

# The Effective Use of Semiotics in Marketing Communication to Create Product Relevance Through Naming Strategy

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## ABSTRACT

Marketing communication effort employs various tools to garner brand identity and its relevance to its audience to increase sales. However, marketing communication tools such as advertising are often expensive, and other promotional tools are not necessarily beneficial in the market segment that is specification dependent where product from competing vendor offers the same function. As such brand identity is the sole differentiator between vendor in the category. One way to mitigate the issue is to use structural semiotics that puts attribution of the product right in the name of the product or brand itself, creating direct correlation at a glance. In this research, using phenomenological approach on a focus group study, it is found that semiotic use in naming strategy is very much preferred by the audience to easily identifies products that suits their needs. This in turn reduce cost of marketing communication effort but still create product relevance to the target audience.

**Keywords:** Marketing communication, semiotics, naming strategy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since its mass market introduction in the 1970s, personal computer has become part of humanity daily activities [1]. From number crunching, entertainment, and recently during the covid-19 pandemic, as tools for communication and collaboration, personal computer is up there in the list of things modern humans cannot live without. In an almost prophetic way, the use of personal computer have been predicted by scholars in the 1990s that its uses will be second to none in daily activities, spanning from education, productivity and entertainment [2]. Further studies on the prevalence of personal computer uses also aims at the usage pattern that it will play an important role going forward in the digitalization of human activity in the future [3]. The era of smartphones slightly askew the use of personal computers, some media pundits predicts that smartphone will replace personal computers, but in reality to this day, smartphone does not replace personal computers, in fact it has become complimentary to personal computers.

Computers today is defined by its shapes, one that supports mobility and one that is static. A mobile personal computer is called a laptop or notebook, two interchangeable terms that dated back when the product in questions is a replacement for notepad, a document keeping device. IBM in the 1990s chose the name ThinkPad for its laptop line because its intended use is just like a notepad. Laptop has become the preferred term because of its semiotics that means can be used on top of a lap, hence the name, lap top, but combined to make it easier to say. There are no right or

wrong about the two terms. On the other hand, a static personal computer, is just called a computer. The term personal computer applies for every home or office use computers, however Apple in the late 1990s tried to rebrand personal computer and claim the name to themselves [4]. Apple rebrand their personal computers as "Macs" from the shorthand form of their Macintosh personal computer line, different than other personal computers that Apple dubs as "PC". Even though they are still personal computers, Apple successfully runs an advertising campaign all through the 2000s that separates the notion of Macs are not PC. Yet, essentially, Macs are still personal computers with the same hardware structure as others.

As much Apple wanted to separate itself from the collective personal computer audience, it further distances itself from usability standpoint. As a computer, Macs is only relevant to uses that Apple engineers and board of directors wished it to be. While other personal computers with different operating system powered by Microsoft and Linux, have become a versatile tool for every usage scenario. From becoming a media server, entertainment, productivity, and lately as media production system, for YouTube and Twitch streamers.

In Indonesia, computer sales is still strong, stronger even entering second year of the covid-19 pandemic. With learning and non-essential works is still being done remotely, adoption rate of computers reaching all time high, sadly hampered by supply issues as the pandemic also hits supply chain [5]. Even though computer vendors are enjoying higher sales rate, management still needs to

properly promote their brand and product to maximize the increasing demand from the market, as such marketing activity still needs to be on full force. One notable computer brand in Indonesia that is ubiquitous in its position as computer for gamers is Asus. Asus shies away from fancy terms that alludes aggressivity and opted for a simple sub brand for their gaming solution known simply as Asus Republic of Gamers, simplified to ROG. Asus ROG started way back in 2006 as a component sub brand aimed, interestingly not to gamers per se, but to computer enthusiast who likes to optimize their system to the littlest details [6]. Off course, tweaking the computer and exceeding the factory specification nets a higher performance and giving higher frame rates in games, a positive trait especially in the competitive computer gaming that spawns e-sports of today.

ROG brand is used on various line of Asus computer components, laptop, and a smartphone brand, each aimed squarely at the gaming community. The use of ROG brand for Asus simplifies the decision-making process for a person to buy gaming related products. Philip Kotler's decision-making process of AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) is a model designed to acknowledge the effort of marketing activity on creating demand [7], and the ROG brand strikes directly to the awareness aspect of the product it represents. Asus in its marketing activity exemplifies how applying structuralist semiotics creates a simple and recognizable brand that its users and aspired users can relate to.

