Brand Communication as Intertextual and Intermedial Myth:
A Cultural Semiotic Reading for Audiovisual Campaigns

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Abstract

In a context of pervasive connectivity and multimedia environments, brand communication increasingly relies on discursive forms that transcend literal description to produce cultural meanings. These representational structures combine image and text across diverse formats and media, strategically engaging audiences and reconfiguring real referents into widely circulating symbolic narratives. This article advances conceptual foundations for a cultural–semiotic reading of brand communication, conceived as an intertextual and intermedial myth. The focus is on audiovisual and digital campaigns that adapt and appropriate authentic attributes, benefits, and spaces, transforming them into narratives of identity, belonging, and consumption. For exemplification, three main areas are considered: products such as food, clothing, or automobiles; services such as mobile telephony, entertainment venues, or urban transportation; and places such as tourist countries, heritage regions, or developed cities. Recent Portuguese campaigns illustrate these dynamics, demonstrating how cultural references are reworked into intertextual and intermedial myths within the online world. Without constituting an in–depth case study or a closed methodology, the article proposes an exploratory reading framework that can be applied to different communicational fields and sociocultural contexts. Ultimately, reflecting on brands as cultural semiotic myths clarifies their role in shaping collective imaginaries, generating symbolic value, and constructing shared social realities in the digital age.

Keywords: *semiotic myths; intertextuality; intermediality; brand communication; cultural branding.*

Introduction

Among the analytical possibilities of brand communication, this article proposes to approach it as a semiotic myth of an intertextual and intermedial nature, within a cultural semiotic perspective that addresses the complexity of its current sources, formats, and media. Its focus lies on brand communication understood as text, particularly in audiovisual and digital campaigns that adapt and appropriate actual referents – attributes, benefits, and spaces – into their own narratives, shaping cultural values and constructing truth. As a reference, this work considers the communication of typical products —food, clothing, or automobiles –, services – mobile telephony, entertainment venues,

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or urban transportation –, and places – tourist countries, heritage regions, or developed cities – as examples of consumption areas where discursive practices are articulated and cultural meanings are negotiated. To illustrate, three recent Portuguese campaigns provide concrete cases of those consumption areas where cultural references are reworked into intertextual and intermedial narratives. Sandeman's *The Taste of Sandeman* (2025) reframes a traditional wine through cosmopolitan codes of contemporary status; Vodafone Portugal's *Experimenta viver mais: Christmas 2024* (2024) explores family and youth rituals in a vision of fuller living beyond technological mediation; and Visit Portugal's *It's not tourism. It's Futourism* (2023) projects the country as a laboratory of sustainable, forward–looking tourism. Although not developed here as full case studies, these examples are revisited in the conclusions to demonstrate the framework's analytical potential and delimit the scope and projection of the suggested preliminary framework.

To achieve this proposal, the concepts of text, medium, intertextuality, and intermediality are explored and related from the perspectives of Bal (2002, 2009), Sanders (2006), Clüver (2007), and Hutcheon (2013). The framework of cultural semiotics is then delimited, conceived as a tool for the analysis of cultural signs in different formats and media, based on the approaches of Williams (1975), Hall (1997), Bal (2002, 2009), and Barker and Jane (2016), as well as the contributions of authors such as Barthes (1986, 1991), Hodge & Kress (1995), Rose (2001), and Oswald (2012, 2015), among others. In line with this, the ideas of Barthes (1986; 1991), Rose (2001), and Oswald (2012, 2015) allow us to delve deeper into the notion of the semiotic myth and its relevance for understanding how brand communication produces meanings. At last, the concept of brand and the understanding of branding are discussed, primarily supported by Holt (2004) and Batey (2013), from a perspective of identity, communication, and cultural management, focusing on the recognition and preference of brands as bearers of consumer values. These dynamics are understood as intertextual and intermedial adaptations or appropriations of real sources, created as new truths between senders and receivers in specific contexts.

Finally, although this article does not purport to constitute a full case study or a complete methodological proposal, it establishes conceptual and operational foundations for future cultural semiotic readings of audiovisual and digital brand communication campaigns. It advances an exploratory reading framework, which is briefly illustrated with examples already mentioned and revisited in the concluding discussion. Its contribution lies in offering a flexible and transversal analytical framework that invites us to reexamine how brand texts operate at the intersection of the denotative, connotative, and mythical, and how their narratives contribute to cultural

processes of consumption and representation in our actual hyperconnected environment.

