The Communication of Luxury: A Semiotic Analysis of a Luxury Brand's Perfume Commercial

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Abstract: This study explores the mode of communication of luxury in the case of Chanel. It includes a review of theories regarding the cultural concept of luxury. It discusses the psychological, historical, cultural and sociological aspects of luxury in order to explain its dynamics and significance. It also elucidates the discourse of advertising, and the practice of luxury branding and communication. The methodological base for the study is semiotics with its structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to meaning, and its emphasis on the complexity of cultural systems through discourse. The analytical section is an in-depth description of a Chanel commercial, deconstructing the component parts according to semiotic and discursive categories. It offers an interpretation of the commercial's intended (preferred) reading concerning this particular luxury brand of perfume and conclusions regarding the distinguished modes of communicating luxury.

Keywords: luxury, commercial, communication, meaning, brand, value

1. Introduction

The luxury market is currently enormous as it rose to an estimated value of $1.2 trillion around the world in 2017; however, it has experienced a considerable upsurge since the 1990s. In the period between 1996 and 2017 it rose 6% annually on average (D'Arpizio, Levato, Kamel and de Montgolfier 2017). What is more, the market is expected to be on the rise in the near future. Thus, it is worth devoting special attention to the increase in digital luxury advertising, which is currently largely made of video commercials and posts ("Hospitality leads digital transformation of the luxury category" 2018). *Business Insider* noted a staggering and rapid 63% growth in digital luxury

expenditures in 2016 (since 2013), while pointing towards some newly emerging phenomena, for example the amount of money for promotion of luxury brands in magazines decreased 8%, which suggests only a modest but steady shift and the luxury brands do not lavish their money on digital channels yet (Gallagher 2017). Yet it has been projected that all luxury purchases will be online-influenced in 2025 (D'Arpizio et al. 2017). These numbers imply the rising power of digitalization in luxury consumption, as this special segment of shoppers is digitally engaged and "the Internet is the only medium that can reach all luxury buyers in all markets" (Chehab and Merks-Benjaminsen 2013).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that luxury brands have always been more cautious and slower in entering the digital environment, in contrast to other businesses. Luxury is a complex meaning container that possesses various intangible characteristics and forms a very distinct part of the market. Its management has struggled to face the challenges of communicating its essence through easily accessible online channels (Okonkwo 2009). From the very beginning, luxury brands have been questioning the appropriateness and effectiveness of the digital media to transmit their exclusive values. However, since the digital environment started to advance, there comes a question: how do the brands manage to transmit their "luxuriousness"? That is why the exploration of digital luxury advertising seems essential to obtain a deeper insight into the ways of communicating luxury, which helps comprehend the luxury advertising's unique position in the marketing world.

The study considers a one-minute-long Chanel N°5 perfume commercial as a case study.[1] A commercial is considered as a purposeful text built of signs and susceptible to analytical deconstruction (Gottdiener 1995). Therefore, the study provides a semiotic perspective that aims at analysing many techniques of communication embedded in the commercial ranging from language, to pictures and music and attempting to investigate systematically how these semiotic elements work with each other within the text to create luxury meaning (Kress and Leeuwen 2006). Additionally, in order to explain how the meaning is created, the study draws on media semiotics (Chandler

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[1] Available from official Chanel You Tube channel at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkKROkzYdXs.

2002). It elaborates on the very specific role of luxury advertising in brand strategy, symbolic consumption and the significance of multimodality in the transmission of meaning.

2. The Fundamentals of Luxury

The word luxury is frequently incorporated in people's everyday speech to name or describe certain material objects, services or some ways of living. Interestingly, this often happens without the awareness of how rich the notion really is and how differently the concept is realized (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebel 2007). Although it has been recognized that luxuries as products fall into four distinct categories including: fashion items, fragrances, pampering goods and alcoholic beverages (Fionda and Moore 2009), there has not yet been an official agreement on what determines a luxury brand, product or service (Hudders, Pandelaere and Vyncke 2013). Essentially, the challenge of capturing the definition of luxury lies in the ever-developing and highly relational nature of the idea of luxury that depends on many cultural variables. There are a number of aspects that strongly articulate the very basic traits of luxury. First of all luxury has always revolved around the notion of exclusiveness, or scarcity and a high price. In the past, costly fabrics and other pricey materials that were hard to come by caused the luxury products to be rare, because not every-one could afford them. The experience of possessing something exclusive is now cultivated by luxury brands that launch limited editions, carefully choose places of distribution and generally avoid production on a large scale, which gives the owner a feeling of privilege of belonging to a special, very narrow group (Hudders, Pandelaere and Vyncke 2013).

Uniqueness is another facet of luxury that falls within the exclusive category. Luxury brands are meant to be exceptional and distinctive as much as it is possible (Hudders, Pandelaere and Vyncke 2013). It is about being so special that one does not even think of comparing it to something else. In pursuit of originality of design and unusual external beauty, luxury brands sometimes tend to decrease the product's practicality to a minimum to achieve the outstanding aesthetics (Mortelmans 2005). Finally, luxury brands live up to their very demanding quality standards. In the past, only the most affluent people could afford luxuries, as their production was time consuming and relied on work of highly skilled artisans doing almost everything by hand

(Amatulli, De Angelis, Pichierri and Guido 2018). That is why the world of luxury does not except middle-of-the-road solutions, as the price that one pays for luxury goods should always stand for the product's durability and excellent craftsmanship (Mortelmans 2005). Nevertheless, it cannot be forgotten that a cluster of luxury features is not sufficient to define this broad concept, so it seems essential to elaborate on more abstract dimensions of luxury.

According to Kapferer and Bastein (2009, 5), "luxury is a culture" and thus a key element when attempting to grasp the modern identity of luxury is getting to know the fundamental rules of its "inner dynamics", which finds its roots in the historical background. The researchers track the first representations of luxury and its social practices. Believing in immortality, in some ancient cultures people started burying their relatives, equipping them with everything they needed in the afterlife; however, with time the objects became not only better crafted and sophisticated, but also stood for symbols of the power of the dead. That is why expensive body decorations, fighting gear, horses and even things as precious as ships were found in some graves. The emergence of the first civilizations, such as the Egyptian Kingdom, showed a direct correlation bet-ween luxury and socialization. The religious and ritualistic traces of luxury in the past are the reasons for one of its most important characteristics: "Luxury is about elevation" (Kapferer and Bastein 2009, 7).