### **1.1. Our Contribution**

This research will investigate whether semiotics in brand building nets a positive response from users in relation to creating a desirable trait for a brand. The correlation between key aspects of a brand desired by the marketer and the response from its audience sometimes does not go hand in hand. With the audience differently took the wrong meaning, marketers have to change the strategy to support the new meaning by its audience. By minimizing the mistakes from understanding the meaning of the brand, marketer can effectively create a brand that is simple and relevant.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Unique Selling Point**

Unique selling point has always been the pivot point for any marketer to focus on. The premise is simple, if a marketer can create a unique product, then the product will have no equal or even substitution thus the marketer can put up any price for the product due to the supply and demand law. In economics term, a non-substitutable resource or product garners competitive advantage for the institution [8]. However, as technology and information advances, free access to processes and resources, have opened the market to secrets of productions that created such unique selling

point. As such, Rosser Reeves posits Unique Selling Proposition, a concept that a specific trait is no longer inherent to the product itself, but it is created through communication effort [9]. Rosser Reeves created a rift in the marketing community, as marketer understands the point, the creation of identity for their product now stems from fiction, no longer a unique solution, but rather, unique stories.

The creation of these stories, in part is a process of thoughtful communication from the marketer as a communicator to create meaning from a set of symbols for the intended audience to receive as it was initially projected by the marketer. The end goal from such communication is to create the same understanding of meaning from communicator to its audience whereby preferably no misunderstanding happens in the process. However, communication as a process is not perfect, as each individual perception of condition is left to their own experience thus each will come to different understanding of an event [10].

### **2.2. Advertising**

As one of the most popular marketing communication tools, advertising is always the first go to for an effective brand building, to create awareness first and foremost for the solution's existence. Advertising using accessible media is not necessarily the most successful or cost-effective approach to achieve the advertiser's stated aims. However, this does not imply that advertising medium will become irrelevant. The argument is that, as essential and established as advertising is for generating sales, it is equally important to carefully evaluate the usage of alternative modes of communication before opting to rely solely on advertising for marketing communication activities [11].

Reeves argue that advertising effectivity as a tool to remind its audience about a solution's premise declines over time. In his book, only half of the people he followed after 6 months showing a specific advertising remembers what the ad is all about [9]. What Reeves alludes to is that when a brand garners sufficient brand recognition, it will lead to an identity that is forever attributed to the product without the costly effect of running an advertising campaign.

Advertising is not without its merit. Past researches have proven the effectiveness of advertising to change its audience behavior at the very least from not knowing to knowing a product. This change in behavior utilizes utilizing the Continuous Opinion and Discrete Action (CODA) model. However, the frequency of the commercial spot and/or media placement should be constant enough to support a habit change CODA has been shown to influence target audience habits when exposed to marketing communication activity over an extended period of time [12].

### **2.3. Semiotics**

The simplest method to achieve brand recognition is through applying structuralist semiotics directly in the name

to create instant correlation. Semiotics is the study of all the signs and symbols in a particular culture that interact with the signs and symbols contained in a brand, whether communications, packaging, or product, that form customer comprehension. Semiotics may thus be a strong instrument for increasing brand awareness, developing brand connections, and adding market-differentiating brand attributes [13].

The main advantage of semiotics is that every innovation, be it communication, product, and/or packaging design is based on experience of the person observing it. This implies that any new product, brand, or message will make sense to customers right away since the outcomes are drawn from the experience of the person themselves [14]. Thus, a relevant brand name that displays the attribute that refers to the function of the product itself simplifies the acknowledgment process for potential audience. Oswald in her book postulate that product attributes that is displayed on a product name enhances the meaning of the product itself. This notion is repeated by Rossolatos on his recent research that a designation of a brand name surpasses the concept of similarity and will ingrained further on the usability aspect of the product's function, thus creating a strong correlation of what the product name and what it functions as [15]. Research by Del Rio et al also corroborate the notion that the concept of attribution in the brand nets a positive result in recognition and offers a comparative advantage [16].

