

Cultural-sensory synesthesia: creating a mythical space-time as a tool for brand expression

Sinestesia cultural-sensorial: criação de um espaço-tempo mítico como ferramenta de expressividade da marca

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ABSTRACT: *This article aims to analyse how the sensory-cultural creation of heterotopias and heterochrony by Magnum's ice cream brand campaign "Find your Summer" favours a cultural branding strategy. Through a semiotic analysis and an approach focused on Michel Serres's rambling (randonnée) and the exploration of the five senses, the campaign's aesthetic and metaphorical languages are discussed: their contrapositions, sensations, parallels, inflexions, and displacements. The conclusions point to the creation of a mythical time-space that is experienced synesthetically by consumers, strengthening the brand's cultural identity.*

Keywords: *cultural branding; heterotopy; advertising; semiotics; five senses.*

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RESUMO: Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar como a criação sensorial-cultural de heterotopias e heterocronias pela campanha “Find your Summer”, da marca de sorvetes Magnum, favorece uma estratégia de branding cultural. Por meio de uma análise semiótica e de uma abordagem voltada para o rodeio e a exploração dos cinco sentidos de Michel Serres, são discutidas as linguagens estéticas e metafóricas da campanha: suas contraposições, sensações, paralelismos, inflexões e deslocamentos. As conclusões apontam para a criação de um tempo-espaço mítico que é experienciado sinestesicamente pelos consumidores, fortalecendo a identidade cultural da marca.

Palavras-chave: branding cultural; heterotopia; publicidade; semiótica; cinco sentidos.

Introduction

Communicative speeches can be considered dynamic and with transcendental capacity to change the world, relying on a rationale that does not exclude the pathos (PARRET, 1997). According to Parret (1997), every speech, even if logical, has intensity and passion, even if it is tamed by a grammar that restricts it. Therefore, the communication of people and the media occurs through affections and feelings.

In this sense, other thinkers also discussed aspects that transcend and extrapolate verbal or written communication. In other words, they refute the claim that there is no world outside language or that it can be independent of human beings (MARCONDES FILHO, 2005). It is from this perspective, according to which we communicate beyond words and writing, that Serres (2001) investigates the five senses in the communication process, understanding that the centrality of spelling is nothing but another form of racism (MARCONDES FILHO, 2005). Barthes (1980), in turn, argues that there should be as many languages as there are desires, making it possible to cheat and play with the signs instead of destroying them.

Similarly, Derrida (1998) considers writing as a violence, as a form of exploitation of man by man, which reduces people without writing and conditions those who possess it. On the other hand, the author also develops the concept of deconstruction, which is a way of leaving things (texts, traditions, or beliefs) open, in such a way as to exceed the borders that confine them (CAPUTO, 1997). Thus, the term *différance* is coined, something that differs from other things, while representing a postponement of meanings, which follow indefinitely, favouring polysemy (DERRIDA, 1982; NUYEN, 1989).

Besides the communicative aspects that transcend words and writing, there are spaces and times that extrapolate those existing in reality: heterotopia and heterochrony, which are concepts of the philosopher Michel Foucault (1986). The first is related to idealised places or staged utopias; that is, they represent real places, but are opposed to them,

challenging and reversing them (FOUCAULT, 1986). In addition, heterotopias juxtapose several spaces that can be incompatible, work differently according to culture, isolate themselves by an opening and closing system, and operate differently from what is real, but always in comparison to reality. In turn, heterochrony is part of heterotopia, being an absolute rupture of the traditional notion of time (FOUCAULT, 1986). Therefore, both are extrapolations of space-time, even though they are shaped by reality.