Another significant part of the discussion about luxury that expands our understanding of it revolves around the opposite functions of use and waste: fulfillment of basic needs versus something that goes beyond the category of necessity, which is (pointless) excess (Mortelmans 2005). The "needless" characteristic is present today as well and is a major issue when considering the identity of luxury. To illustrate this, Kapferer and Bastein emphasize that the core idea of luxury is "needlessly superb, rewarding, expensive," which is key to distinguishing a luxury brand from a premium brand where everything is logically justified. In the meantime, luxury does not need any functional argumentation, facts and proofs (Kapferer and Bastein 2009). For instance, luxury dining is only about pleasure, not a meal, because one is left hungry, and wearing a scarf on your shoulder is luxury as your shoulder is not going to catch a cold (Rapaille 2015). However, there is more to luxury than going beyond utility.

One may ask what is the added value that makes precious, unique, rare and superb-quality things luxury. Mortelmans (2005, 508) explains that luxury

objects are "meaning-producing devices circulating in a specific cultural environment." The world of tangible things possesses a socially grounded life in which people rate the objects in line with the meaning that they attach to them. Objects can be categorized according to their utility, their economic worth or they can be used to carry symbolic value, such as birthday presents. The sign-value category, according to the author, separates the object from its straightforward, factual meaning-giving place to a vast range of unfixed connotations. Purchasing luxuries falls predominantly within sign-value correlation, as it does not limit itself to mere functional or even symbolic motives. A good instance is the acquisition of a brand new luxury vehicle not for its speed or technologies, but for its ability to mark social position, status, membership or splendor. Advertising discourse is one of the most powerful players in the construction of such sign-values. Mortelmans (2005) states that luxury connotations are ascribed to objects that are used as a sign of differentiation. In other words, luxury meaning is added when material culture is harnessed socially to distinguish the owners from the rest, whose mutual knowledge about luxury is an essential component. Mortelmans (2005) stresses that the abstract dimension of luxury might cause some ordinary things to switch to luxury in some circumstances and become a demonstration of refinement and style, as coding a product as luxury will fail if the object is not put to use as an indicator of social position.

Luxury goods have the power to answer people's psychological cravings. The ability of luxury to carry value on the psychological level is considered to be one of the most differentiating factors from products not belonging to the luxury model (Nia and Zaichkowsky 2000). According to Hennings, Wiedmann and Siebel's (2007) conceptual model, the overall luxury value is realized through its pricing and functional dimension, but, more importantly, it lies in individual and social value. The researchers point out that people not only make use of the symbolic meaning of luxury goods to manage their actual or desired self-identity but also use luxury objects to communicate that image to other people. Moreover, consumers highly appreciate the emotional side of luxury, whose consumption provides such comforts as sensual enjoyment, elation and the experience of beauty. The pursuit of self-indulgence triggers a feeling of completion and reward (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebel 2007).

In brief, the definition of luxury ought to embrace a holistic approach, since it is highly perceptual and operates on different levels. The idea of luxury is a network of connotations that refer to tangible things, such as vehicles,

fragrances, accessories or clothing items, as well as to abstract elements such as time or experiences. In the face of quickly transforming world-wide markets and various globalizing consumption cultures, it seems that luxury can be grasped as a peculiar "transnational type of culture" (Hudders, Pandelaere and Vyncke 2013, 3). Luxury-related concepts also stand for elements such as a required way of behaving, norms and a rich set of practiced cultural values (Wiedmann, Hennigs and Siebel 2007).

3. The Discourse of Advertising and Branding

In the modern world, advertising is omnipresent: it pops up at us from every corner. In spite of its prominence, it seems to be profoundly marginalized in comparison to others less present forms of culture in our daily live. At the same time, people recall a commercial's words and images with greater ease than those of more highly appreciated forms like poems or art. It is a controversial genre too, as it evokes emotion, grabs attention, provokes discussions and, more importantly, it is so strongly entrenched in society that it is considered as an indispensable element of everyday life (Cook 1992). This strange position of advertising implies its complex nature and the significant role it plays as social practice.

According to *Cambridge Dictionary*, advertising is a business whose core function is to talk the audience into making a purchase of products or services, or to make things to be purchased known to others. Advertisements are characterized as highly purposeful texts that are deliberately crafted to carry the preferred reading (Barthes 1977; Bignell 2002). However, there is much more to advertising than pure selling. Modern advertisements do not openly urge us to consume and to go on endless shopping sprees. They seem to be more focused on entertaining us. From a semiotic point of view their objective is to make us actively take part in deconstructing their messages while plunging us into the pleasant game of decoding what we can see and hear. Bignell (2002) stresses that advertisements are sophisticated meaning constructions based on already used signs, codes and social myths.

It is crucial to mention that advertising is not limited to advertisements understood as isolated texts within the pool of various circulating messages. Advertising is also a discourse, which means that ads work best with the context of communication, which takes into consideration vital factors that make

up the meaning as well. Thanks to a discourse perspective on advertising, apart from sheer analysis of language, the approach takes notice of music, images, medium of delivery or participants. It recognizes reasons of the communicative act, functions of the text; it takes into account the situation and all different variables that go with language: voice, behavior, gestures, face expressions even feelings and intentions. The blending of context and a text gives a holistic view and thus also gives birth to a model of analysis of advertisements defined to be the sum of intertwined signs represented in various modes (Cook 1992).

Advertising is closely related to branding. Okonkwo (2016) asserts that branding has transformed into one of the most vital business segments. Brands are not essentially the goods; they are not an economic institution, not even the services. The author defines brands as "a name, term, sign, symbol" or a constellation of these various elements that serves to distinguish the brand from its rivals (Okonkwo 2016, 9). A brand is a distinguishable body of everything that the maker has to offer, which stands for the reassurance of quality and high standards. It is an indicator for the clients that what they intend to acquire is going to fulfill the brand's commitments (Room 1989). The immediate recollection and interpretation of particular goods is predominantly the consequence of effective branding capable of bringing about an emotional and mental bond with the brand. For Okonkwo (2016), goods are just raw materials that were given some characteristics and qualities which make them physical, whereas brands come down to the total of all encounters and messages experienced by consumers, which leads them to develop a differentiating image of the brand rooted in the psychological and material advantages. This implies that branding and its connotations are placed in the subconsciousness of the purchaser, which turns all consumers into inevitable elements of the branding structure.

