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Social Representations in Action and Construction
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"Developing Meta-Theoretical Approach to
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Scientific Material

European Ph.D

on Social Representations and Communication

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MARIE CURIE ACTIONS

Humans are social animals, living through interaction with each other. We construct a framework of shared references to define how we think about the world around us. Such shared references are social representations. This theoretical concept allows us to rethink the complex interaction between our individual minds and the social life by focusing primarily on socio-cultural phenomena and their integration into our common sense.

This volume brings together prominent social psychologists from the United States and Europe to present the major concepts and applications of social representation theory. Both content and methodological issues are raised in a series of case-study chapters. In addition, three key themes - social construction, social categorization, and social identification - are addressed through chapters and commentaries by social psychologists representing different theoretical traditions and geographical locales. Covering a wide range of issues, this diverse collection will have a forceful impact on the future of social psychology.

"Social psychology urgently needs greater rapprochement between its theories. This valuable volume directly addresses this need. With the social representations paradigm as their starting point, Deaux and Philogene have assembled a diverse selection of 24 essays. American readers especially will benefit from the book's many European authors and wide-ranging bibliography."

Thomas F. Pettigrew, University of California, Santa Cruz

"This brilliant collection of essays is going to become a seminal reader for cultural psychologists on both sides of the Atlantic."

Richard A. Shweder, University of Chicago

Kay Deaux is Distinguished Professor of Psychology at The City University of New York. She is past president of the American Psychological Society and is author/editor of many books and journal articles.

Gina Philogène is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Sarah Lawrence College (Bronxville, New York). She has published several journal articles in both the United States and Europe and is the author of From Black to African American: A New Social Representation, 1999.

BLACKWELL

Edited by
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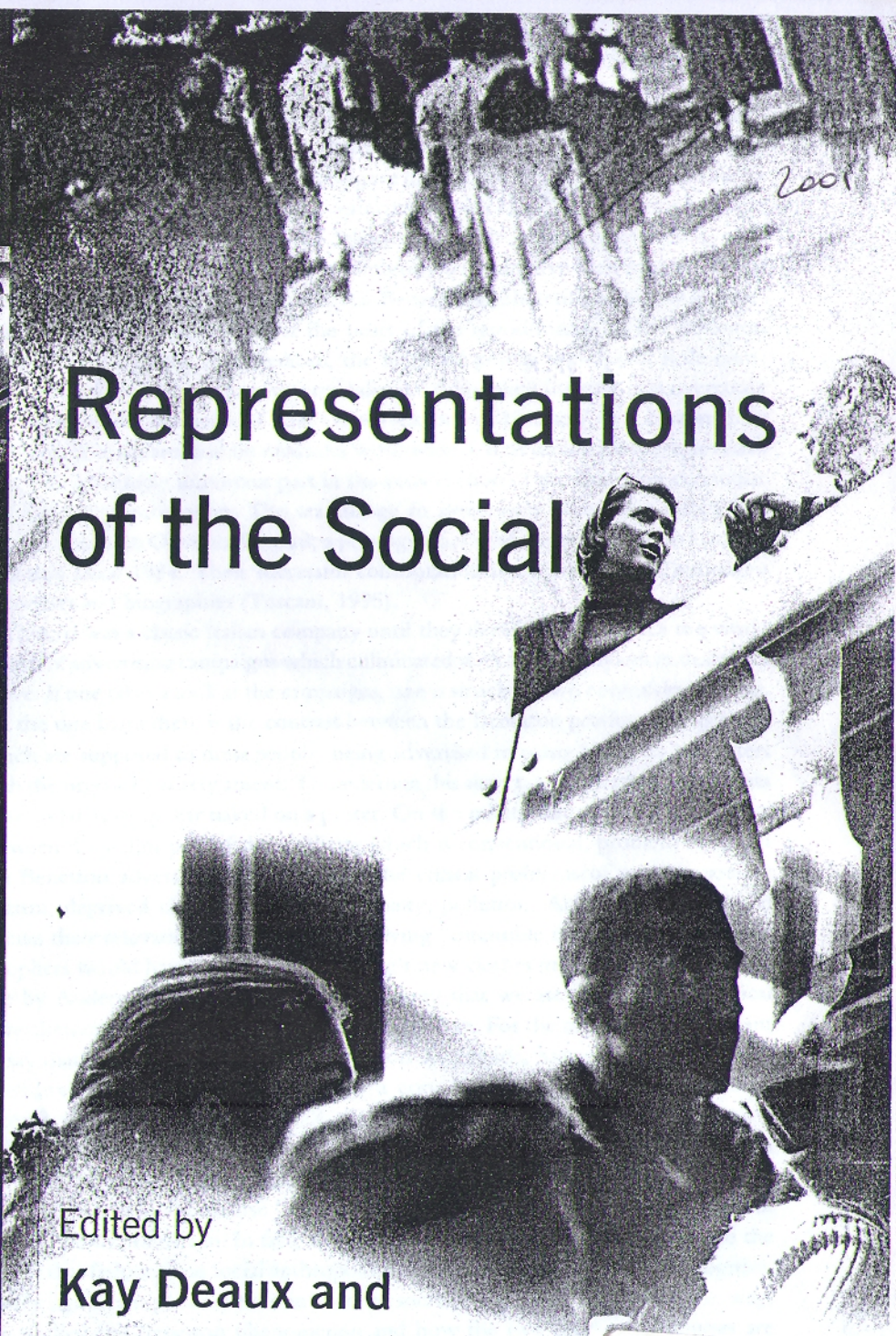
Representations of the Social

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Edited by

Kay Deaux and Gina Philogène

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The King is Naked. Critical Advertisement and Fashion: The Benetton Phenomenon

Annamaria Silvana de Rosa

Introduction: Benetton as a Unique "Social Experiment" for Social Representation and Communication Studies

A big scandal: the advertising campaigns of the Italian clothing company Benetton have all been pronounced scandalous! This judgment occurred again in the case of the Spring/Summer 2000 advertising campaign entitled "*Looking at death in the face*" which showed the faces of prisoners on death row in several American prisons. This campaign on the death penalty (a topical issue already appeared in one of the seven images of the Autumn/Winter 1992–3) was prohibited and its creator, Olivieri Toscani, was heavily criticized, provoking legal action by the State of Missouri and a breach of contract suit against Benetton by Sears Roebuck for distributing Benetton products to their chain of four hundred shops. For many years, neither the company nor its creative director succumbed to the waves of criticism until now, when the explosive effect of the anti-death penalty campaign has rebounded to its creator, finally "dividing" what was so strongly "united" for almost 18 years. On April 29, 2000,[1] it was announced that Benetton—Toscani were "divorcing"; thus breaking up one of the most famous relationships existing between a company owner and a creative director, between commercial and communication leaders.