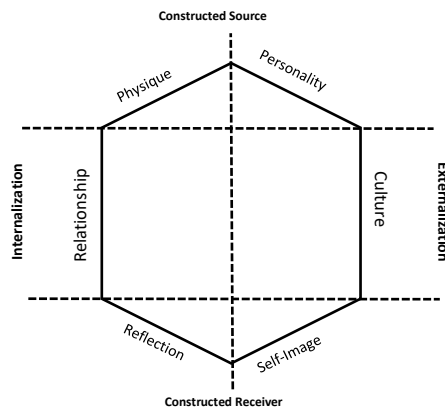


Figure 1. Kapferer's brand identity prism

Jean-Noël Kapferer identifies six points of brand identity, divided over two dimensions of expressions and construction source. The brand identity points such as as physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image [17]. According to Kapferer, these points can only be realized when the brand connects with the consumer, where strong brands are capable of integrating these parts into an effective whole in order to achieve a succinct, clear, and compelling brand identity. Each aspect of the points in Kapferer's model is very clear. A brand, internally has to deliver recognizable traits, from its physical and metaphorical points such as what the brand wants to be associated with, what principle it holds, and

what is the brand character. On the external side, the marketer also needs to define the personality and self-image of its audience, whether they want its audience to feel something from using said product. Kapferer's model in this regard perform closely to SWOT analysis, where internal and external conditions affect a marketer's solution performance and/or design.

## 2.4. Marketing Communication

The two fundamental aspects of marketing communication, as simple as the term and word sequence, is marketing and communication. Marketing is a collection of actions through which businesses and other organizations exchange values with their clients. Marketing is a social process in which people and groups get what they want and need by creating, providing, and freely exchanging value through products and services. Marketing is the process of creating anything that fulfills personal and organizational goals by planning and implementing the concept, price, distribution, and marketing of ideas, goods, or services [18]. More than just communicating and transferring brands or products from producers to consumers, marketing is a complex process. Marketing encompasses all aspects of product development, distribution, and after-sales support after the sale has been completed. Product distribution is one of the steps of marketing. These phases are connected like interconnecting links, and if one of the connections is weak, the link will be broken. As a result, product distribution is just as crucial as any other link in the marketing chain.

The fundamental thing that marketers aim to force on their target audience is behavioral modification. Changing the audience's perception of the subject matter is one approach to modify this behavior. When a product or service is perceived as a solution to a problem for the audience, it is more likely to be accepted than just providing facts. This idea originates from how an individual perceives information, how he or she perceives, organizes, and interprets it in order to build a meaningful image for themselves [19].

The development of a brand image in the minds of customers is a crucial connection in marketing operations. As a result, brand image, as part of its identity plays a role in supporting the success of the brand in winning the market competition, and a shortcut is used to develop a brand image is to take advantage of customer perceptions. Consumer perceptions are used to analyze the image of one's own brand as well as the image of rivals or other companies. A strong brand image is an excellent approach to simplify marketing operations. This technique, in addition to reducing the message, allows marketers to make predictions about what is likely to happen in the future. Although perception is frequently misunderstood as an imperfect shortcut, it may be utilized to understand and take the required measures to develop good understanding of the brand.

Communication is the process of selecting and conveying symbols from the sender to the receiver in such a way that the receiver is able to derive meaning from the symbols that

is similar to or identical to what the recipient expected. Communication is also an attempt in which people develop activities in order to elicit reactions from others in accordance with the sender's or communicator's expectations. As a result, interpersonal communication is a process of generating uniqueness and exchanging meaning, but the effect of the words communicated is determined by each active communicator's views [10]

Marketing communication is a mix of communication with all components of marketing, generating possibilities for mutually beneficial exchanges. Satisfaction happens when the trade offers advantages that meet the participants' expectations. Communication is important in communicating messages that elicit meaning or responses in the minds of the target audience, so that the target audience is motivated to do what marketers desire. Because of the influence of communication, marketers are able to persuade their target audience and advertise their products, while the target audience receives a product or service that meets their wants and aspirations.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is aimed to shine light and explain the observable phenomenon being researched, to specifically understand the relation between semiotics in naming strategy to create product relevance. This research final goal is to answer the questions postured through the identification and formulation of problems through focus group discussion as method of grouping the respondents, using interpretation based on inductive mindset. This method of reasoning is supplanted with phenomenological paradigm whereby the discussion of truth and the conclusion can be dissected more thoroughly. Focus group discussion as a valid tool to uncover ranges of perspective and experience is popular marketing communication field [20].

Inductive procedures and qualitative approaches were used to process the data in this study. The goal of this study is to uncover facts, events, phenomena, variables, and conditions that occurred throughout the investigation and function as intended. This qualitative study will interpret and describe facts pertaining to the current state of affairs, as well as attitudes and viewpoints expressed in marketing efforts. The goal of a phenomenological method is to illuminate a specific experience and identify it based on how the person experiencing it perceives it. Phenomenological approaches are epistemologically grounded on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, emphasizing the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As a result, they're useful for deciphering subjective experience, obtaining insights into people's intentions, and cutting through the clutter of presumptions and common wisdom.