Thus, taking into account the forms of communication beyond verbal or written language, this article will explore ways to understand space-time through the conceptualisations of heterotopia and heterochrony. Furthermore, it will investigate ways of communicating through reasonable pathos, senses, the semiological system of myth, and polysemy. As a corpus of our research, we will analyse the Magnum brand campaign, aiming at understanding how the sensory-cultural creation of heterotopias and heterochronias favours a cultural branding strategy, which involves the incorporation of cultural codes, ideologies, and myths in communication actions of a brand (HOLT; CAMERON, 2010; FOURNIER; ALVAREZ, 2019).

This study was motivated by a gap found in the literature. Previous research focused on the meanings of advertisement and its relation to life projects (MICK; BUHL, 1992), the authenticity of advertising texts (STERN, 1994), the visual rhetoric of advertising pieces (PHILLIPS; MCQUARRIE, 2004), the narrative persuasion of advertisement (PHILLIPS; MCQUARRIE, 2010), brand storytelling (DELGADO-BALLESTER; FERNÁNDEZ-SABIOTE, 2016), or the semiotic analysis of brand communication (GURZKI; SCHLATTER; WOISETSCHLÄGER, 2019) and its relation to diversity and ethnicity (FERNANDES, 2024). Although authors have analysed, from the semiotic perspective, brands (PEREZ, 2016), advertisements (FERNANDES, 2024; GRUNFELD; GOMES, 2024; BRANDÃO; HEMAIS; PESSÔA, 2025), and consumer behaviours (MICK, 1986; MICK *et al.*, 2004), there is a lack of studies whose authors adopt a

semiotic analysis of advertisements considering languages that surpass the verbal and the written as well as a transcendent space-time.

Not quite as methodical as it seems

First, to analyse the corpus of the present study, we will make an analysis based on the semiological system of myths. According to Barthes (1991), the myth is a particular system because it is of second order, created by previous signifiers and signifieds. To differentiate it from the first order, the author calls the signifier form, and the signified, concept. Therefore, there is a constant hide-and-seek play between forms and concepts, which end up defining what a myth is. Moreover, its meanings are confusing, unstable, and open, having at its disposal an unlimited number of signifiers (BARTHES, 1991).

According to Barthes (1977), the mythological system has some characteristics. First, it can be found and propagated in collective representations, such as in consumer goods advertisements. Second, myth transforms cultural, social, and ideological aspects into something natural, making them common sense or general opinion. Third, the myth is discontinuous, no longer needing to be expressed through long narratives, as it did in the past. Lastly, its message is separated into two semantic systems: connotation and denotation.

Therefore, we will use the semiological system of the myth proposed by Barthes (1977, 1991) to analyse the Magnum brand campaign. However, we do not intend to be too attached to the method, nor its restrictions and assurances. Therefore, we will also adopt what Serres (2001) calls *randonnée* (rambling), which will allow us to explore the space, wander, improvise, and navigate the landscape. Therefore, instead of a rigid method, we rather focus on wandering and randomness (MARCONDES FILHO, 2005). In the words of Serres (2016, p. 273):

Wander as free as a cloud, cast your gaze in every direction, improvise. Improvisation is a source of wonder for the eye. Think of anxiety as good fortune, self-assurance as poverty. Lose your balance, leave the beaten

track, chase birds out of the hedges. *Débrouillez-vous*, muddle through, a perfect popular expression meaning literally to unscramble yourself. It supposes a tangled skein, a certain disorder and that vital confidence in the impromptu event that characterizes healthy innocents, lovers, aesthetes and the lonely.