For several years we have been interested in what can be described as "the Benetton phenomenon" (de Rosa, 1988a; de Rosa & Losito, 1996; de Rosa & Smith, 1997; 1998a , 1998b; Kirchler & de Rosa, 1996). It began as a family business. Founded in 1965 under the name "Maglieria di Ponzano Veneto dei Fratelli Benetton," the Benetton Group was rapidly transformed into an international company whose brand name became both a worldwide financial success and a cultural phenom-

enon. Subsequent changes in the logo to "Benetton" to "United Colors of Benetton" reflect the progressive change from family firm to national and global company. Luciano Benetton is the "charismatic" figure of the Group[2] and the director of sales since the company was founded, as a company "*born of ideas*" – as he describes. The globalization of the brand name was achieved through centralized planning, marketing, product management, and distribution systems allied to high impact applied information technology. However, it was Benetton's coherent and highly innovative use of advertising that lay at the heart of the repositioning of the Benetton brand image. A rarely used medium, the billboard poster, which cost little compared to television advertising, was revitalized.[3] An implicit invitation to overcome any barrier under the aegis of "the United Colors of Benetton" was blazoned on giant boards in squares and on roadsides worldwide. Communicative strategies have played an extremely important part in the construction of the Benetton economic and cultural phenomenon. The sea change in Benetton's advertising policy was brought about by Oliverio Toscani, a photographer who has worked with Luciano Benetton since 1984. Their successful collaboration is documented in numerous interviews and biographies (Toscani, 1995).

Thus, it was a classic Italian company until they decided to launch to the world a series of advertising campaigns which culminated with the consequences described above. If one takes a look at the campaigns, one is struck by two contrasting aspects. On the one hand there is the contrast between the Benetton products themselves, which are supposed to dress people, being advertised in many instances by posters with the product entirely absent. To underline this aspect, Mr Benetton himself has gone so far as to appear naked on a poster. On the other hand there is the contrast between the major part of the publicity which is conventional, problem free, and the Benetton advertisements that stress the critical problems of western society (racism, deprived children, the death penalty, pollution, Aids, etc.). One could discuss their relevance, but not the underlying "ostensible intention," as the philosophers would have it. It is like the King's new clothes in the well-known fairy tale by Andersen. In that sense, one could say that we are dealing with critical advertisement: we will see this more clearly later on. For the moment it's sufficient to say that Benetton, which sells its products worldwide, has achieved through its communication and marketing strategy a considerable visibility and become an actor in the world of fashion.

It is a strategy that has stirred up professional literature, has provoked a discussion between the public opinion and polarized attitudes, as we will see later. We can say that today there is a discourse "*of*" Benetton about our society, and a discourse of society "*about*" Benetton. In fact, this is a remarkable cultural phenomenon, to the extent that fashion is, as social anthropology and communication studies recognize, a very significant phenomenon in modern society. To better understand the way, we studied the Benetton phenomenon and how the two types of discourses are

related, starting with the equation that Moscovici[4] (1988) suggests: $F = f(C, Rs)$, which means that fashion is a function of communication and social representations, in that order. It can be discussed, of course, but at least it has the merit of highlighting the significance of fashion, which at first glance could seem a frivolous topic in the area of social representation studies. It's an appealing possibility that we want to take up with a lot of precautions. One of these precautions concerns what we mean by communication.

Social Representations and Communication

Most of the time we define communication as transmitting information from a source to a target or receiver. It is clear that there is more to it to the extent that this information is iconic and/or linguistic, presupposes a shared code, and so on. We prefer to define communication as "a process of symbolic interaction, in which the possibility of transferring messages occurs on the basis of signs, according to culturally and socially shared rules, i.e., according to codes conventionally defined on the basis of the use of criteria previously selected" (Crespi, 1996, p. 209).

As has often been said, this process is inherent to the theory of social representations. For example, Jodelet (1993) describes the relations between representations and social communications as:

> forms of social thinking used to *communicate*, understand and master the social, material, and intellectual environment. As such, they are analyzed as products and processes of mental activity that are socially marked. This social marking refers to conditions and contexts where representations emerge, to *communication* by which they circulate, and to the functions they serve. This form of knowledge is constructed in the course of social interaction and *communication*. It bears the mark of the subject's social insertion. Collectively shared, it contributes to the construction of a vision or version of reality that is common and specific to a social or cultural entity. This form of knowledge has practical aims and social functions. It operates as a system of interpretation of reality, serving as a guideline in our relation to the surrounding world. Thus it orients and organizes our behavior and *communication*. (p. 184)

In other words, the process of communication has an important role in the *genesis* and in the *functions* of social representations and, of course, in their *transmission* and *diffusion*. They are so mutually interdependent that "any consideration of social representations also means a consideration of communication; social representations originate in communication, they are manifested in it and they influence it" (Sommer, 1998, p. 186). But to seize this communication process, we must take into account the communication systems or genres – conversation, propaganda, etc. – in their reality. Our time has a great diversity in this sense, to the extent that

social representations are generated and diffused through multiple communications systems or styles quite simultaneously. It is said to be a multimedia time. It's also a multisystem or multigenres time. Naturally, all this complicates what was relatively simple up to now.

Strangely enough, advertisement, whose importance continues to grow, is a neglected communication system or genre in social psychology in general and in the study of social representations in particular (Farr, 1955; Petrillo & Leonetti, 1996). One reason for this neglect could be a lack of interest in iconic symbols, images, and linguistic symbols. Another reason could be that models tend to focus on the unilateral actions of communication on social representations $\Rightarrow$ (S.R.) or social representations in the form of messages or content on communication $\Leftarrow$ (S.R.). One of the main orientations of our work is to conceive of communications systems as an interactive model of mutually producing or constructing the messages or content $\Leftrightarrow$ (S.R.). This interdependence between what's communicated and who communicates it is primordial in advertising for obvious marketing reason.

Sociocultural dimensions, as referential representational systems common to target and source, involve both target and source profoundly in the active construction, reconstruction, interpretation, and symbolization of the message. This dialogical communicative process occurs within a social sphere that is already organized. This is why one must take into account, whenever possible, this communication process at a level of society (Doise, 1984, 1986). The Benetton phenomenon gives us an opportunity and allows a kind of observation of a "social experiment" due to its original and unique character for the time being.

Social Representations and Corporate Communication: The Benetton Empire

As a commercial enterprise Benetton was dedicated to selling its products worldwide and to marketing its brand image on a global scale, becoming socially visible through its communicative strategies and marketing, as a result of its ability to introduce contrasting options in public opinion and highly polarized attitudes. There is thus a discourse *of* Benetton and a discourse *about* Benetton as a *cultural phenomenon*. The latter is proof of the success of the corporation in its expansion to a national and subsequently global company.

