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Title: Brand image re-revisited: a semiotic note on brand iconicity and brand symbols
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Abstract: Brand image constitutes one of the most extensively and intensively explored and operationalized constructs in marketing theory and practice. This paper problematizes the way brand image has been conceptualized in the traditional branding and cultural branding streams by seeking to disentangle primarily the definitional ambiguities involved in the concepts of brand symbol and brand icon. Then, it elaborates on a critical missing component in the branding literature, viz. how brand imagery is transformed into brand image concepts. The conceptual exploratory draws largely on Peircean semiotics and to a lesser extent on structuralist approaches, by way of a contextualized discussion on the differences and similarities between signs and symbols, symbols and icons. Furthermore, I argue that iconicity constitutes an overarching semiotic principle whereby a brand language appropriates signs and transforms them into integral aspects of its expressive inventory, rather than a mere descriptor of similitude. The conceptual exploratory culminates in a discussion of the implications for cultural branding from adopting a semiotically inflected branding metalanguage.

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