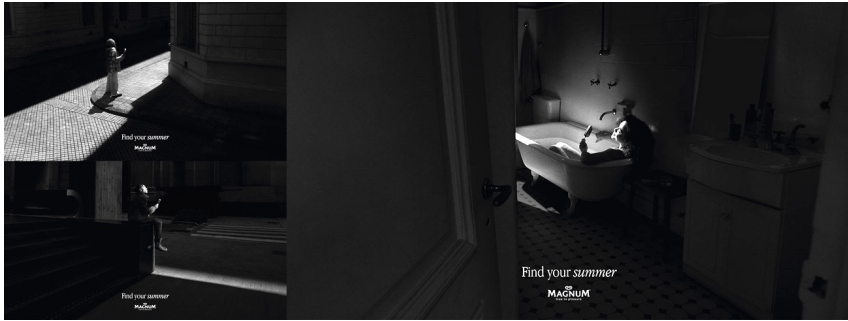
After all, our rambling through the Magnum campaign will be both by the mythological system and the synesthetic contact of an affective consumer-in-community (PARRET, 1997). Thus, the theatricalisation and the simulacra of this community life will be evaluated as well as its metaphorical and figurative nature (PARRET, 1997).

Cultural-sensory synesthesia in a mythical space-time

The Magnum's ice cream brand was created in 1989 in Europe, aimed at adult consumers seeking indulgence and sophistication (UNILEVER, 2024). The brand values the quality of its ingredients, relying on a Belgian chocolate coating that provides, when consumed, its signature cracking sensation (UNILEVER, 2024). In 2024, Magnum launched the *Find your Summer* campaign in the markets of England and Turkey to encourage consumers to have ice creams in winter, as sales are usually lower at this time of the year (NELSON, 2024). In addition to driving consumption, the advertising pieces allude to an application with real information about the weather, so that people can know where it is sunny (NELSON, 2024). The campaign featured a 90-second film and printed materials, winning the CLIO Awards in the cinematography category (CLIO AWARDS, 2024).

First, we will analyse the printed materials of the campaign, which present everyday scenes of a city. These are urban places where consumers appear holding an ice cream while enjoying the sunshine (Figure 1). The extreme contrast between black and white reinforces the light of the sun, directing the reader's gaze and highlighting the act of consumption. At the bottom, it is possible to read the campaign slogan, "Find your Summer," associating summer with the representations of the advertising piece.

Figure 1 – Posters of the Magnum campaign



Source: Clio Awards (2024).

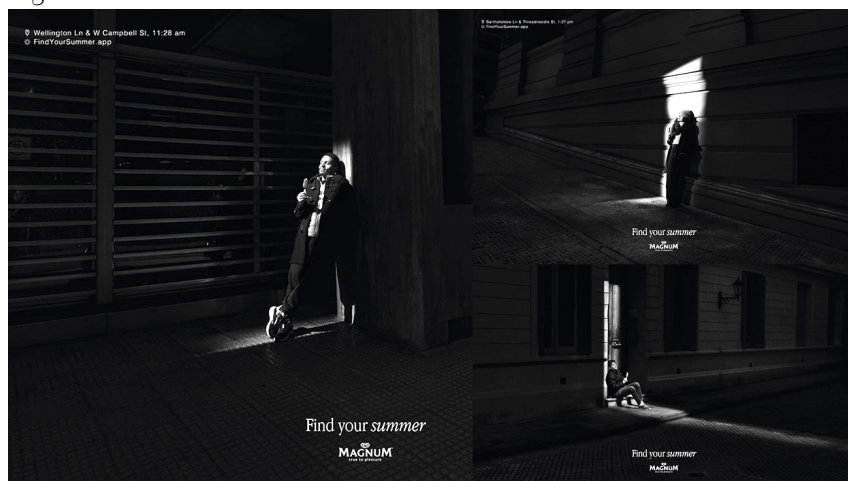
As it is a campaign run in winter, “find your summer” is a way to draw people’s attention to seek a moment of joy, warmth, and pause in their everyday life. As many people go on vacation and look for warmer places in the summer, the advertisement seeks to associate these cultural meanings with the act of consuming the Magnum brand. This magical moment of pleasure, of warm sunshine amid the cold, is a form of catharsis for the consumer, who can momentarily forget their daily life.