My extensive research program on social representations and Benetton advertising has been focused first on an analysis of the social representations expressed by Benetton through its numerous communication channels – internal company documents,[5] public documents available on the Benetton web site,[6] company publications such as posters, catalogues, *Global Vision*[7] and *Colors*,[8] various forms of sponsorship such as Formula 1 racing, socially directed actions, shop furnishings,

Table 5.1 A History of Benetton

Stages	Messages/Themes	Stylistic Elements	Examples	Communicative Strategies
1. 1966–83	Traditional message: product linked with image and brand name "Magliere Benetton" (Benetton pullovers)	• word + image • *photographic* style	Fig. 1	Association of product with positive social values (Barthes "principle of connotative transfer")
2. 1984–89	Universal harmony: positive social connotations; multi-racial themes "We are different – we are united in the name of the United Colors of Benetton"	• no text • multi-coloured products • *graphic* style (studio photos, collective subjects	Fig. 2	• Use of multicolored differences as metaphor of universal harmony and of Company • Change of the Logo: "United Color of Benetton"
3. 1989–92	Towards the shock campaigns by means of contrast (transitory phase)	• no more products • forerunner of the shock-photo series • presence of dyad, pair of opposite and contrasting elements	Fig. 3	• Rhetorical use of visual-perceptual, chromatic and metaphorical contrast • Introduction of social issues in advertising • Deviant symbols
4. 1992–93	Indictment of social problems associated with underdevelopment, race, ecology, death penalty,	• real-life photos • photojournalism (*anti*-journalism) • advertising is more shocking than reality	Fig. 4	• Activation of polarized discussion through shock effect • De-familiarisation; de-contextualization; • Debate about advertising methods
5. 1993	Time for a counter-argument: from indictment to action-oriented : social intervention (Clothing distribution campaign)	• two serial adverts • interrogative form • no colors • image (naked Benetton) plus text	Fig. 5	Rhetorical devices: • dialogical structure of the message • abandoning of the color • request for an external legitimation (Red Cross)
6. 1991–95	AIDS as serial topic: 1991 (condoms), 1992 (dying AIDS patient with family), 1993 (part of the body with a HIV stamp), 1994 (hundreds of human faces)	• Same topic • Different communicative strategies	Fig. 6	• Added action value • Rhetorical alternation of soft–hard messages
7. 1996	Against racism: White, Black, Yellow hearts White and Black Horse	• Image of body part + words • Chromatic contrast	Fig. 7	Topic and strategies already used in previous campaigns
8. 1998	Handicap: Down's Syndrome people	• Product re-appears in the photo • No words	Fig. 8	• Added action value • Modulation of communicative tone (tenderness)
9. 2000	Face to the death Real protagonist in the death row of American prisons	• Photo-journalism • No words	Fig. 9	Message shock

and marketing strategies (Nardin, 1987; Kotler, Clark, & Scott, 1992; Righetti, 1993; Semprini, 1994a,1966). Second, I have considered the brand image of the company among its typical target populations, that is, the people who the advertising campaigns are aimed at and who are potential consumers of Benetton products.

Before examining some experimental results concerning these social representations in detail, we must first look at the *social discourse* which the Benetton company has produced.

Social discourse "of" Benetton: advertising and communicative strategies

The expansion of the Benetton company from family enterprise to global company has involved a repositioning of its brand name, in which communicative strategies, particularly advertising, have played an extremely important part (for a history and background information on the Benetton company see Nardin, 1987; Yagi, 1993; Kotler, Clark, & Scott, 1992; Semprini, 1994b, 1996).

A brief history of Benetton advertising campaigns
In order to show how the social discourse "of" Benetton "towards" a social target "about" social issues has developed, it is necessary to show how the communicative strategy in Benetton advertising has changed alongside the development of the brand. We must therefore look first at the company's advertising strategy.

The main stages in the development of Benetton advertising campaigns from 1970 to the present day are summarized in Table 5.1. As the table shows, the first change in Benetton advertising style was in 1984, when Toscani was appointed creative head of Benetton and eliminated the canons of traditional advertising from Benetton's campaigns. The traditional approach of the first stage (1966–83) made associations between the product (pullover) and positive social values (e.g., beauty, richness, landscape), together with conventional seductive allusions and double
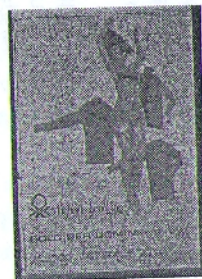

Figure 5.1 Traditional approach.

Figure 5.2 We are different – we are united.

meanings, e.g., "only for men" (see Figure 5.1), according to the Barthes model of "connotative transfer" (Barthes, 1964; Semprini, 1996).

This approach was jettisoned in favor of an approach based on a philosophy of universal harmony between different races and cultures using the colors of the rainbow as a metaphorical expression of the philosophy and a representation of the colors of Benetton clothes expanding across the globe (see Figure 5.2). This second stage (1984–9) can be defined by the sentence: "We are different – we are united." Products still appear (pullovers, t-shirts, etc.), but verbal textual elements disappear in the advertising message. The changed brand name "*United Colors of Benetton*" metaphorically emphasizes this strategy: United States of America as a market to conquer in the name of its highly positive civic value; colors as metaphor of races; the aesthetic harmony of the rainbow of colors as metaphor of social harmony, communicating bright and lively feelings. It is explicitly aimed at inducing a need to belong to the great Benetton group ("*all the colors of the world*" "*all united in the name of Benetton*"). Protagonists of the images are groups of young people or pairs of children and adolescents of different races, in most cases associated with national flags of opposing cultures: America – Russia, America – China etc. Their tender embrace of the globe (see Figure 5.2) suggests an overcoming of current political oppositions.

Toscani summarizes the spirit of Benetton advertising at this stage as follows: "International, homogeneous, and characterized by universal themes, Benetton Group's advertising campaigns have been, since 1984, not only a means of communication but an expression of our time." (O. Toscani, source: Internet Benetton web site, 1998).

The third stage (1989–92) is transitory and can be defined as "Towards the shock campaigns by means of contrast." From 1989 onwards there was a change from advertising the product to advertising the corporation. The poster representing a "new–born white baby being breast-fed by a black woman" is a forerunner of the shock photo series which was to characterize subsequent campaigns. This transitory phase was characterized by the presence of pairs: a dyad, or pair of opposite elements, replaced the group which had dominated the previous stage. Emphasis was on contrast, both in terms of *chromatic* (black and white) and *metaphorical/symbolic*

Rhetorical Devices using Contrast:
- Chromatic
  (Black/White)
- Visual/Perception
  (Detail/Whole)
- Metaphorical
  (Color/Race)
  (Albino girl: Race/Illness)
- Symbolic
  (Devil/Angel)
  (Wolf/Lamb)

Figure 5.3   United colors, divided symbols.

elements (dog and cat in 1990; wolf and lamb in 1990–1; angel and devil in 1991–2, see Figure 5.3). In some cases the contrast is focused on the visual/perceptual opposition between a part, a detail and the whole (e.g., the combined images of a child/adolescent on one side with a part of the body, like a hand, on the other). The chromatic iconic elements focusing on the white/black contrast in the 1990 Spring/Summer campaign were also consistently used in the Winter 1990–1 campaigns.