Laura R. Oswald, the author of *Creating Value* (2015), suggests looking at branding from a semiotic and cultural perspective. She stresses that culture and marketing are reciprocally connected and the recurrent encounter of messages makes for the consumer's knowledge of various circulating codes:

> Brands are sign systems that consumers associate with the brand name, logo, and other proprietary assets. Brands, like consumers, are products of their environments. They draw meaning from their positioning in the competitive set, from the perception

of value in the product category and from trends in popular culture. Brands also contribute to the cultural system because the relationship between culture and brands is dialectical. Through the repeated contact with marketing messages, consumers come to associate certain symbols with specific product categories, and incorporate these codes in turn into their repertoire of cultural codes (Oswald 2015, 114).

Brands penetrate the thinking of society, specifically its awareness, through omnipresent communication that creates links by joining clients with marketing symbols in the social domain. In turn, the participants of the market play a part in the generation of brand definition when they make use of the marketing sign in life contexts, behaviors, activities as well as self-produced advertising promotion. A meaning of the brand brought to being by consumers then travels within culture through different modes (Oswald 2015).

Successful luxury brands exist thanks to extraordinary, purposeful marketing plans. Okonkwo (2016) points out that luxury brand managers are aware that the external pleasantness, sophisticated execution and artistry of the offerings mean nothing when they exist alone. The products can only be successfully represented through powerful brands that are able to allure the psyche of the client. While the products form a solid base for the luxury brand, branding is what keeps them alive. The author suggests that creating a luxury brand and its successful direction turns out to be a tremendously lengthy procedure. It needs a steady coherent plan, inventive approaches, strict supervision and persistent evaluation. In spite of a great number of brands aspiring to become luxurious as well as some struggling to launch their own luxury brands, only a few manage to make it work out. The top luxury brands are those that can find equilibrium between being never out of fashion through stable brand philosophy and long tradition; being present and pertinent among competitive brands and lastly being original in creation of the time to come (Okonkwo, 2016). The author also stresses that luxury buyers anticipate unconventionality and freshness in crafting new fashions. Purchasers are not interested in brands which, before production, ponder about what the consumers might want. Luxury shoppers value those that comprehend the psyche of the consumer, grasp the dynamics of fluctuating styles and even modes of thinking faster than the clients do.

Kapferer and Bastein (2009) report that luxury's chief function is the management of social position, that is what one conveys to others, particularly in terms of refinement. That is why it has to be dynamic in the cultural sphere. This facet of luxury is extremely ingenious and diverges from other non-luxury products. That is the cause of a remarkably contrasting way of communication employed by the luxury world that is far from hard selling. Within luxury advertising, something is expressed to construct the dream and to fuel the brand's worth, not to make a classic market exchange. Luxury communication takes place away from the actual purchase. The narration, the language used to speak about the brand and its offerings is imaginary. Moreover, it has to be indefinite enough so that many consumers can relate to it and discover their individual involvement in the dream. This, according to Kapferer and Bastein (2009), suggests a sophisticated and creative communication with the power to establish social codes. It must not appear too old-fashioned, explicit or straightforward, but should revolve around being figurative and emblematic. The consumers are somehow given a free hand to construct their own meaning out of the subordinate text and thus satisfy their need to dream. This technique turns out to be especially in tune with the aim of giving prominence to the spiritual and experiential feature of luxury expression and consumption.

The aim of producing lasting experiences and strengthening the client's hopes, wishes, expectations and urges (facets that are representative of luxury products) can be effectively achieved by means of visuals. The reason behind this is that imagery has a projective potential. It provides the consumer with more space and freedom to make sense of some information in comparison with a linguistic text. Therefore, it is highly possible that this encourages the consumer to direct their thinking towards his aspirations or visions – and ultimately to dream (Amatulli, Angelis, Pichierri and Guido 2018). That is why a visual commercial has been chosen as an object of analysis here; however, first, the methodological basis for this analysis will be explained.

4. Basic Concepts and Approaches in Semiotics

Semiotics is one of the crucial prerequisites to an effective analysis of any kinds of commercials, as they are texts that are deliberately crafted to achieve certain goals through various component messages. Therefore, it appears essential to discuss the inner workings of this discipline. Daniel Chandler (2002, 1)

warns the reader that semiotics, although it entirely comes down to "the study of signs", is at the same time a ubiquitous and diversified subject. Umberto Eco (1976) provides an extensive explanation of semiotics, asserting that it has to do with everything that can be regarded as a sign. This means that semiotics relates not only to what we are used to name as actual "signs" on a daily basis, but essentially to anything that represents something else. Thus, signs when looked at from a semiotic perspective comprise of seemingly distant categories ranging from words both written and spoken, visuals, music, the way we use our bodies while speaking and tangible objects. However, modern semioticians do not investigate signs separately but analyze them as a unit of a much bigger network of signs belonging to, for example, one genre or medium. Their aim is to track the process of meaning production and expose the way the real life is depicted (Chandler 2002).