Thus, the characters represented in the pieces have a contemplative gaze; some of them have their eyes closed, appreciating the tactile sensation of heat provided by the sun (Figures 1 and 2). It is a moment for taking a break, suspending time, of heterochrony, in which people lean against the wall to rest (Figure 2) or relax in a bathtub (Figure 1). Therefore, of the five senses, taste and smell are evoked by the presence of ice cream; touch is felt by the heat of the sun or the hot water; hearing is present in the slow music of the advertisement (of which we will talk later); and sight is selective and directed, standing out from the dark surroundings of the scenes.

The printed material also features a location indicator (always on a street corner), in the upper left corner of the page (Figure 2), supposedly marking where the people who appear in the pieces are, as well as indicating the mobile app needed to “find your summer.” That is, the spatiality registered in the pictures works as a form of legitimization of

the advertisement, anchoring it in reality. However, at the same time, it transports the consumer to an idealised space that challenges and reverses what is real, constituting itself as a heterotopia (FOUCAULT, 1986). It is no coincidence that there is a conjunction between a virtual space (the mobile app), a real space (topia), and a mythical space (heterotopia), which are amalgamated into a single advertising piece, reinforcing the brand's cryptic message.

Figure 2 – Posters with indication of location



Source: Clio Awards (2024).

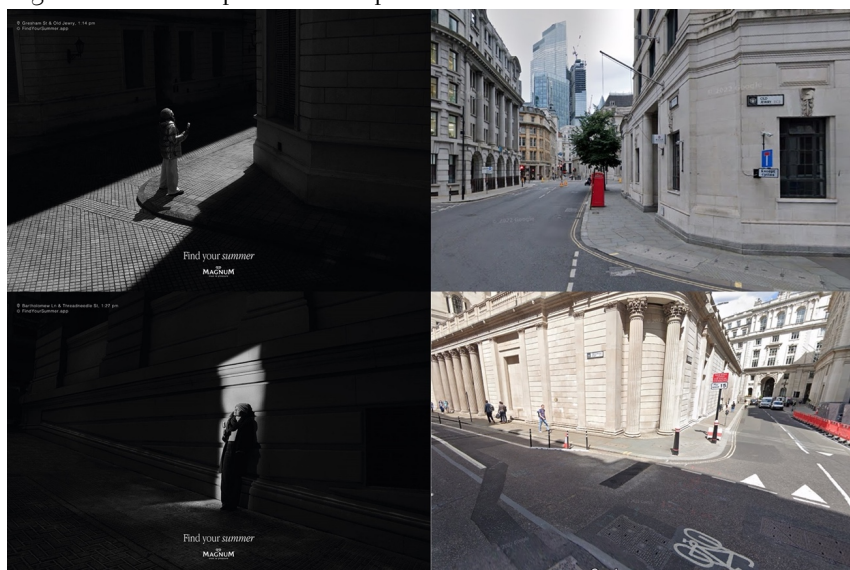
The campaign deliberately chose a street corner to be represented in the ads, rather than a single street or avenue. This choice can be interpreted as a form of reality displacement, of choosing a space that does not belong to one path or the other. It is a junction, an ambiguity that displaces and withdraws people from everyday life, or a non-place without symbolism and anonymised (AUGÉ, 1995). Non-places, according to Augé (1995), are those in which people remain anonymous (such as on roads, supermarkets, or airports) and cannot be considered places in the anthropological conception, with historical, relational, and identity meanings.

However, by carrying out this displacement, the advertisement culturally transforms the non-place into something personalised, mythical,

heterotopic, and heterochronic. That is, it brings something of one's home, of its cosy and familiar nature, to the cold and impersonal space of the street. In the street, there is impersonality, hierarchy, exclusion, and the cold power of the law. While in one's home, there is hospitality, affection, friendship, calmness, rest, personality, and a harmonious relationship (DAMATTA, 1997).