The transitional nature of this stage is shown by some advertisements which still focus on the "harmony" topic and still use a communicative strategy of collective subjects and multicolors (e.g., mixed race children's choir, bouquet of flowers, painter's table, multicolored balls as a metaphor for the harmony of differences).

From 1991 Benetton advertising changed radically. The positive social message associated with brightly colored products disappeared and several new social topics, all with a strongly "ideological" connotation, emerged. In this transitory phase the topics focusing on social problems prepared the ground for post-1992 photographic realism. However, the advertisements still had an ironic flavor marked by a "graphic" style as used in the advertisements on race (Negro/Aryan/Asiatic children sticking out their tongues, devil/angel black/white children, multicolored wooden children *pinocchi*), sexual transgression (multicolored condoms, toilet paper, black/white priest/nun kissing each other) or the natural world (zebra and parrot; leaves of different colors) in the Autumn/Winter 1991–2 campaign.

Within stage 4, after the Spring/Summer 1992 campaign, Benetton advertising became tougher and more shocking. It can be defined as "The world's woes: advertising is more shocking than reality." Topics were still sometimes focused on the same social problems, like race, but this time they were presented using real-life rather than studio photos and were more strongly connotated in terms of underdevelopment and violence. Examples include a black soldier with a kalashnikov over his shoulder, symbolizing the arms made by white people, holding a thigh bone in

his hands; an Indian couple holding their meager belongings, wading through floodwaters; a human cargo boat full of Albanians; and black people climbing over a dividing wall. Other social problems that had never previously appeared in advertising, such as Mafia killings, organized crime, a burning bombed car, and a person dying of AIDS with his family, were also used.

This strategy focused on a message-indictment of various social problems. It contained an implicit request for "for/against" options, aimed at activating polarized discussion in young people (the Benetton target) who are very sensitive to ideologically oriented social problems. The merchandising strategy seemed to be aimed at involving divided segments of the target in animated and conflicting discussions: "*talk about Benetton: it does not matter if you speak well or badly of it as long as you speak of it.*" In order to emphasize the focus on social issues, the products disappear from the advertisements which are presented with the realism of photo-journalism[9] (or antijournalism, according to Righetti, 1993, p. 109). "Toscani is and is not like the *photojournalists* whose works he uses. Like them he wants to inject the trauma of the real into the era of the lulled. Unlike them, he is a hip-hop sampler, embedding their traumatic image in his so-called advertising" (Blonsky, 1994, p. 58).

Negative reactions were based on the presumed illegitimacy of the intrusion by a commercial company on a discourse space that was traditionally the domain of the medical/scientific, legislative, and political discourse communities (Semprini, 1996). Toscani's response to these criticisms was to claim the right to take a different, more colorful approach to that of traditional commercial advertising, whose image was illusory and which falsified reality. Toscani claimed that his portrayal of worldwide "reality" with its full horror of violence, illness, social and natural disasters (e.g., immigration, racism, terrorism, Mafia, death penalty, ecological disasters), and his use of issues, such as AIDS, which had only been used in nonprofit making advertising was justified not only in terms of an abstract right to "know the truth,"[10] but also in terms of commercial logic – sales figures invariably increased after each campaign. Indeed the success of the advertising campaigns based on the use of universal issues like sex, religion, race, life and death[11] led Benetton not to finance any market research into advertising campaign results.

The Autumn/Winter 1992–3 campaign consisted of seven images all focusing on important social topics, each with a strong indictment of "the world's woes." It was a pessimistic development of the narrative of the previous campaigns, which had been more oriented by the ideology of "fraternity" in the name of "The United Colors of Benetton." The seven images of this campaign once again concerned *race/illness/deviance*, depicted by ambiguous connotations of biological and social differences, such as an Albino in an African tribe (see Figure 5.4). Other images connoted *underdevelopment/violence/exploitation of children*, for example, a poor black girl with a dirty white doll, or children working as laborers on a building site.

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Figure 5.4 An Albino in an African tribe.

Ecological subjects included pigs "grazing" in a refuse dump or a cormorant swimming in a black sea of crude oil; *social issues associated with violence* such as the death penalty were illustrated by an electric chair or KGB interrogation.

Stage 5 marked a break with the style of stage 4 because it involved a link between advertising and social action. It can be summarized as "Time for a counterargument: from indictment to action-oriented message." Communicative acts include social intervention on HIV/AIDS (Benetton campaigns for the distribution of condoms in shops and schools, financing AIDS research, sponsorship publications on AIDS prevention), promoting world peace (distribution of "multicultural notebook-passports" in schools), and relieving poverty (collection and distribution of clothing to Third World countries with the help of the Red Cross). Through this kind of organized social intervention Benetton communicates that the company is able to intervene in areas which have hitherto been the domain of politicians (Ministries of Health, Education, Scientific Research), the church, and humanitarian organizations (Red Cross). On balance, the evidence suggests that the shift from social criticism to action by Benetton was deliberate rather than, as Semprini (1996) claims, a response to accusations of using public and private tragedy for commercial gain.[12] The two serial advertisements, which appeared in the Spring/Summer 1993 campaign are linked to a single message, involving both image and text (see Figures 5 a and b). The style of stage 5 differs from that of previous stages
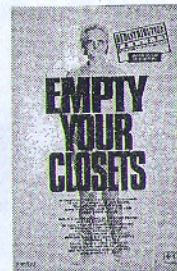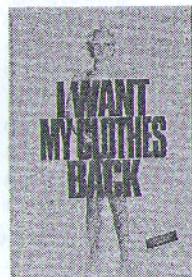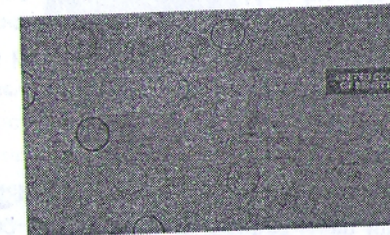

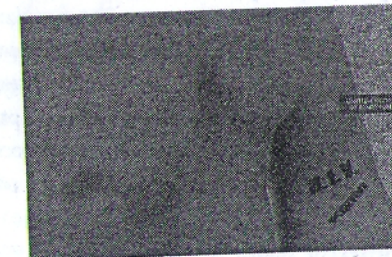**Figure 5.5** Clothing distribution campaign.