Ferdinand de Saussure developed a structuralist theory of linguistic sign (Saussure 1983). He claimed that a sign can be broken down into two component parts, which is a signifier and a signified. Modern authors most often define the signifier as a kind of form which the sign obtains, whereas the signified is the idea to which it relates (Chandler 2002; Oswald 2015). However, Saussure stresses that the linguistic sign is not a correlation between the name and the object, but it is a relation between the physical impression of sound and the idea brought to the mind of the speaker (Saussure 1983). That is also why he treats these two elements as sheer "psychological" entities. The interrelation between the signifier and the signified is called "signification" while the sign is everything that comes out from identification of the signifier with the signified (Chandler 2002). In semiotics languages split up the sphere of thinking, giving rise to concepts which form people's experiences (Bignell 2002). For instance in French "mouton" is the equivalent of English "sheep" referring to an animal and "mutton" – to a kind of meat. This does not mean that the French do not differentiate these two things, but they attach more importance to lamb on account of their highly refined eating culture that takes precedence over wool and textiles, so valued in the case of England. That is why the lexicon naming kinds of lamb meat in French is so extensive in comparison to English. This case clarifies the way cultural codes shape the importance people attach to products and their categories and thus shape how these wares are portrayed in signs, emblems and habitual behaviour. This knowledge is crucial while looking closer at case studies on luxury, as it explains dissimilarities in the estimated worth of luxuries in different markets, justifying it with cultural

contrasts (Oswald 2015). For Saussure, signs generate meaning when they are an element of a systematic and conceptual organization: what constitutes "value" of a sign is the interrelation between other signs belonging to the structure (Chandler 2002).

Roland Barthes, a French critic, developed crucial semiotic concepts related to the semiotic-centered deconstruction of modern media (Bignell 2002). Barthes's brief essay on Italian food advertising for Panzani pasta (Barthes 1964) puts Saussure's ideas of semiotic deconstruction in language to use in the examination of images. The writer opted to inspect an advertisement on account of the conscious and purposive character of communication that this form contains (Stokes 2003) and provided an insightful analysis of a print advertisement across two dimensions: the denotative (literal) and connotative (interpretative) one (Barthes 1964). Firstly, Barthes delves into the linguistic plane, which is the label with the name of the brand. He notices that Panzani communicates more than just how the company is called, but more importantly its sound gives an impression of "Italianicity." The second function appears when the linguistic message is an indispensable element that accompanies the image and thus makes it possible to convey the intended message (like in comics). After this the author goes on to the study of pictures, firstly from the denotative perspective. However, he emphasizes that there is no way to come across a literal image with no undertones in the domain of advertising. It would be abstract to consider visuals in separation from symbolic meaning since each person participating in a society possesses some knowledge at hand that urges to see more than what is physically represented by the signifier (Barthes 1964). The next step, probably the most prominent, is to identify the hidden, non-literal message. The whole scene represents a conscious way of shopping and the matching of colors (yellow, green and red) symbolizes *Italianicity*. Interestingly, Barthes remarks that a native Italian would scarcely arrive at this connotation, while it is noticeable for the French that rely on reinforced tourist expectations. Finally, the entire organization of the image recalls a signified that has its place in art – still life paintings. The conventional realm of signifieds or connotations is defined by Barthes as an *ideology*. Lastly, the author also coins the term "rhetoric of the image" which stands for the whole arrangement of signifiers able to imply the signifieds (Barthes 1964).

While denotation is the exact, fixed, or simple message that one derives from a sign, that is, the utterances or images precisely about an object, connotation is an interpretation which the thing brings to mind: it is about

what it represents from a personal standpoint. In Barthes's essay, connotation enacts cultural significations, mythologies and beliefs. The meaning obtained on the connotative level embodies all the cultural definitions connected with the particular thing. They originate in previous encounters or recurrent attachments made between a symbol and certain object (Smith et al. 2004).

If one looks at advertisements, daily reports on TV and other media texts such as movies, it is obvious that verbal signs, images, and other symbols are not utilized merely to indicate something, but also in order to precipitate a variety of associations. Barthes dubbed this societal fact – the joining of signs and their symbolic meaning to form certain communication – the generation of "myth." This term relates to modes of processing about individuals, goods, locations, or concepts that are constructed to convey certain messages to the receiver of the material. For instance, if the viewer watches a shoe advertisement, in which a person is getting out of a Rolls-Royce, the scene does not solely represent a pair of high heels and a make of car. It connects the overtones of luxury that are obtainable through the symbol "Rolls-Royce" with the footwear, implying a mythic signification – this wardrobe item is an element of socially advantaged lifestyle (Bignell 2002). The high heels and the car were deliberately arranged together so that they seem alikes since they are both expensive and stylish – this reveals a metaphorical relation between these two. However, the fact that one can observe only a glimpse of the shoe is not important as this sign points to the whole figure, owner of the shoe. This unreal advertisement employs an elaborate mixture of signs in order to invest the identified things with mythic message. Bignell (2002) states that myth seizes an already used sign and causes it to operate as a signifier on another rank. The symbol of "Rolls-Royce" turns into a signifier with the signified concept of luxury, for instance. In this sense, myth resembles in its structure a certain type of language that puts to use already circulating signs and builds a brand new sign structure out of them. It must be mentioned that myth is not a made-from-scratch, pure and unbiased language. It picks up the operating signs and the ideas they evoke, and intentionally applies them to fulfill certain social function.

The idea of a code is pivotal to semiotic analysis (Dyer 2009). The codes provide a rationale for the social side of sign structures, as they control the linking of particular definition with symbolic portrayal in a specified culture, for example relating diamonds to social standing. Codes also explain the shared reading of such resources as body language, hues and shapes. They structure people's

reasoning about the world according to "prevailing meaning schemes" that differ across cultures and times. They frequently remain unquestioned and are assumed to "have always been there," so are of high importance in people's cognition when making sense of things or pondering about them. For instance, long blond hair interpreted through the frame of femininity points to the signified of woman (Dyer 2009).

Post-structuralist theoretical model of semiotics shifts the focus from the codes as ordering principles for signs to the reciprocal relation between codes and how they are used in the culture. The codes can be looked at according to structural elements of discourse; however, how they are put into action can be deconstructed by semantic categories of discourse. The semantic dimension studies the different roles of the code that develop while codes are utilized in social communicative acts. This perspective asserts that people do not solely depend on codes to convey a message, but also make changes to the codes, adapt them in order to individualize their communication (Oswald 2015). The marketing research emphasizes the power of placing in context any specific sample of text, regardless whether it is an advertisement, web page, or an interview with a client by looking at them as a part of a bigger composition of texts that characterize "the brand, the competitive set, the product category, or a consumer segment" (Oswald 2015, 24).