The creation of the mythical space can be better understood when comparing the pictures of the idealised street corners with those that actually exist (Figure 3), captured by the Google Street View cameras. Some elements of reality are preserved for the sake of anchoring, such as parts of the walls and windows. Nevertheless, heterotopia takes place by modifying the non-place to transform it into a mythical place. This happens, for instance, with the change of the pavement of the streets, which becomes more geometric and flawless, or with the absence of traffic signs and road identification. Making the place quite anonymised was the solution to sublimate it and approximate it to a utopian, romantic, and time-suspended city.

Figure 3 – Heterotopias and real spaces



Source: Clio Awards (2024) and Google Maps.

As for the campaign film, we are invited to participate in its setting from the first scene, in which people wearing coats walk through the streets of a city in the winter, full of ice and snow. What city are we talking about? One cannot know for sure, as it could be New York, Buenos Aires, or London, reinforcing the mythical and mysterious aspect that the ad intends to create. Thus, the movements of pedestrians and the city are opposed to those of the clouds and the sky (Figure 4). At a distant glance, we see the city from above, in perspective, from a distance, as if it were possible to escape from it. At the same time, however, its citizens, those who are below, look up, as if they wanted to achieve something higher.

Figure 4 – City x sky



Source: Clío Awards (2024).

These contrasts show two opposing views, two levels of cultural meaning: the ground floor, which settles people in reality, and the sky, which moves freely and disorderly, allowing the sunshine to appear. Thus, the sense of sight is sharpened both horizontally (on the sidewalk, on the streets, or when a woman appears lying on the bed) and vertically (in the clouds, in the aerial shot, or in the buildings, which are seen from the bottom up). On the ground level, people are stuck in reality, in domestic or professional affairs, bored and eager to escape the routine. On the ethereal level, what is sought is the freedom of clouds' composition, the random movement of the wind, and the calming force of the sun.

The differences between the two worlds are also explored through the contrast between work and pleasure. Scenes of people working or waiting anxiously for a moment of pause in the routine are shown. Therefore, when the clock marks precisely three hours and fourteen minutes (Figure 5), the same as π 's value (π), a space-time suspension takes place so that the person can enjoy their Magnum and the heat of the sun. After all, π is an infinite number, the result of the perimeter of a circle divided by its diameter. Therefore, when one tastes an ice cream, one experiences an infinite psychological time that, like a circle, one does not know where it starts or ends, until a new cycle begins.

Figure 5 – Work x leisure



Source: Clio Awards (2024).

Another turning point in the advertisement is represented by a man walking his dog, as they are the only ones who observe the camera throughout the film (Figure 6). It is as if their gazes are inviting us, waiting for us to join them to enjoy a moment of indulgence. Likewise, an open window breaks the stiffness of an office building, reinforced by the tactile and auditory sensation of the wind, which swings a curtain. It represents an opening to something different, sensitive, which breaks the mould of the buildings' geometric plane and the routine. All these turning points are signs that heterotopia has settled, and time has been frozen.

Figure 6 – Turning point



Source: Clio Awards (2024).

Thus, people are invited to experience new sensations, using their taste and smell in the act of consumption, transporting themselves to a mythical place. The key that opens the way to this other space-time is the ice cream, which is firmly held in one hand, as if the consumer were holding it in a sign of victory. Numbed, people look up at the sunshine, calmed by its light (Figure 7). Through the consumption of ice cream and the sun, consumers experience a sensory sublimation that makes them smile and paralyse, becoming happier. Even if the instant persists only for a moment, it gives the impression of being infinite while it lasts. This sensation is reinforced by careful, slow-motion movements, as if aware that it is necessary to slowly savour everything Magnum and its products have to offer.

Figure 7 – Sublimation gazes



Source: Clio Awards (2024).