- Condoms, 1991

- Dying Ill, 1992

- HIV Stamp, 1993
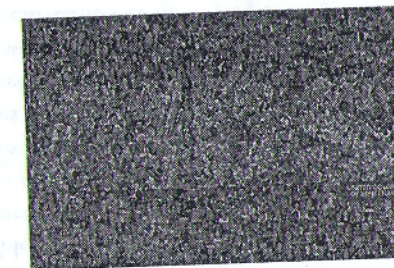
- Multifaces, 1994

Figure 5.6 The serial advertising campaigns on AIDS (1991-4).

4 in terms of its use of three rhetorical devices: (a) the interrogative form and the dialogic structure of the message, which directly and imperatively involve the recipients, calling for action; (b) the abandoning of colors, in favor of a more discrete use of black and white; and (c) the request for an external legitimate organization (e.g., the Red Cross) to guarantee the humanitarian nature of the projects.
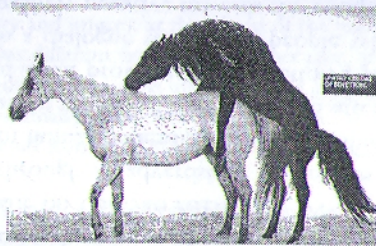
Figure 5.7 White and black horse.

Stage 6 is defined by a thematic rather than temporal criterion. HIV is a serial topic that has appeared consistently since 1991: "Condoms image" (1991), "dying AIDS patient with family" (1992), different "parts of the body with an HIV stamp" (1993–4), " hundreds of human faces" (1994–5) (see Figure 5.6). Although the topic of the advertisements appeared over several years and the campaigns were the same, the communicative strategies were quite different. Benetton has not simply used the AIDS question in a message/accusation format.

The social issue of racism appeared in the campaign 1996 and is not a new topic. In these advertisement the difference of color, as a metaphor for races, is associated with the words White, Black, and Yellow. In the pair of horses shown in Figure 5.7, the chromatic contrast recalls the previous series of black and white images.

The campaigns of stages 8 and 9 represent an emblematic example of two different ways to look at reality. One is the topic of the handicap represented by a tender mother and her Down's syndrome son (see Figure 5.8) in a photo showing again dressed people communicating tenderness (the product reappears associated with suffering and solidarity). In a second, the topic of the death penalty is represented by the faces of real protagonists who were interviewed by Toscani in the death row of American prisons (see Figure 5.9).

What will be the new stage, after the divorce between Toscani and Benetton, is at the moment an open question. Also, we cannot totally exclude the possibility that they will reconcile at a later stage, transforming this rupture in a phase of modulation of their discourse towards the world.
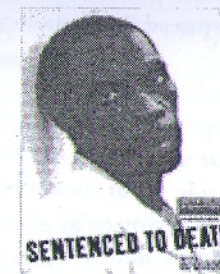

Figure 5.8 Handicap.

Figure 5.9 Looking at death in the face.

Benetton's communicative strategies

In the light of the social representation paradigm, let us now look at how these different stages reflect different communicative strategies adopted by the company. The main change in strategy between stage 1 and stage 2 came about as the result of the appointment of Oliverio Toscani as creative head of Benetton. At an early stage of these new Toscani-led campaigns, advertisements were still anchored in the product and used a graphic rather than photographic style (Semprini, 1996, p. 36). However, they focused on coexisting multicolored/multiracial elements expressing a positively connoted social message aimed at cultural integration – the forerunner of an advertising strategy aimed at the internationalization of Benetton products and the conquest of the American market.

After stage 2, the strategies of decontextualization and defamiliarization are used to create an effect of "the advertisement being more shocking than reality" (see "two processes – two-strategies" below). At stage 3, for example, the rhetorical use of visual/perceptual, chromatic and metaphorical/symbolic contrasts provokes a semantic short-circuit. Familiarity is destructured by using semantic dissociation and mixing elements from different categories that are conventionally perceived as opposites (see de Rosa & Smith, 1998a). At stage 4, Toscani apparently did not need any such rhetorical strategy. He simply put problematic pieces of the social world in posters and introduced controversial social issues in advertisements – an unfamiliar (defamiliarization) and illegitimate (decontextualization) space for public political discourse. In this way, the controversy about "shock advertising methods" is activated, rather than the social issue itself. What caused outrage was not AIDS, racism, or any of the many other social issues addressed in the Benetton campaigns from 1990–1 but their unfamiliar and decontextualized use by a commercial enterprise. Commerce was not authorized to speak about social issues as other institutions (e.g., medical, political, scientific, religious) were (see Righetti, 1993; Semprini, 1996). Reality is objectified through advertising – it becomes more shocking in advertising than in its natural, culturally legitimate context. Toscani's criticism of

conventional advertising as a means of falsifying reality is put into practice in his strategy of showing reality as it is. In *"new-born baby"* Toscani started to break the convention of private/public space division, which assumes birth to be a private, intimate event and not to be shown in a public advertisement by a commercial company. From here there was a progressive escalation in putting the social world on posters as realistically as possible:

> You can see a news photo of the fighting in Sarajevo and it's in context; it conforms to your expectations. Shocking violence in the news is normal. But when you take the same photo out of the news and put a Benetton logo on it, people pause and reflect on their position on the problem. When they can't come to terms with it, they get mad at us. (O. Toscani, source: Internet Benetton web site, 1998)

The two strategies of decontextualization and defamiliarization work alongside the two processes of objectification and anchoring in the representational system and activate a polemical code with strong bipolarization (see Figure 5.10). The theory of minority influence, which will be addressed in the next section, explains how these strategies work in relation to social representations and how this study provides empirical confirmation of their influence. The spirit inherent in all Toscani's campaigns is polemical and avant-garde: "Traditional advertising is cheap songs singing always of the beautiful, telling us how we should consume our life instead of creating it, how we should fail in courage so as never to be disturbed" (O. Toscani, interviewed by Blonsky, 1994).

Communicative strategies adopted at stage 5 are defined by Semprini (1996) as "the cycle of truth." The advertising at this stage had an added "action-value" – the promotion of social activity was a sort of acting-out of advertising itself. One of the best illustrations of the strategic change towards prosocial action is in Benetton's use of the HIV topic. HIV is a serial topic which has appeared consistently since 1991, for example "Condoms image" (1991) and "dying AIDS patient with family" (1992) from stage 3. However, at stage 5, Benetton did not simply use the AIDS question in the message/accusation format. It also supported social work concerning AIDS prevention among the young, for example by distributing condoms in schools, donating money for AIDS research, exhibiting a huge condom monument in public, and devoting a special issue on *Colors* to AIDS.