The meaning implied by a certain advertisement and derived by the receiver is obviously determined by what can be perceived in the material on a screen or page. Although people tend not to reflect critically on ads on a daily basis, it is crucial to precisely figure out what can be observed so that one can generate more well-grounded interpretations regarding the deeper level of signification. The investigation of text in advertisements requires delving into language components as well as pictures, concerning the pictorial representation to be as relevant as (if not more than) the words. Images are "faster" to read and exert more influence than language, and principally provide better tool for the expression of enthusiasm, emotions and creative power. An illustration is utilized to draw attention to and to guide the eye to the written piece in a journal and in a video advertisement; language frequently works as a mere strengthening of a picture or a commercial's shot. Even though people generally look at pictures, especially photographs, as if they were mirroring the real-life world and therefore depict the actuality, one ought to be conscious that the intention of an image is not "clear" – in the contrary, just like the remaining elements of ads are deliberately created and controlled (Dyer 2009).

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) in the book *Reading Images* present a framework for the systematic semiotic analysis of any kind of visual representations. Therefore, their ideas can be applied to the examination of advertisements, also moving images, so commercials seem to be the right sample to break down taking on their view on the deconstruction and understanding of image. There are many ways of visual construction: one of them is picturing the relation between two objects in an action. In a still image, it is realized through a vector created by for example a picture of a hand in a position that shows somebody else to come closer. In the moving image the same vector is controlled by movement, so the same scene would display a hand gesture in motion aimed at the other person. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) also distinguish two kinds of participants – the interactive ones (e.g. the producer and receiver of a commercial) and the represented ones that makes up the substance, "everything" which takes part in a representation process ranging from people, objects to locations. The participants have semantic roles (e.g. "actor" or "goal"). If there are two characters interacting with each other, they are both actors, the relation between can be either transactional or nontransactional. When an image depicts just an occurrence and it is not known who or what is the cause of it, it is an "event." The visuals are also capable of portraying reactions, which are marked by the line of eyesight and glimpse of the "reactor" while observing the "phenomena." Reaction processes can also be transactional, when people react to each other, or not transactional. Other categories in the multimodal discourse analysis framework include: the description of attributes, participants taking part in a scene, the circumstances that comprise of setting. There should also be taken notice of the background and foreground, the scenery and objects embedded in it. Multimodality consists also of distance, angle of viewing and positioning of the viewer in relation to the scene represented. An important part is played also by colors and their hues; they are able to express certain meanings. When it comes to motion pictures, additional categories might be crucial to deploy, such as narrative and narrative devices: caption, dynamic and composition, Movement is capable of changing the position of the viewer and thus produce impressions that cannot be evoked by still images (Kress and van Leuween, 2006).

5. Case Study – Chanel Luxury Brand Advertisement

The example chosen for the study of luxury communication is the Chanel perfume commercial of the iconic scent N°5, released on the official You Tube channel of Chanel on the twenty-eight of February in 2018. In the commercial the main character is played by Keira Knightley – a prominent British actress. The video represents a sequence of actions by a young woman who is leaving an apartment after an all-night party, interspaced with flashbacks of her recollections of some significant moments of that party. One by one, she recovers her shoes, scarf, handbag and blazer (all Chanel branded) and leaves the place leaving the man she had met there behind. The story seems amusing, captivating and free-flowing, but as it turns out, the commercial is a lavish, meaning-charged luxury branding production. An in-depth analysis of the commercial requires a detailed description of the video in the first place.

The story starts at a dark but elegant entrance leading to a glamorous living room in which we can see a greyish round sofa in the middle, grey, gold and brownish pillows scattered around, a black piano in the back and a huge white window with creamy, translucent drapes. The whole white interior is in a mess as if after a party: there are white and pink balloons with glittering white and gold ribbons attached to them, and white fluffy feathers and pieces of glimmering confetti. The viewer sees a shot of a woman from the back striding into this room and looking around a bit. She is wearing a long, greyish dress revealing her back. When she walks in, there is a delicate glimpse of a light beam coming from the left. Straight away there is a shot of her hand picking up a black high-heeled sandal from Chanel, but after that we see the woman holding it and looking somewhere in the direction of the room with a reflective gaze as if trying to recollect something.

Immediately after this, we get to watch a quick flashback of what happened the previous night at the party – in a sequence of quick shots lasting a few seconds. We see people dancing, having fun in the apartment's living room with their hands up in the air, the confetti and ribbons falling down reflecting light. We can hear that they clap their hands twice, then there is a brisk, warm woman's smile, with Keira among the guests and lastly we see just the bottom of the lady's dress and a moment when she throws off her shoe with a light kick while dancing, throwing the confetti into the air. That is the way she had lost her shoe the previous night, which she has just now grabbed into her hands. The mental picture of the flashback is topped off with a glimpse of the party

from above. We can also notice in this scene two huge, crystal chandeliers above the guests' heads. As the action in the commercial continues, the viewers find themselves back in the empty living room, however, on the other side of it.

In the background there are two massive balcony windows with curtains in dusty pink colour. The walls are covered with creamy-white moldings. It can be observed that the floor is dark, probably made of wood. This area of the room is free from any furniture but there are balloons as if surrounding the central part of the scene. Keira climbs on a chair and stretches up to reach her light pink scarf that is hanging from the crystal chandelier, then we catch a glimpse of Keira's face: she looks up with enjoyment as he pulls the scarf down from the lamp. In the next shot, she holds the scarf in her hands, tangles it and pulls it slightly closer to her chest, and looks to the side – again as if trying to recall the situation in which she lost, this time, the scarf. After this we step right into the scene narrating the course of events the night before. We see Keira again in her own recollection. The bit of her memory is pictured again in several rapidly shown shots. The scene takes place among guests during the party, on the dance floor. It can be said that it happens in the middle of the dancing crowd. Keira turns towards the viewer with a mysterious look and a mild smile, and with a dynamic gesture made with her scarf.

Later we see a situation from behind the actress's back: there is a brown-haired man approaching her, he is wearing a navy blazer paired with a striped T-shirt. He looks at her with a direct, calm and mystifying gaze. Then we observe Keira, first from the front and then the whole scene from the side when they stand in front of each other as she wraps the scarf around the man's neck. She pulls the man closer to herself, which we see from behind the man's back, from a distance as well as from the side, when they are facing each other. As they get really close in front of each other, we see their faces in profile: they exchange deep glances, and then the woman releases the scarf and with one move throws it back dynamically in the air, where the light-weight scarf lands on the chandelier. The confetti flows in the room and glitters in the dim light of the scene.

