other more

contemporary semioticians, having a specific application to the problem under consideration, namely, analytical concepts and tools, the application of which can lead to the sought-after market results of the brand. In this regard, it was rightly decided to present the theories of Roland Barthes (myth identification and mythic sign), Algirdas Greimas (semiotic square) and Yuri Lotman (semiosphere).

In order to show what is the practical application and marketing utility of each of the three theories, Sevim Taneva applies them at the level of the entire tobacco industry by preparing the following semiotic analyses: 1 Mythology of smoking, 2. Positioning male and female cigarette brands on the semiotic square, and 3. The semiosphere of tobacco consumption. Considering that the focus of the analytical integration is semiotic methods, the development of the mentioned analyses is a very good solution, managing to show the importance of semiotics in marketing management, its relevance and indispensable role compared to other research methodologies. However, this would not have been achieved - both in terms of the semiotic analysis of the whole industry and subsequently, when the object of study is one particular brand of cigarette products, without the expert knowledge of the business sector studied. In this regard, the tobacco industry is thoroughly represented. Here the candidate provides two main overviews: of the cultural and historical context of tobacco consumption and of the tobacco business today - the scope and culture of smoking. Tobacco and its different forms of use over time, as well as the factors that have led to the global spread of smoking, can be an interesting field for semiotic analyses, given the deep cultural specificities of this consumer product. This is no less true for the smoking culture of today, continuing the evolutionary nature of tobacco use as defined by business interests and visible in so-called new generation products.

In Part 2, Sevim Taneva discusses marketing semiotics and various research solutions as a source of an integrated approach to marketing analytics. Marketing semiotics is the branch of semiotic science most directly relevant to the topic of this dissertation. It is discussed in depth, where the excellent presentation of the models of Batty (Brand Meaning Framework), Floss (Valuing Advertising), Oswald (Semiotic Dimensions of Brands) and Vincent (Brand Mythology System) is impressive.

The candidate was able to show great expertise in terms of specific research decisions in brand management. These are addressed in two groups: semiotic brand research and traditional marketing research. What is more specific in their presentation is their "refraction" through the

industry studied. Thus, the explanation of the nature and need of each type of research is conveyed through examples from the tobacco industry, which is part of the FMCG sector known for its traditional practices in conducting market research. Within the scope of semiotic brand research are presented: discourse analysis, brand mythology, decoding and recoding, ZMET and Trend Watching. And within traditional research fall Retail Audit, Household Panel and a variety of consumer research, all together in effect representing the main market research used by major manufacturing companies.

The concept of analytical integration and Corset brand research follows. The concept of analytical integration is developed by: presenting the essence of the Marketing Information System, case studies solved by the integrated approach, levels of integration, achievements in the field of integration within traditional research, achievements in the field of integration of semiotics with traditional methodologies. Very good impression is made that for the identified marketing and commercial case studies, Sevim Taneva also develops research agendas in terms of: research topic, categorization of research type and results provided. After considering the achievements and expertise in the field of integration, Sevim Taneva arrives at the need for the availability and application of the so-called optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis. She develops and proposes for use such a model consisting of five analytical steps: 1. Retail audit data analysis, 2. Semiotic analysis, 4. Semiotic performance measurement, and 5. Market share tracking. This is also the chosen research methodology which is fully consistent with the aim and objectives of the dissertation.

Undoubtedly, this is a comprehensive research approach, with an integration of the semiotic method and a focus on its indispensable function, which is then applied to a case study of the Corset cigarette brand in the dissertation. In the sense of the integration model, this research manages to encompass data from different sources and show the role of the different steps of the model, and their integrated use to solve the case study facing the brand under study. One of the sources of the research is an own empirical consumer survey implemented for the dissertation. Under the concept of integration, it is clear that the obstacles to the development of the studied brand are on a cultural level, then with the help of well-defined semiotic analyses, the candidate was able to reach important conclusions and solutions for the brand.

The literature used is fully in line with the dissertation topic. The doctoral candidate refers to important sources, including books, collections, articles, corporate publications, institutional

documents, correctly cited in relation to the phenomena studied.

Description of contributions

The main contribution of this paper is the proposed integrated research model as the final theoretical result. The development of this model has been supported by the aforementioned research programmes for major case studies in marketing and sales. According to Taneva's conclusion, unique in the model is the involvement of semiotics in a common research tool with retail auditing. The proposed model can find application in a wide range of business sectors.

One more significant contribution of the thesis is the semiosphere of tobacco consumption, and should be mentioned that in the field of tobacco industry, this is probably the first attempt to apply the semiosphere model. The model aims to structure the culture under study, to reveal its inner mechanisms and to help create typologies of it.

In her analyses, Sevim Taneva applies Williams' typology of dominant, residual, and emergent codes. Considering the peculiarities of the tobacco business sector, she proposes an update of the typology by adding to it the category of perpetual codes, which is also a significant contribution of the dissertation.

Other contributions: levels of meaning making, explanation of research tools applied to the tobacco industry.

The abstract follows the thesis in its entirety. It formulates five contributions. Overall, they are characterized by their theoretical and applied nature.

Sevim Taneva has published three scientific papers, one of which in an international journal. Although there are not many publications, the candidate definitely meets the requirements for a quality dissertation.

Opinions, recommendations and comments

I have one note and one recommendation.

The parts of the dissertation that unfold the history and culture of tobacco are quite extensive, perhaps some of it could be brought out as an appendix to make the marketing and semiotic analyses stand out when reading it in particular.

The part of the dissertation dealing with the types of research solutions, the concept of analytic integration and the five-step integration model would constitute a subject for a

monograph. Such a publication could be used for educational purposes as well as applied by various business organizations.

In conclusion, this dissertation is a work of quality that undoubtedly succeeds in achieving its intended goals. As a result, with full conviction I vote positively, and I urge the Honourable Scientific Jury to do the same, that Sevim Asimova Taneva be awarded the degree of Doctor of Science and Education in the professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Semiotics).

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