In attempting to show, through its advertising, that it was not a commercial enterprise which profits from human suffering but was genuinely concerned with social issues, Benetton's strategy at stage 5 was clearly an attempted reply to the increasing criticism that had been provoked by Benetton's previous campaigns. The aim was to re-establish a dialogue with those people who, after the shock campaigns, had become extremely negative towards the company as other recognized humanitarian institutions. It seems that this dialogue, which for many years
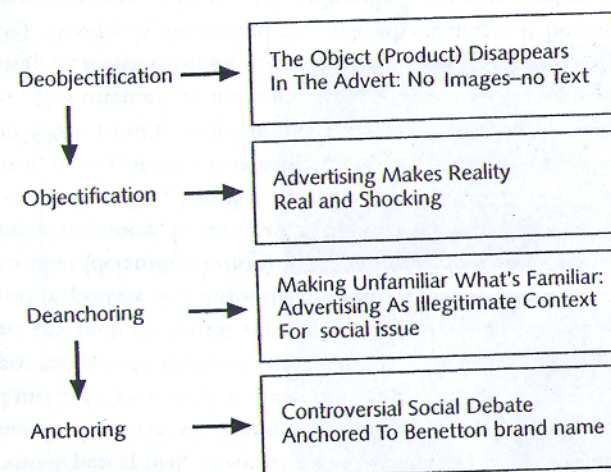
Figure 5.10. Two strategies, two processes.

has been modulated by rhetorical alternating between hard and soft messages, has been definitively broken after the last 2000 campaign "Face to the death."

Social discourse "about" Benetton

> Advertising is the most powerful form of communication in the world. We need to have images that will make people think and arouse discussion. Benetton's intention is to stimulate a critical discussion. It's wonderful to raise doubts rather than sanction certainties by conforming to established rules. (O. Toscani, quoted in T. Yagi, 1993)

> Our advertising is a Rorschach test of what you bring to the image.
>
> Ad agencies are obsolete, they're out of touch with the times; they're far too comfortable. When the client is happy, they stop trying. They don't want to know what's going on in the world. They create a false reality and want people to believe in it. We show reality and we're criticized for it. (O. Toscani, source: Internet Benetton web site, 1998)

From stage 2 onwards, when Benetton, in its Spring/Summer 1992 campaign, started to use images with a strong social impact, it aroused strongly-held and conflicting opinions (see Landi & Pollini, 1993, for a collection). The following are just a few examples:

> Real reality, not virtual reality. Conscience stimulated to think. (signed letter. Turin, p. 26)

We looked with curiosity and interest at the photo of the young black albino who, because of her illness, was different from others of her race, with the same somatic features as her brothers and sisters . . . It is important that people question themselves, reflect on things which normally are accepted as "different" and are nothing else but "different normality." (letter from two Albinos. Johannesburg, South Africa, p. 66)

If you love life, boycott Benetton. (leaflet distributed in Melbourne, Australia, p. 18)

We'll never buy your blood-stained pullovers again. Does this please you? (signed postcard, London, p. 18)

You are the exploiters of the human race (anonymous letter, Frosinone, p. 20)

As these examples suggest, reactions were both positive and negative. Generally speaking, the social discourse about Benetton generated by this debate can be summarized in the following terms. Firstly, it stirred up debate in a vast cross-section of the community. The role of Benetton advertising has been debated by governments and their lawyers, by social scientists in academic circles, by journalists and opinion makers, as well as by the public. It has involved both experts and nonexperts. Secondly, it has involved debate in a considerable number of social settings. It has been discussed at home, workplaces, clubs, academic conferences, and government buildings as well as in newspapers, magazines, and on TV and radio.

Thirdly, the kind of controversy stirred up by Benetton advertising is polarized. The extracts in Landi and Pollini show opinions that are either clearly favorable or clearly unfavorable, with very few people showing indifference. The favorable opinions claim that Benetton advertising is original, effective, aesthetically pleasing, forward-looking and socially useful, whereas the negative opinions claim that it is cynical, "necrophiliac," and opportunistic. Fourthly, as the above cited examples suggest, the opinions that are held about Benetton are very strongly held; people are either strongly in favor of Benetton advertising or strongly against.

What this social discourse shows is the transformation of a debate about social issues into a debate about Benetton advertising and a debate about advertising into a debate about the company itself. Benetton's strategy of using relevant social problems (discourse "on" the social) is of great interest and curiosity to scholars of mass communication. Indeed the split at the level of public opinion and the resonance obtained in the mass media raise an important question: are the advantages of "visibility" (namely of making the brand name widely known – one of the most traditional markers of an effective advertising campaign) offset by negative reactions to the images? In other words, is not the fact that a large part of the population has a clearly negative reaction to this kind of advertising, accusing it of necrophilia and cynicism, of more relevance than the gains made in terms of notoriety and social

visibility? The answer to this question will be grounded on the results of the empirical research described in the next section.

Empirical Results

This section examines some results of an empirical study, aimed to reveal the links between Benetton's global communication strategies and the part played in the construction of the Benetton brand name by the social representation of company-created Benetton discourse (i.e., Benetton as a *cultural phenomenon*). This examination was based both on media texts about Benetton produced by experts and lay people in publications, interviews, press articles, and letters to magazines and to the company, and on people's conversation within focus groups that had discussed the same media texts.[13]

Social discourse "about" Benetton: the company as perceived by its target

A multimethod approach
The general methodological design behind this project and some of the results of the advertisements used here have been published elsewhere (de Rosa, 1988; de Rosa & Losito, 1996; de Rosa & Smith, 1997, 1998a). Two methodological conditions were used. In one, quasi-experts viewed 11 slides of Benetton images; in a second, "daily use" condition, nonexperts viewed images in magazine advertisements. Advertisements from the controversial 1992–3 Autumn/Winter campaign and the 1991–4 AIDS campaigns were used. Participants in each condition were equally distributed for sex and age. They were tested for message selection strategy, focus of attention, message comprehension, message interpretation, and memory of previous exposure to the same image as well as other familiarization variables. The study was begun in Italy (n = 1257) and extended to other European countries: Austria (n = 232), France (n = 240), and Portugal (n = 120).

The aim of the research was to identify possible connections between the dependent variables linked to the message/advertisement (descriptions of the image; interpretation of the message; interpretation of the meaning attributed to the message by the source; memory reactivation processes; evaluation of the effectiveness of the message; evaluation of the moral acceptability of the message; identification of message topic) and variables outside the message (attitude to message topic; Benetton product buying behavior; sociodemographic data).