The viewer is taken back to the empty apartment the morning after. Keira makes a few steps towards the "camera" as if looking for something more, then we see her feet as she puts them together in two audible "bangs" against the floor. Then she snaps her fingers twice while staring somewhere thoughtfully, once again, as if attempting to bring back certain pictures to her mind. Each moment of snapping is seen from two different perspectives – from

the front showing the whole figure and closer from the side. From this point the viewer jumps into the scene that has happened the night before. People at the party are having a good time: they dance, fight using the pillows, and the feathers are drifting in the air. We can see that the actress is among them trying to force her way through the crowd with a green quilted Chanel bag on a chain clutched in her outstretched hand. We see the bag falling on the floor among feathers and confetti and, then right after it, a shiny copper pillows falls on it. The moment the pillow hits the floor covering the bag from view, the viewer sees Keira back in the morning. She notices the bag, uncovers it and grasps it in her hands. Then, we see her face in close-up, as she starts to smile with a certain spark of delight in her eyes and from this point on we delve into her next remembrance of the past night.

We see her hand reaching for the microphone; she grabs it from the floor and lifts up above her head in a gesture of victory. She opens her mouth smiling, shouting something. Around her we can observe a pillow-battle, feathers drifting in the air from one direction to the other. We watch Keira's hand as she turns up the volume of music with a golden knob. She is wearing a black nail polish and a silver ring. Then the viewer watches the room full of guests who are enjoying themselves, at the back of which Keira sings to a microphone. The man that approached her before makes a jump and lands on top of the crowd, which holds him. Keira sings with a gentle voice "Coco" to the microphone and the memory cuts off.

Keira appears from behind the door frame and walks along the hallway to look at the mirror on the wall, which is made of small square mirrors in gold frames put together. We see her reflection in the mirror as she passes, also her look focused on lipstick stains from kisses. Straight away we observe what happened in the hall during the party. We see girls, women jostling in front of the mirrors fixing up their makeup. Keira can be seen in the reflection of the mirror taking a look in the direction of the camera's eye. The man, whose shady figure outline can be distinguished in the right side of the shot, stands at the door frame and watches her. The viewer observes closely (from three different angles) as she kisses the mirror softly leaving a mark on it. Then she looks into the man's eyes, and he looks at her with a slight mysterious smile. When she turns away to go, she continues to keep the eye contact, so he follows her into the bedroom.

The bedroom walls are covered with sea-blue patterns, which look as if they were painted carelessly. There is a huge gold decoration on the wall, white curtains

and a big bed in the middle. The classy furniture is black with polish and gold ornaments. The bed is dishevelled, there are olive-green pillows on a modern navy blue sofa and a piece of creamy wrinkled silky fabric laying on the bed. When she walks in, there is a male hand emerging from the duvet. She takes her black Chanel blazer and holding the blazer and her Chanel bag she comes across a white chess pawn laying on the turquoise carpet. She picks up the pawn and lifts it on the level of her eyes and glances with deliberation. This way we move on to the next recollection. The bedroom is dim, there is just a yellow-gold light leaning against the bed. The actress is lying on the bed in a reclining position facing the man and there is a chessboard between them. A black pawn is being beaten by the white pawn with Keira's delicate push, and she sees him as he takes off his striped shirt showing off his muscular body with tattoos. Then the man strikes Keira's pawn and we see that she is about to untie the knot from the top of her dress still looking into the man's eyes. The recollection finishes in mid-movement.

While walking through the living room on her way out and putting on her blazer, Keira glances at the wall where the words are written with a gold spray: "COCO FOREVER." Just as she smiles to herself there starts another memory of what happened the past night. We see a shot when someone's hand touches a golden light switch. As the people dance, we see and hear a boy whistling. Later, we see a shot in which the man goes forward and guides Keira: he holds her arms with both hands. She looks into his eyes with an intrigued facial expression. As they stride, we can listen to a clear sound of their foot steps. When the man turns her around to see something, she opens her mouth in admiration and surprise. The man stands next to her, rests his arm on her shoulder and also watches the view with content. On the wall there are words: "COCO FOREVER," people are cheering and holding cold sparklers. Both Keira and the man are happy and laugh. This way the last mental image comes to an end.

We follow Keira as she takes a last look at the apartment. Her hand touches the handle and opens the door. We see her with a pleased smile, already going down the street. Behind her we can admire the creamy-coloured facades of Paris's decorative tenement houses. They are shown from the perspective that reveals how they stretch along the road. The sunrays are leaning against the high buildings with wrought balconies. The man rushes to the balcony door shirtless and shouts "Coco!", but she does not look back. We can still hear one more echoed "Coco!" as the light pink bottle of Coco Chanel N°5 perfume shows up against a black background. On the label big letters of different size

and thickness spell: "Coco Mademoiselle Chanel Paris." At the bottom of the bottle we can read "Eau de parfum intense." The narrator says what is displayed underneath the bottle "the new eau de perfume intense" then she adds "Coco mademoiselle Chanel."

6. Meanings and Myths in Chanel Advertising

The 2018 commercial from Chanel, although it aims at advertising the iconic scent Chanel N°5, obviously communicates far more than a bottle of perfume. Following the course of the narrative in the video material, one realizes that there is actually nothing that directly or indirectly refers to perfume. The receiver is not flooded with elaborate commentaries on what the product is like, what it does or why it is a better option than something else. The viewers are not forced to decide whether to make a purchase or not, nor are they provided with bits of persuasive information, but are encouraged to relax, take their time and derive their own meaning out of the multitude of images, narrative sequences and intertextual references. The commercial seems to captivate one in a pleasing process of meaning making on account of the heavily edited sequence accompanied with music. The unquestionable supremacy of images makes this advertisement a great semiotic specimen and, for the sake of moving images, the multimodal perspective can produce interesting insights when other modes of communication are taken into consideration. Even though the commercial lasts only sixty seconds, it is increasingly rich in meaning-generating elements that build up the implied interpretation. What the viewer is offered in the first place is a certain identity produced by the brand that entails a luxurious lifestyle.