Intertextuality and intermediality in the arts and consumer communication
A text can be defined as a set of intertwined signs that produce meanings in verbal, nonverbal, or mixed formats. From a communication and cultural perspective, this concept is beneficial for interdisciplinary analysis. As Mieke Bal (2009) observes:

> A word from everyday language, self–evident in literary studies, metaphorically used in anthropology, generalized in semiotics, ambivalently circulating in art history and film studies, and shunned in musicology, the concept of text seems to ask for trouble. But it also invokes disputes and controversies that can be wonderfully stimulating if 'worked through.' (21)

Although contested in some fields, this notion underpins current debates where pictures or films are considered "visual texts:" objects that "have, or produce, meaning, and that they promote such analytical activities as reading" (Bal 2009: 21). They can therefore be dismantled, like linguistic texts, and recombined culturally and semiotically to generate new readings.

Claus Clüver (2007: 19) extends this view by defining texts across different media as "multimedia texts." For him, intermediality concerns not only the coexistence of formats but also the transformation of narratives as they circulate between them. Adaptations and appropriations, such as films reworking literary sources, modify conventions of representation and create new meanings (Clüver 2007). Interpretation depends on the integrated experience of script, music, staging, acting, and multimediality (Clüver 2007: 25). This highlights intermedial or intersemiotic crossings where meaning emerges through specific media conditions.

Clüver also builds on Jürgen E. Müller – and Bohn, Müller, and Ruppert – to define medium as "that which mediates for and between humans a (meaningful) sign (or a combination of signs) with the aid of suitable transmitters across temporal and/or spatial distances" (2007: 30–31). Within each medium, genres and codes can only be understood in an intermedial context. As he summarises:

> Intermediality must be seen as a comprehensive phenomenon that includes all the relations, topics, and issues traditionally investigated by Interarts Studies […] and the inevitably intermedial character of each medium. (Clüver 2007: 32)

In this sense, adaptation and appropriation become central. Julie Sanders (2006) distinguishes adaptation as "a transpositional practice […] an act of re–vision in itself" (2006: 18) and appropriation as "a more decisive

journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (2006: 26). Both reveal the creative role of the author and the recipient as co–constructor of meaning, challenging traditional authorship interpretation (Bal 2002; Sanders 2006).

Bal (2002) already framed translation as transfer and intermediation, making it a valuable model for non–linguistic texts. Consequently, intertextuality is rewriting beyond imitation: a cooperative process that allows quotations, implicit references, adaptations, and appropriations of many kinds (Sanders 2006).

Linda Hutcheon (2013) further expands adaptation to contemporary formats:

> We have even more new materials at our disposal—not only film, television, radio, and the various electronic media, of course, but also theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments. The result? Adaptation has run amok. (xiii)

For Hutcheon (2013), intertexts may be printed, audiovisual, digital, spatial, or abstract, never subordinate to an "original" but distinct and situated. Rewriting always involves change, even unconsciously. In today's digital field, transmediality has intensified these processes, producing participatory experiences that turn the receiver into a co–creator alongside the sender.

Thus, brand communication can be analysed as a generator of intertextual and intermedial myths, articulating previous signifiers into new cultural forms. Audiovisual and digital campaigns function as intermedial intertexts that rewrite actual referents within newly constructed cultural narratives.

Cultural semiotics for social analysis: from the material to the abstract
Raymond Williams (1975) defines culture as a whole way of life recognisable in patterns of ideals, records, and social activity. Stuart Hall (1997) complements this view by emphasising that culture is made of shared meanings and values, produced and exchanged to interpret the world. Thus, an anthropological conception intersects with a communicative one, allowing an integrative approach to culture as a style of life visible in practices and objects. As Hall (1997) notes:

> To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves […] in ways which will be understood by each other. (2)

Chris Barker and Emma Jane synthesise Hall's perspective, defining culture as "practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific

society" (2016: 9). Social identities are constructed and revised through discourse, and nothing in people's lives, relationships, products, or communications is outside cultural analysis (Barker & Jane 2016). In short, culture generates shared meanings expressed in artistic and consumer texts – from books and films to brands – through signs and languages deployed across media.

Bal stresses that culture is "a plural, changing, and mobile existence" (2002: 9), and that cultural analysis studies not abstractions but concrete objects (2009). For her, definitions are inevitably programmatic, grounded in democratic debate and anti–elitist principles. This makes cultural studies a field open to interdisciplinary readings and interpretations of texts, works, or "things" (2002, 2009).

In communication, Hall (1997) highlights the sign as the link between conceptual maps and their representation in writing, sound, or image. People construct meaning through these processes, reinforcing linguistic and cultural codes. Culture studies, rooted in literary traditions, thus broaden the analysis of texts within historical and social contexts (Gil 2008).