With regard to the present discussion, the most significant technique used was the *associative network* (see de Rosa, 1995, for a complete description of these techniques). This projective technique was used first, in order to prevent responses

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being anchored by information from the questionnaire which might bias word elicitation. It requires participants first to associate words with stimulus words and then to establish connections and branching pattern between the elicited words written around the stimulus word in the center of the page. Thus, it enables respondents to specify the structure of a semantic field themselves. Thus, starting from a free association test, you obtain a textual web. The associative network also gives information about the order in which words come to mind. This order indicates both their saliency and the level of stereotyping of the elicited representations (participants" first words, because of their high level of accessibility, may be both their most salient ones and the most socially shared ones).[14]

The associative network requires people to attribute a particular polarity to each word (positive, neutral, or negative) to describe its connotations. This enables not only the structure and content of a social representation to be revealed, but also the "polarization of the semantic field', that is, the evaluative and attitudinal aspects of the representation. A polarity index calculates the positive, negative, or neutral connotations of the free associations evoked by each of three stimulus words used in this study: image, brand name, and I . This index, which varies from +1 to −1 is calculated by the following formula:

$$\text{polarity index (P)} = \frac{\text{no. of positive words} - \text{no. of negative words}}{\text{total no. of associated words}}$$

A second "neutrality" control index, which also varies between −1 and +1, is calculated. In this way the structure, content, and polarity of particular representations are established.

In terms of data analysis, associative network processing has two objectives: the first is to describe the structure and content of the representational fields associated with image, Benetton and I (achieved by lexical correspondence analysis: SPAD-T; see Lebart, Morineau, and Beçue, 1989), and the second is to reconstruct the discourse dynamics implicit in the structure of the textual web (by applying a content analysis program DISCAN to the corpus of elicited words; see Maranda, 1990). Technical details of these analyses are described elsewhere. The end result is a map of the semantic activity of a particular corpus of the kind shown in Figures 5.15 and 5.16.

The hypotheses of the study were as follows:

1   Alongside highly contrasting reactions to the advertising campaign, the target would have a relatively positive representation of the company and that, paradoxically, the controversy caused by the "provocatory" style of the campaign would be associated with a kind of metacommunication reinforcing positive connotations of the brand name.

2   Within the discourse dynamics of the associative networks (stimulus word "Benetton"), the social representation of the Benetton brand name would mediate between the company's advertisement (and other communicative strategies) and its industrial activity and production (goods and attributes).

Results

As regards the first hypothesis, the polarity indexes of the representational fields associated with the various advertisements of both campaigns (Autumn/Winter 1992–3 and HIV/AIDS serial adverts) were compared with the indexes of the semantic fields activated by the stimulus word "Benetton." Results confirmed the hypothesis regarding the relatively positive representation of the company coupled with the negative, or ambivalent, representation evoked by the advertisements.

Figure 5.11 shows that the average polarity index for individual images tends to be negative for almost all images, particularly the "interview" and "electric chair" photographs. There are less negative reactions to images containing children, such as "tribe" and "child labor," probably evidence of a sympathy effect. Analysis of
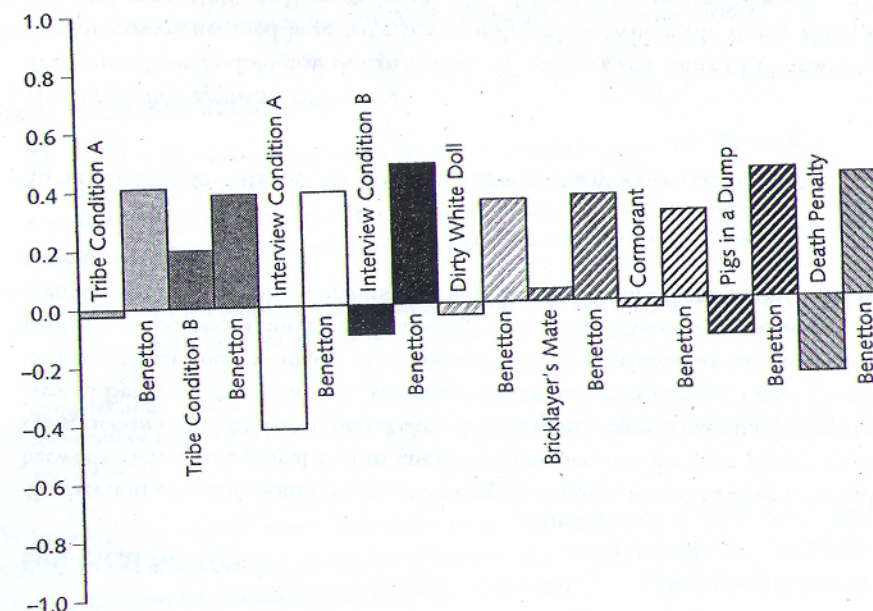

Figure 5.11   Indexes of polarity relating to the 1992-3 campaign and the Benetton brand.
Note   The same graphical pattern identifies the group of subjects who answered both the stimulus "adverts" and "Benetton" brand.
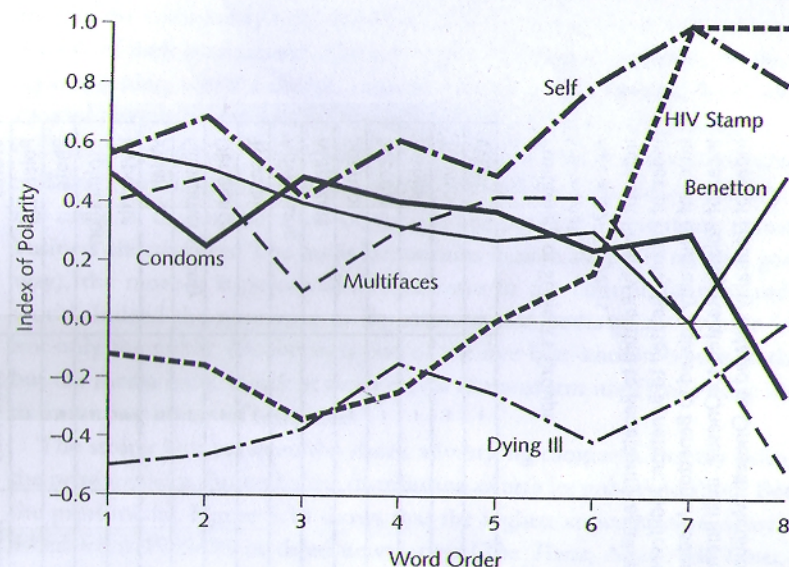
Figure 5.12 Indexes of Polarity relating to the stimulus adverts "condoms," "dying ill," "HIV stamp," and "mutlifaces" (see Figure 5.6) according to the order of elicitation.

variance, using image contents as independent variables and average polarity indexes for each image as dependent variables, shows that evaluation varies significantly in accordance with photograph type (F = 12.58, p < 0.001).