Although Keira Knightley is a world-renowned actress starring in this commercial, one can easily recognize that she does not play herself in this short brand material. Instead she impersonates "Coco Chanel," yet not personally the famous woman that founded the brand and launched the production of the promoted perfume. Keira represents the "Coco Chanel woman" that any woman can become. The commercial focuses to a greater extent on what such a woman is like and what she does, than on what she has got in terms of material objects, even though those things are a prominent part of the material (playing a subordinate role). The observer is presented with brand identity that is represented as an inspiring and powerful female personality that is carried and reinforced

in the story. First of all, Keira is dressed comfortably, but she is also undeniably elegant and classy, as there is nothing over the top or excessive in her look. She has her hair tied in a messy yet a good-looking bun, she has got a powerful and stylish grey smoky eye makeup, a grey tulle dress, black leather sandals with unique decorative heels. Keira's look seems to be an essence not only of "French" attachment to simplicity and quality but also of creativity of design and uniqueness.

The starring of Keira Knightley brings additional connotations that the consumers associate with the brand and the scent. The consumers start to attach the qualities of the character Keira plays as well as the characteristics of Keira as a person to the brand's identity and its luxurious propositions – clothing items, accessories, makeup products, cat walks and different sorts of events. The mental bridging between the woman's lifestyle and the brand results in the creation of myth. The brand logo takes over all the facets of Keira's personality that people commonly identify her with and turns them into signifieds of the luxury brand. This way Keira adds to the way the consumers define the brand. As Keira is one of her kind – a classy, beautiful and incredibly gifted person – the same qualities get associated with the brand.

For the viewer the woman may appear to be an embodiment of femininity, self-confidence, mystery, joy and power. These characteristics are realized on the screen through meaningful actions, gestures and behaviours of the main character in critical situations. Coco presents herself as a complex, strong and inspiring woman's personality. Coco is truly self-confident; she communicates purposefully, often nonverbally. She consciously uses eye contact and her gaze expresses more than words. Coco is also powerful, decisive, free and takes the initiative – she decides on her own to leave the building; she is the one that initiates the flirt on the dancefloor and controls it; she strides confidently through the crosswalk without turning around when being called by the man from the balcony. The personality which the main character embodies is not only bold but also full of happiness, joy and appreciation for life – Coco seizes the moment at the party, embraces meaningful moments; she starts to sing in front of others, is able to express her emotions in various ways.

While looking closer at the young lady played by Keira Knightley, it is worth placing her figure in the perspective of contested roles of femininity and masculinity, and analyse which codes emerge from the personality the main character represents. A common, reinforced female archetype takes for granted such characteristics as vulnerability, fragility, weakness, passiveness and tendency

to hesitancy. "Coco" breaks the dominant model of femininity that joins women with all the qualities regarded as "not strong," especially when set beside men. The young woman that the viewer gets to observe in the commercial presents the opposite – she exhibits all the traces that point towards the inner strength of character. She does not wait for the things happen to her; on the contrary, she takes on a proactive position, she is the decision maker, controls the course of action. Coco chooses a partner and initiates the interaction with the man without hesitation, sings at the party with hardly any bit of stage fright, abandons the man with no feeling of guilt. She looks happy with herself, independent and free while not being afraid to reveal her emotional side or enter a romantic relation. Coco proves that it is possible to bridge everything that makes a true woman with incredible inner strength. On the other hand, the viewer sees a man, although not central to the story, but a complementary figure showing gentleness, obedience and slight disorientation. The man is left behind empty-handed, the symbol of which might be the sleeping man's hand emerging from the duvet.

Interestingly, for the most part of the story, the "Coco Chanel woman" has a mild, mysterious smile. She communicates deeply with her gaze, leaves the apartment in the morning without warning and in full control of her attire. That is why her figure may bring about intriguing questions that probably are going to remain unanswered or that will trigger the reader to imagine even more. We might have an impression that the woman keeps certain secret as we can only deduce her intentions and thoughts from what she does. We have also no idea of what happened in the bedroom that night. Moreover, we know nothing about her romantic relationship with the man. These are the elements that create a mysterious atmosphere, provide a lot of space for self-interpretation as specific aspects are left for the imagination of the viewer. Mystery is also constructed through the use of different tools. That is for example: the shade of a figure's outline, a dim lightning of a scene, dark colours, smoky eye makeup or blurred shots of the crowd when the people are shown as a mass and, lastly, when we see Keira's reflection in the mirror. These components are not mystery in themselves but they strengthen the experience of indirectness and implication which is pivotal for a luxury brand so that it can stir consumers' imagination and thus remain an object of constant desire.

With the motive of mystery comes a prominent factor of dreaming that cannot be omitted in the analysis. Apart from the signifiers presented so far that leave the imagination to its own devices, it should be explained how dreams

are embedded in the storyline, which has much to do with the organisational and technical side of the commercial. Dreams are central in the construction of this story. While the apartment and what can be observed in the interiors are the remains or evidence of the last night's party, the mental pictures that Keira brings to her mind are the second reality in which the most important part of the action happens. The viewer goes back in time getting to know Keira's personal sense of the party experience. The images of Kiera's recollecttions are dreamlike. If one tried to describe images of night dreams, the ways of capturing them would most probably largely coincide with the modes of portrayal of the dreamlike scenes in the commercial. Recollections, like dreams, appear to enclose just the most prominent moments, often symbolic or emotional. The parts when Keira pictures the memories are short, dark, frequently with close-ups of meaningful objects or actions and are displayed in a dynamic sequence of quick shots combined with music that supports the multisensory experience of dreaming. It is also worth noticing that the dream-like recollections that take the viewer to the vital points of the party are highly emotional, which means that they attempt to express what the character felt. The use of dreams underlines the added value of luxury that comes down to its intangible worth – it caters to the emotional and projective potential of people's nature.

The reader of the commercial is not shown just retrospections but increasingly emotionally-charged moments that touch upon a wide range of different sorts of emotions. The feelings that can be identified are: attraction, surprise, happiness, fun as well as the warmth of somebody else's presence. Also the emotional side of the dreams is realized through changing perspective and deliberately created close-ups – the viewers get to see the characters' interaction from behind their backs or observe their face expressions in detail. This way the receivers can more strongly experience the relation between the man and the woman, their nonverbal communication that needs no words, being therefore full of guesswork and, lastly, their meaningful exchange of glances that create an alluring tension.