This operational approach allows the study of both classic cultural texts and newer consumer goods with substantial symbolic impact (Gil 2008). Complex signs and texts can be read as images – not only visually but also metaphorically – (Bal 2002). Branding strategies, for example, produce audiovisual capsules circulated on mass platforms that invite audiences to know, prefer, or visit an offering. Such campaigns can be analysed as intermedial intertexts, rewriting referents across denotative, connotative, and mythical levels. While methodologies abound in cultural studies, specific tools for cultural signs remain scarce (Baptista 2009). Hence, models from art, linguistics, and the humanities remain essential (Bal 2002, 2009; Baptista 2009).

Semiotics offers one of these transversal approaches. For Roland Barthes, it is "a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content" (1991: 110), extending beyond linguistics. As Bal notes, novels and images alike require reading to "become semiotically active" (2002: 50). Semiotic analysis thus applies to images, gestures, sounds, objects, and rituals (Barthes 1986).

Building on Saussure (1916), Barthes (1986, 1991) defines the sign as a material signifier – sound, object, image – with an abstract signified – content or mental image. Meaning is collectively constructed, not inherent to the thing itself, constituting a consensually associated mental representation (Hall 1997). In this sense, Hodge and Kress (1995) underline that:

> A general semiotic theory must try to theorise the full range of semiotic acts, including writing, art, film and the mass media, where the relationships between participants are more complex and abstract than is the case with a face–to–face conversational exchange. (19)

Gillian Rose (2001) underscores the instability of meaning: signifiers and signifieds are socially constructed, contingent on cultural codes and myths (see also Bal 2002, 2009). Barthes (1986) already expanded semiological analysis to include myth, narrative, journalism, and everyday objects, making semiotics adaptable across anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and consumer studies (Barthes 1986; Rose 2001; Oswald 2012, 2015).

Bal (2009) argues that solid cultural analysis requires a hermeneutic and non–reductionist reading. Authors such as Barthes (1986, 1991), Hodge and Kress (1995), and Rose (2001) show how meaning arises through associations and contrasts between signs. Barthes further distinguishes between denotative signs, which are of direct interpretation, and connotative ones, which mobilise deeper cultural meanings (Rose 2001).

For Oswald (2015), semiotics is both science and art:

> Semiotic research is scientific inasmuch as it relies upon observable, recurring codes […] It is also an art because it requires a greater degree of spontaneity and creativity from the researcher than traditionally used in qualitative research. One of the advantages of semiotic research for marketing is that it exposes the inherent tensions and ambiguities structuring consumer creativity and cultural diversity in the marketplace. It relies on the power of metaphor, free association, and visual media to highlight these tensions in a set of data. (4)

This cultural–semiotic approach facilitates intertextual and intermedial readings by recognising cultural codes and recurring patterns in texts and signs. It supports analytical protocols tailored to diverse cases. It helps identify emerging trends in popular culture, whether in media, literature, film, advertising, or digital environments (Oswald 2015). Cultural semiotics thus integrates sign, context, codes, myths, and rituals into a dynamic communication process, linking the familiar with the new, the concrete with the abstract, and even the mythical. This perspective is particularly fruitful for analysing how brand communication mobilises meaning in varied cultural contexts, leading to the discussion of brands as intertextual and intermedial myths.

Brands as semiotic, intertextual, and intermedial myths
Semiotics enables us to read diverse forms of cultural communication as translinguistic elements – such as books, films, products, or brands, in visual, audio, or mixed media. To go beyond reference and description, Barthes (1986) stresses the move from denotation to connotation, from the concrete to the abstract. He even proposes a further level of meaning, the semiotic myth:

> A system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form. (Barthes 1991: 107)

Myth does not need to be oral; it can take shape in written, photographic, or audiovisual media, in news, sports, shows, or advertisements (Barthes 1991). It constitutes a second semiological system, where denotative signs become signifiers at another level of meaning, generating mythological signs (Rose 2001). Barthes highlights its unstable and motivated character: myth is neither natural nor absolute but appears "innocent," consumed as if it were natural (1991). As Oswald adds, meanings in consumer culture "are subject to the effects of history, ideology, and consumer agency" (2015: 19), shaped by denotation, connotation, and mythology. In branding, this semiotic burden is strategic, since it "endows signs with nuances and shades of meaning that people associate with the brand […] highly dependent on the context" (Oswald 2012: 55).