The process of connecting individual experiences to obtain a fundamental and comprehensive image as a reflective structural analysis to summarize the substance of the debate is the focus of this empirical phenomenology technique. The researcher provides a study of individual life

experiences of a phenomenon as stated by participants in phenomenological research, which originates from economics, notably management and psychology [21].

Using interview, researcher can take notes on personal experiences such as speculation, feelings, difficulties, ideas, thoughts, impressions, and prejudices during in-depth interviews. This research will use the snowball technique to perform participant observation and in-depth online interviews with participants in order to get more information, conducted in Jakarta from July 2021 to August 2021.

To understand the social phenomena about the respondent's behavior on the use of semiotics in naming strategy, 15 participants were selected as to avoid the point of diminishing return, as in qualitative research, increasing the sample size will not lead to increased data saturation. Qualitative data sample usually lies under 50 data point or respondents [22]. Although sample size is contingent on a number of factors relating to epistemological, methodological and practical issues, Sarah Elsie Baker and Rosalind Edwards agrees that 15 is the minimum number of interview sample to reach data saturation [23]. While Hennink postulate that 8 is sufficient number of respondents given the focused topic, this research will use 15 respondents as baseline. All respondents have a minimum of bachelor's degree, with median age of 38 years old. All respondents have their own laptops and have fulfilled minimum of time to involve in gaming for a minimum of 6 hours each week.

### **4. DISCUSSION**

Computer buyers especially in the gaming sector wants assurance that their needs in the product is answered without any issue. This means that the engagement of the product from packaging and even to its name should be synonymous to gaming. These audience engage positively with terms of aggressivity that reflects their desire to win in the game. Most of the respondents chose gaming as a way of escapism, to be freed even for a short while from the mundane life and daily routine, to don a persona and channel their inner self in a safe and unanimous manner. Choosing a product based on name alone is preferable as with many solutions from competing vendors create confusion in the market.

The respondent's response positively with Asus ROG as the name represents simple association to their chosen activity which is gaming. There is no simpler way of association with using the name of the activity in the brand itself. The respondent's response positively also on Lenovo Ideapad Gaming series, giving a reassurance that their choice of product to game is relevant to the name. Even though Lenovo Ideapad Gaming series is considered an entry level, its higher end offering with the name of Legion does not ring positively with the respondent, lacking the gaming identity from its name. Legion as Merriam-webster define is a group of Roman soldiers or a large military force, which portrays a grouping instead of relevance in gaming. This in

stark contrast with Acer Predator name, that correlates to being a force of nature that stands on top of the food chain, bringing a strong correlation to winning in the game. All of the respondents' responses mimics accurately of Kapferer's brand identity prism theorem. Where the physique, reflection and relationship of the marketer's solution reflects positively on its users. The bright colorful keyboard lighting and available colorful lighting accents on some of these gaming laptop products represents the flashy and individualism of its users. Some gaming laptops have controllable lighting on its keyboard to match the user's mood or to simply show off. The showing off aspect on the Kapferer's brand identity prism theorem showcases the second stage which is Brand Style, where self-projection and personality aspect of the users is showcased front and center. This also relates to the culture of the gaming community where most of the users records their gaming session and publish it on social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Some of them even goes to great length to record their play session through camera and post it on YouTube or even stream it live while they are playing on either YouTube, Twitch or both, where the individuality of the user is in display fully. Thus, some of the respondents choose flashy solutions to display their individuality as part of self-projection to their audience. This notion of individuality is further supported by Asus to not include built in webcam on their gaming laptops. Asus never publicly explained why the company removed built in webcam from their gaming laptop solutions, but media pundits justify the removal of the webcam with reason of quality. While built in webcam image quality is acceptable, it still offers far less quality than standalone external camera with capabilities far exceeding built in webcam. For one, built in webcam seldom have autofocus capability due to the thinness of the laptop screen where it is usually placed on. Also due to the size, built in webcam most webcam is limited to 2MP or 720p resolution, far lower than 1080p or 4K quality that external camera can push. These reasons according to the media pundit justifies Asus decision on removing built in webcam on their gaming solution. As gamers who uses the camera wanted to project their individuality at its best, accurately portraying Kapferer's brand identity prism theorem, then they will seek the best solution as well.