The advertisement also makes a parallel between images created on the street, such as those of surfaces full of ice and the steam coming out of a manhole, with the chocolate cracking and the heat of a bathtub. These sensitive metaphors (Figure 8) invite the consumer to play with the sensations and replace them with more pleasant ones. Thus, the grim cold of the street is exchanged for the icy ice cream, and the bland steam of the manholes turns into the inviting warmth of the bathtub. Similarly, parallelism also takes place in the comparison between the floating bits of ice cream and the clouds in the sky, urging people to imagine them as sublimated, higher, and sophisticated objects.

Figure 8 – Sensitive metaphors



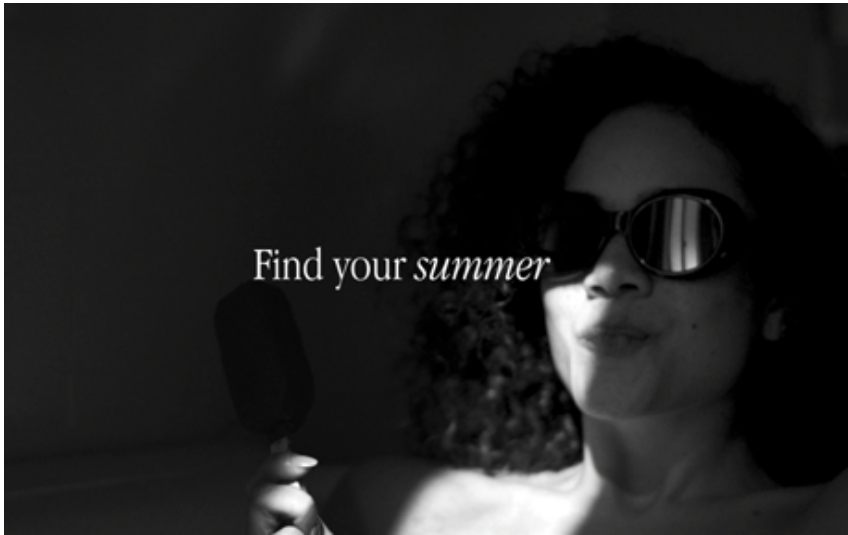
Source: Clio Awards (2024).

Concerning the sense of hearing, it is possible to hear, throughout the advertisement, a slow and almost hypnotising song, entitled *In the rain*. It is a soul music hit by the 1970s band The Dramatics. The lyrics reinforce the ad message, chanting “once the sun comes out / and the rain is gone away / I know I’m gonna see / a better day.” This auditory sensation composes the atmosphere of the advertisement, appealing to the soul of the consumer and preparing them for a hypnotic state enabled by soul music.

Finally, the film ends with the ad’s protagonist in a cathartic state, savouring her ice cream in her home’s bathtub (Figure 9). This scene consolidates and summarises all of Magnum’s efforts to create a cultural

and sensory synesthesia, as the consumer represents the state of mind that the brand promises to make possible. As if, when having the ice cream, everyone felt like they were in a warm bathtub, in the comfort of their homes, numb, ecstatic, warmed by the sun, calm, and happy.

Figure 9 – The consumer's final catharsis



Source: Clio Awards (2024).

Therefore, it is a magical rite that isolates the consumer, as if it were something almost forbidden, secret. In this sense, the brand's advertisement approaches the elements of magic listed by Marcel Mauss (1972, p. 27): "The magician falls into a state of ecstasy, often naturally induced but more usually feigned. Then he often believes, and it seems to the onlookers, that he has been transported out of this world." The brand turns a banal rite into something extraordinary, rare, and loaded with symbolism that is incorporated by consumers when they consume the ice cream, as if it were a magic potion, just as Asterix acquires his strength to fight the Romans.

Thus, hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste are merged into a unique sensory experience, being part of an affective community (PARRET, 1997). "The five or six senses are entwined and attached,

above and below the fabric that they form by weaving or splicing, plaits, balls, joins, planes, loops and bindings, slip or fixed knots” (SERRES, 2016, p. 59). All these sensations are communicated in the advertisement, forming a sensory network that meets Serres’ argument for a communication that goes beyond linguistic representation (MARCONDES FILHO, 2005). There is a brand effort to create a sensitive and sensory narrative, even if its pathos is reasonable (PARRET, 1997). It is reasonable because there is a logical construction behind the advertisement, an argumentative rhetoric that stimulates the consumption of Magnum ice cream in winter. The created simulacra and metaphors make the speech staged, with a well-defined objective (PARRET, 1997).