From this perspective, myth can be read as an intermedial intertext, rewriting sets of signs from real sources and transferring them across formats and media. Connotations and myths are not incidental but constructed by producers or senders to orient perception (Barthes 1986, 1991; Oswald 2012, 2015).

A brand can therefore be understood as a material, social, and cultural super–sign of identification and consumption (Holt 2004; Kapferer 2012). It promises and associates sets of meanings (McCracken 2005; Batey 2013) and possible worlds (Semprini 2006), which are managed through the symbolic and cultural reputation of the branded object (Anholt 2010). For Mark Batey (2013), branding encompasses naming, marketing, and its discursive articulation through texts and images, often via campaigns and narratives that add recognition and value.

Douglas Holt's (2004) concept of cultural branding proposes that brands acquire real power when they become consensual expressions of values shared by a community. In his words:

> What makes a brand powerful is the collective nature of these perceptions; the stories have become conventional and so are continually reinforced because they are treated as truths in everyday interactions. (Holt 2004: 3)

According to Holt (2004), brands function as cultural myths, providing references for identity and self–expression. Their value is nowadays built through audiovisual and digital campaigns that adapt circulating references into meaningful narratives. Competing with films, music, or television, advertisements manage to present myths that consolidate the identity of brands and their consumers. In many cases, brands recycle materials already

circulating in the media, revising or reworking them to reinforce their cultural relevance. Therefore, Holt (2004) suggests that the management of mythical narratives – convincingly adapted and appropriated – is essential to consolidating a brand's cultural relevance.

In summary, brands function as complex signs that embody attributes, benefits, and spaces, often reconfiguring sociocultural desires into intertextual and intermedial myths. Analysing brand communication from this cultural–semiotic perspective clarifies how campaigns rearticulate local and global referents, thereby reinforcing brand identities and positions. This provides the basis for the closing section.

Conclusions and implications
The discussion presented has demonstrated that brand communication constitutes a fertile field for exploration through cultural and semiotic readings. Conceiving it as a myth, articulated through intertextuality and intermediality, allows us to understand how real attributes, benefits, and spaces are reconfigured through representation strategies across diverse formats and media.

Instead of outlining a full methodological proposal, this article advances an exploratory framework for interpreting contemporary brand campaigns. Audiovisual capsules disseminated in mass and digital media prove especially productive, as their discourses circulate and are continually reinterpreted, redefining cultural and territorial references through synergistic articulations of languages and images. Products, services, and places are thus reframed in mythical terms – products through narratives of craving or status, services through myths of well–being or efficiency, and places as territories of relaxation or progress. This framework allows a consistent reading of branding cases, progressing from their intertextual and intermedial strategies to the semiotic layers of meaning – denotative, connotative, and mythical – , and to their broader cultural projection. We will briefly show this with three brands from the product, service, and place categories, specifically in the recent Portuguese context.

The Taste of Sandeman (Sandeman 2025) produced by Sogrape was conceived by the creative studio Solid Dogma in collaboration with Portuguese illustrator Tiago Lobo Pimentel. It consists of a series of illustrated digital ads, each narrating short everyday scenes associated with a specific product in the brand's portfolio, and circulated across social media and online platforms. Its original referent is Port wine – originally from the city of Porto – , a product with centuries of local tradition and international recognition, historically tied to the iconic figure of the "Don" as a marker of brand identity. Intertextually, the campaign reuses this traditional character as an internal citation, while also engaging with the visual languages of comics, editorial illustration, and

contemporary advertising art, thereby establishing continuity with global representations of premium beverages. Intermedially, the pieces are adapted for multiple supports – from short capsules to banners, posters, and merchandising – evoking the aesthetics of classic Mad Men publicity while circulating fluidly in today's web and social media environments. At the denotative level, the campaign depicts young adults, individually or in groups, in luminous and modern urban spaces, stylishly dressed, accompanied by glasses of ruby or tawny Port styles, with the Don presence and the product bottles always visibly integrated in the scene. Connotatively, these images evoke different cool cocktails, representing cosmopolitanism, sophistication, and elegance, and reframing the act of drinking Porto wine as an aspirational lifestyle. At the mythical level, Sandeman becomes a fresh symbol of global prestige, transforming a local brand into an emblem of status and cultural belonging. Culturally, this case exemplifies how a traditional product is rearticulated as both a national heritage and an international icon, thereby reinforcing Portugal's image as a modern, desirable, and exportable entity.