Another significant subtopic to discuss is the implementation of elements of magic and symbolism into the story happening on the screen. The most important aspect of this point is the use of objects in the course of action. Firstly, the brand items and other things that Keira stumbles across make up the structure of the commercial (they are all captured in a close-up). However, they play a far more meaningful role. They are as if magic, they are capable

of bringing about mental pictures and recalling emotions. What is more, the branded items stand for all the experienced moments, revealing that there is more to them than mere functional, aesthetic or quality-bounded characteristics. They are depicted as entities which possess intangible, added worth, as containers of experiences and emotions. There are particular stories that stand behind these items. They are able to tell a story as they have personal signification. For example, the shoes recall the moments of a carefree and joyful dance. The light pink scarf reminds of the playful flirting on the dancefloor. The recovered Chanel handbag is the reminder of the cheerful, lively party. In the commercial there are also close-ups of non-branded objects and worthwhile actions, whose use is deeply symbolic. For example, the microphone Keira grabs from the floor is a sign of boldness, confidence and initiative.

Finally, there are two relevant symbolic moments – as Keira gently kisses the mirror leaving a lipstick mark on it (the viewer can even hear the kiss), which might be a sign both of self-love and flirtation, and when she plays chess with the men on the bed. The latter is undeniably not just a simple board game but, on the level of connotation, a signified of a "love game," attraction and flirting between two people. It should also be remarked that there are a few other components that create the atmosphere of magic. This is the gleaming confetti and fluffy feathers working as a kind of "magic dust," which makes the scenes appear elusive, unreal. The light beams leaning against objects, appearing and disappearing, reflecting light – build a mysterious, magical aura. Besides, Keira does "magic" with a hand gesture when she snaps her fingers in order to return to the party and recall the images of it. Symbolism brings figurative and emblematic language into the experience of luxury that is not about being direct and explicit. Lastly, the implementation of magic gives the consumer an experience of having to do with a miracle, something whose value cannot be explained with reasoning. At this point the luxury brand acquires qualities that are closer to religion.

What amounts to an increasingly powerful motive in the commercial is the broad meaning of the message "celebrating." First, the commercial is surely not exclusively about the glorification of the perfume, but it is essentially a clip that represents the "celebration" of the whole brand, more precisely its image, identity and the experience it offers to its consumers. This is mainly because of the fact that the receiver comes across a large number of brand offerings (scarf, shoe, blazer, lipstick, bag) entwined in the story line in a subtle, engaging way. Apart from these items there is the main character of Coco, and, as it can

be deduced, it all takes place in Paris. The viewer is told a coherent story with all necessary elements to pinpoint the experiences of a brand in a specific cultural environment, linking objects, identity, behaviours and emotions. Moreover, the viewer observes people virtually celebrating during the party. However, as the guests dance and cheer with cold sparklers in their hands, lightning up the golden inscription on a wall (COCO FOREVER), it becomes obvious that it is not just a simple party, but in a connotative dimension a celebration of brand's eternity, immortality, timelessness.

The apartment in a tenement house in which the party took place is not just a "stage," a decontextualized environment where something is displayed, or a scenic backdrop for the action. In order to visualize why the place plays such a pivotal role it is worth envisioning what would be the implied meaning of the commercial if the surroundings were changed (for a park, a city square or a meadow in the countryside). Therefore, the place, interiors and the objects should be regarded as active meaning constructors. For example, the crystal chandelier, the use of gold colour (elements of furniture – handles, ornaments, frames) or a silky fabric on the bed are clear signifiers of opulence and luxury. The books, graphics and paintings on the floor leaning against the walls as well as a huge black piano are connotators of class and refinement. There is a cor-relation between the meaning-generating elements of Keira's appearance and the appearance of the apartment. The interiors and objects are not only classy, in French style, but the furnishing is also full of creative and modern elements. The minimalistic sofa, a geometrical chest of drawers, or fancy pillows in the bedroom stand for an inventive design while being of top quality, even to the untrained eye. This points to the balance that needs to be kept by luxury brands between being original and being loyal to the tradition and timelessness.

7. Conclusion

The semiotic analysis of the commercial performed above clearly indicates that communication of luxury branding demands a multimodal approach, as the expe-rience of the brand, which is of the utmost importance for the luxury sector, can only be transmitted this way. The characteristics of luxury brand's image almost wholly coincide with the interpretation of lifestyle qualities derived from the study sample. The motive of magic, dreaming, religion, femininity,

celebration and emotions are easy to distinguish, but require a close analytical look at each component and then another look revealing a synthetic interpretation in the perspective of the whole luxury brand.

Moreover, luxury communication utilizes people's projective thinking, their meaning-making nature, desire to dream, emotions and the need to experience beauty in a pure state. The analysis reveals that the communication of luxury is mainly constructed with the aim of transmitting the intangible worth, which is a really demanding task, because the experience of added value has to be realized through physical means. That is why the meaning is conveyed through various modes that range from images, sound, utterances to movement. This multi semiotic environment activates a whole variety of Barthes' lexicons to detect the meaning, which shapes the consumers' definition of the brand.

The example chosen for the study turned out to be rich on the connotative level, which reveals that communication constitutes a highly coded text, full of undertones and symbolic actions and objects. Almost every bit of the video has the capability to bring about certain connotations. The Chanel commercial exhibits a deep understanding of the nature of luxury brand. It successfully manages the relationship between being ahead of its time while keeping itself close to the core identity of the brand (Frenchness and the founder – Coco Chanel). The commercial creates an integral environment for the consumers to immerse themselves in the identity of the brand. However, the most influential choice is the use of Keira Knightley, herself a brand name. Her role in the commercial is a powerful impersonation of the chief person in the history of the brand and stands for the whole philosophy of Chanel. Last, but not least, it is worth mentioning that this commercial is one in a series of perfume and branding commercials that feature well-known European and American actresses who have a history of playing ambivalent characters in top-ranking artistic films.

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