However, some of the respondents do not like the correlation between gaming and bright colorful lightings that some of the solutions from the vendor offered. Some of them prefer gaming in their solitude, playing long term strategy game, with winning and losing gives the same thrilling experience. In this regard, they wanted a solution that fits their gaming needs but without the additional individuality and flashy. These respondents also value the gaming naming scheme as they are considered casual gamer, where winning is non issue as they want to play purely as escapism instead of wanting to achieve something. The respondents also validate Rosser Reeves skepticism on advertising that without continual effort and push on advertising spending, the intended target audience messaging gets lost in time. Without having strong advertising presence, most respondents already disassociate

the brand names from its gaming heritage except for Asus ROG brand. The issue is most prevalent on HP Omen and Victus brand, a relatively new comer compared to Asus, and Acer. Omen and Victus as gaming brand of HP has harder time to associate with gaming according to the respondents. As Omen means prophetic significance and Victus, latin for way of life needs to be semiotically exercised to impart its meaning to gaming. A way of life in correlation to gaming does instill a strong sense of word, but not when the meaning is hidden behind another language that the respondents have no knowledge of. Most of the respondent response on gaming correlation of HP gaming line stems from the fact that in every promotion activity be it e-commerce banners, social network ads and video ads, there is always a "gaming laptop" notation. Without, none of them relate Omen and Victus as gaming solution. This is in stark contrast when HP gaming laptop line is called Pavilion Gaming where all of the respondents recalled the name immediately. Granted that Omen and Victus is relatively new to the market, HP still needs to exercise consistent advertising activity to influence a change of behavior in the market that accepts Omen and Victus as a gaming brand. On advertising related discussion, the respondents welcome advertising as a new information outlet that showcases new models of gaming laptop. As a matter of fact, the respondents actively look for official videos of gaming laptop from the vendors for its b-roll, a beauty roll, or series of videos that showcases the product from various angles. This is because as much as the respondents watch famous YouTube tech reviewers, they want to look for professionally produced videos instead of unboxing videos that sometimes shows too much of the YouTuber physical appearance instead of the product itself. In this regard, the respondents corroborate David and Franklin research that advertising is sought after when it is used as tools of information [24] [25].

With advertising however comes with high cost with minimal immediate sales return. The main factor to consider about gaming laptop advertising is that it is a specification heavy solution where performance is based on its specification so even high image might not be a desirable trait. This notion is corroborated by every respondent that given same specification but if a popular brand solution garners premium pricing, then the respondent will buy the lower priced competitor. At this junction, higher frequency of advertising for gaming laptop is a moot point. Yes, there are cases where advertising frequency works to create awareness and even improve sales in short time [26], but if the brand identity is not introduced inherently, Roger Reeves theorem that the masses will forgot about the advertising content over time will always dissolve such effort.

To mitigate this issue of identity, the respondent agree that gaming laptop vendors should take advantage of influencers or tribal leaders to jumpstart the relevance of its brand identity specially to match Asus brand relevance in the gaming category. The use of tribalism in marketing, in social context will create a fellowship of like-minded people that respond positively to group think [27]. The other reason to use tribalism is that gaming laptop scene is not a

straightforward end user product. There are optimizations that can be tweaked to give optimal results in certain applications that can deliver higher response or more nice-looking visuals that suits different use case scenarios (e-sports vs casual gaming). Various social media outlet have unsanctioned and unofficial user groups of gaming laptop per the respondent input. A small portion of the respondent also is part of a group called low spec gaming, where the group shares setup and custom files to actually makes games visually worse so it can run on outdated hardware specification, or below the recommended requirement of specific games.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Marketing communication effort is an infinitely vast topic to dwell into. Marketers went into great length to buy massive advertising spots, expensive marketing campaign that utilizes in the moment public figure at exorbitant rate, only to get minimum gain of exposure and even relevance in the market. As many as there are marketing theories available to increase relevance in the market to benefit the marketer, a marketing communication method as simple as attributing a function on the brand name of the product is very effective to create correlation between the brand, the product and its benefit. In the case of gaming laptop in Indonesia, Asus enjoys market leading sales and brand identity with its Republic Of Gamers sub brand.

The attribution of gaming in the name of the brand itself is twofold, semiotically it represents the representation of the demographic that uses the product and specification that gamers covet. On the other hand, it also represents tools which gamer uses. In recent years, gaming has been accepted globally as a competitive event, some even called it sports, and as such, sporting equipment represents durability that non-gaming related lacks.

Attributing product function in the name itself might not be universally applicable for all product, but in gaming laptop category, applying structuralist semiotics creates a simple and recognizable brand that its users and aspired users can relate to.

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