Experimenta viver mais: Christmas 2024 (Vodafone Portugal 2024) was disseminated through the brand's official YouTube channel and adapted for other platforms. It is a two–and–a–half–minute spot about a Portuguese nuclear family travelling at Christmas to their grandparents' rural home. Its original referent is Vodafone, a telecommunications operator with a strong national presence, reframing its role through a seasonal and familial storyline. Intertextually, the campaign draws on conventions of holiday cinema and advertising, utilising narrative continuity, montage, and piano with light vocals to heighten emotional impact. A voice–over and on–screen closing texts tie the story to Vodafone's broader brand discourse, placing the spot within global telecom campaigns that prioritise emotional connection over technical features. Intermedially, the spot circulates across YouTube and social media, with adaptability for other broadcast formats, embodying the multi–platform adaptability of contemporary advertising. Denotatively, the narrative depicts a mother, father, and adolescent son preparing for Christmas, travelling by car to the countryside, where tensions arise from the boy's preoccupation with his mobile phone. Scenes include festive rituals, the reunion with grandparents, and a parallel storyline in which the son reencounters a local girl, wandering through fields, sheltering from the rain, and sharing a kiss, all while the phone is forgotten. Connotatively, these images juxtapose digital distraction with authentic presence, linking family bonds, nature, and youthful affection to a vision of "more life" beyond screens. Mythically, Vodafone positions itself as a mediator of social values, proposing that true fulfilment lies in a fuller life less mediated – or intoxicated – by technology, a message reinforced by the statistic that 41% of young people spend over six hours online daily. Culturally, the campaign situates the brand within Portugal's contemporary imaginaries of

balance between digital connectivity and lived experience, projecting Vodafone as an enabler of deeper human connection.

It's not tourism. It's futourism (Visit Portugal 2023) was developed through the Portuguese destination brand's official YouTube channel and digital platforms, and is a one–minute and thirty–seven–second spot that positions the nation as a tourism brand oriented toward innovation and sustainability. Its referent is Portugal itself, reframed not only as a leisure destination but as a site of experimentation and shared responsibility. Intertextually, the capsule combines visual and discursive codes from arts, science, ecology, and futurist aesthetics, drawing on cinematic and documentary conventions of travel advertising while invoking cultural registers of history, consumption, and discovery. Intermedially, the piece is designed for flexible circulation across online environments, event screenings, and promotional ads, highlighting the adaptability of its message to diverse audiences. Denotatively, the spot presents emblematic Portuguese architectures, cultural landmarks, natural landscapes, flora and fauna, gastronomy, and human details through close–ups of skin and eyes, a bicycle ride, footsteps on sand, and the beam of a lighthouse, accompanied by a recurring slogan delivered in voice and text: *"It's not tourism. It's futourism."* Connotatively, these juxtapositions weave together images of nature, diversity, beauty, openness, and adaptability, presenting Portugal as a country where ecological awareness and cultural vitality coexist as desirable values. Mythically, the campaign elevates tourism into a narrative of renewal, aligning the change of the year with the idea of a social movement already underway, one that invites travellers and locals alike to acknowledge their footprints, care for traditions, and correct what unsustainable lifestyles may have neglected. Culturally, the case underscores Portugal's dual role as both guardian of heritage and laboratory for future tourism, situating this discourse within a broader trend of "futourism" that rearticulates global sustainability narratives. This dual identity reflects the kind of cultural tensions – between tradition and modernity, authenticity and marketability – that branding transforms into collective myths, reinforcing its role in shaping visions of responsible change and positioning Portugal within broader debates on sustainability and innovation.

By situating these types of cases in a mythical key, we understand how brand communication not only promotes tangible or intangible goods, but also articulates cultural imaginaries that circulate intermedially and are rewritten in different formats and media. The analysis of these signifying processes demonstrates how brand narratives continually reshape cultural myths, creating new appropriations and truths in the contemporary setting. Although this article focuses on the underlying conceptual proposal, future research could apply this framework to deepen comparative case studies that examine

how different sociocultural contexts rewrite brand myths. Recognising these dynamics opens possibilities for understanding not only the circulation of messages but also the construction of collective imaginaries in the transmedia and digital era. In doing so, the article fulfils its initial aim of outlining how brand communication, conceived as intertextual and intermedial myth, reworks products, services, and places into cultural narratives that circulate across formats and media. In this sense, the article does not claim to provide a closed methodology, but rather an exploratory reading framework that can be mobilised in different contexts to interpret how brands generate and circulate cultural myths.

Finally, analysing brand communication as intertextual and intermedial myth clarifies the circulation of messages. It enriches the fields of semiotics and strategic communication by providing critical tools to interpret brand discourses and understand how cultural myths are continually rearticulated in the digital and transmedia age.

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