Through the films and posters, the campaign transforms a non-place, which is devoid of symbolisms (AUGÉ, 1995), into a unique and idealised space-time. This space of heterotopia (FOUCAULT, 1986) is loaded with meanings, but remains open, postponed, active and passive, polysemous and deconstructed (DERRIDA, 1981; 1982). That is, its meanings must be deciphered and completed by the consumers. The final appeal is for everyone to find their summer and the meanings that the brand provides. For this to be possible, the consumer must incorporate what is constituted in culture and society through advertising (MCCRACKEN, 1986), using rituals that resemble magical ones (MAUSS, 2003).

Finally, the advertisement moves away from the violence of writing, leaving the meanings up in the air, cheating with the senses and language: “But for us, who are neither knights of faith nor supermen, the only remaining alternative is, if I may say so, to cheat with speech, to cheat speech” (BARTHES, 1979, p. 34). Although there is communication language in the ads, graphism is left aside to privilege the five senses, considering that “We must either feel or be named. Choose. Language or skin, aesthesia or anaesthesia. Language solidifies meanings” (SERRES, 2016, p. 72). In conclusion, Magnum’s brand identity is strengthened by the ad campaign, as it appeals to a cultural and sensory synesthesia that involves the consumer.

Final considerations

In this article, we aimed to analyse whether the sensory-cultural creation of heterotopias and heterochronias would contribute to the development of a cultural branding strategy. According to our reflections and analyses, campaigns that develop a mythical narrative, based on a transcendental and idealised space-time, can connect more deeply with the consumer. Heterotopias and heterochronias, experienced through a cultural and sensory synesthesia, positively benefit the brand identity.

As we have seen throughout this article, Magnum's campaign creates this synesthesia by transporting the consumer to a mythical place, in which heterotopia and heterochrony prevail (FOUCAULT, 1986). The mythological system, which was carefully created by the brand, steals the meanings and senses associated with the sun, with the pleasure of spare time, and with small pleasures, deforming them (BARTHES, 1991). These staged, mixed places of reality and fantasy make people sublimate their thoughts, reversing the logic of everyday life and suspending the dictatorship of the clock, even if only for a moment.

As implications for brand strategists, this study shows how a campaign based on synesthetic-cultural connections can deepen its connection with consumers, going beyond functional or utilitarian aspects. Throughout the narrative created by Magnum, the brand is established as a cultural icon with which consumers can identify (HOLT, 2004). This brand expression is composed of myth, cultural codes, and ideology, which are integral parts of a cultural branding strategy (HOLT; CAMERON, 2010). In this sense, Magnum associations were incorporated into a cultural model, forming cognitive networks shared with the same social group (FOURNIER; ALVAREZ, 2019). Thus, through the *Find your Summer* campaign, the brand transferred cultural meanings that are constituted in the world to its products (MCCRACKEN, 1986).

In conclusion, it is possible, therefore, to escape simplified and unstructured communication, prioritising those focused on reflection and

transporting people to a mythical and idealised space-time. By leveraging heterotopia, heterochrony, cultural connections, and synesthesia, marketing and advertising professionals enable brands to gain greater symbolic depth and desirability.

Finally, one of the limitations of this research is the fact that it was based on an interpretative and semiotic approach of an advertising campaign exclusively from the perspective of the broadcaster. Future studies should evaluate whether campaigns using mythical constructions are understood in the same way by consumers. In-depth interviews, focus groups, and netnography will be necessary to complement and corroborate the conclusions of this article.

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