The difference between the largely unfavorable reaction to the seven images of the Autumn/Winter 1992–3 campaign and the favorable reaction to the Benetton brand name is shown in the graph, which shows a considerable "disproportion" between the average polarity indexes for individual images (almost always negative) and for the brand name (always positive). These results are confirmed by the significant difference between the average scores represented in the graph, as derived from the t–test.

The same pattern of results emerges from the index of polarity relating to the HIV/AIDS advertisements, compared to that of the brand name. The only difference here is the modulation of the target's reaction in line with the soft/hard rhetorical devices used by Toscani (represented in Figure 5.12, also taking into account the order of a word's elicitation from the first to the eighth evoked words). The AIDS issue is presented softly and positively in "Condom" with a beautiful colored image and in a mass of friendly "smiling faces," but more aggressively in the images of "a person dying of AIDS" or "sexual parts of the body stamped HIV" (for a

detailed analysis of the rhetorical devices adopted by Toscani, see de Rosa & Smith, 1998b).

Our findings show that most of the people interviewed considered Benetton advertising to be effective for the purposes of promoting a positive corporate image (54%) and for the purpose of boosting sales (21%), while 18% considered it ineffective and only 6% thought it harmful. Among nonexperts, however, replies to the two questions on the "moral acceptability of Benetton's advertising campaigns"[15] are less favorable and more controversial. Although most of those interviewed (61%) considered Toscani's advertisements to be "morally acceptable because they focus the attention of public opinion on important social questions," only 48.6% of the respondents considered it legitimate to use these issues for commercial ends. This marked fluctuation of opinions reflects the existence, in a non–negligible portion of the target, of an ambiguous attitude, namely a condition of psychological uncertainty (a conflicting condition that is typical of subjects under a minority influence). Thus, Benetton is acknowledged as being able to stimulate (through original images with a powerful emotional impact) reflection on and discussion of social topics such as racial discrimination, marginalization, and violence. At the same time, it is not considered legitimate for these topics to be dealt with by a firm for private business interests (though almost half our respondents thought this was legitimate).

The highly favorable evaluation of the *brand name*, when compared to the less favorable (and often negative) evaluation expressed by the polarity index for the images, seems to show that factors not exclusively and directly linked to the advertising world, but also to the economic and business dimension of the group (a multinational group, whose widely varied interests range from wearing apparel to Formula One, from food to cosmetics) are important in the definition of the social representation of Benetton.

However, this result may be interpreted differently by making reference to Moscovici's theory of active minorities,[16] discussed elsewhere (de Rosa, 1998; de Rosa & Smith, 1997, 1998a). Research (Maass & Clark, 1984; Moscovici & Mugny, 1985; Mucchi Faina, 1995) shows that the characteristics attributed most frequently to "deviant" and "disturbing" groups, that show coherence in defending their positions, are originality, self-assurance, confidence in own ideas, competence and "social visibility." Despite the negative reactions (expressed by the polarity index regarding the images and by replies concerning the moral acceptability of the advertisements), these characteristics could be considered by the target to be indications of success at a communicative and business level, and of a marked distinctiveness from other firms that operate in an anonymous and conventional way on the market (a favorable evaluation expressed, not only by the polarity index relative to the brand name, but also by the responses regarding the efficacy of the communication in corporate image terms).

A minority's power to influence derives, on the one hand, from its style of behavior

Words	Semi-Axis	Absolute contr.
Known	+	5.8
Franchising	+	5.4
Work	+	4.7
Condom	+	3.7
Expensive	+	3.6
Adults	+	3.5
Antiracism	+	2.7
Senator	+	2.6
Quality	+	2.4
Contrasts	+	2.3
Young	+	2.2
Interesting	+	1.7
Pain	+	1.4
Union	+	1.3
Peace	+	1.3
Warm	+	1.2
Luciano Benetton	+	1.1

Positioning of Subject's Groups
Sex = Female
Age = Younger Than 22 Years
Index of Polarity Towards Benetton: Positive
Index of Polarity Towards Oneself: Positive
Index of Neutrality Towards Oneself: Low

Words	Semi-Axis	Absolute contr.
Polemical	–	5.7
Photo	–	3.7
Exploitation	–	3.5
Hypocrite	–	3.1
Wear	–	3.0
Consumer society	–	3.0
Denounce	–	2.2
Toscani	–	2.0
Advertising	–	1.5
Magazine	–	1.5
Sponsor	–	1.5
Success	–	1.2
Fashion	–	1.1
Treviso	–	1.0
Wool	–	0.9

Positioning of Subject's Groups
Sex = Male
Age = 22–25 years
Index of Polarity Related to Benetton: Negative
Index of Polarity Related to Benetton: Indifferent
Index of Neutrality Related to Benetton: Medium
Index of Polarity Related to Oneself: Indifferent
Index of Neutrality Related to Oneself: Medium–High

Figure 5.13 Results from SPAD-T analyzing associative networks related to the Benetton brand name.

(which must be mainly characterized by coherence, but also by a capacity to listen to objections and criticisms) and, on the other hand, from a partial correspondence between the ideas and values which it proposes and the ideas and values which are rooted in the society which is the target of its communications – a notion which is at the heart of the theory of modern communication (Eco, 1976, 1987, 1990). If these conditions are met, minorities often show a capacity to impose their own attitudes and to foster favorable behaviors towards themselves. Flexibility emphasizes the bidirectional nature of the influencing processes, which is based not just on the source's communicative behavior, but also on mutual adjustment between the target's reactions and the source's ability to adjust itself to the characteristics and development of the argumentative context.

Benetton's communication technique is, in fact, clearly marked by the creation and management of conflict. Benetton deliberately creates a conflict in public opinion, while trying to organize it by means of a consistent set of "rhetorical stratagems" (de Rosa & Smith, 1998b) aimed at a greater acceptance of its own positions. Exemplary, in this respect, is the relative modification of strategy, between stages 4 and 5, from "saying" to "doing" (documented by the firm itself and pointed out in the literature by Semprini, 1994b).

Finally, it is noteworthy that the target's representation of the company is split into two poles: one focusing on the advertising hemisphere (polemical, photo, exploitation, hypocrite, consumer society, etc.) and the other on the hemisphere of the production and commercial strategies of the brand name (known, franchising, work, expensive, quality, etc.). The fact that the former is anchored to Toscani and is mainly expressed by men over 22, with a negative index of polarity relating to Benetton, is particularly interesting. The latter is anchored to Luciano Benetton, director of Benetton, and is mainly expressed by women under 22, with a positive index of polarity relating to Benetton (see Figure 5.13). Again it seems that the rhetorical strategy of inducing contrasting representations affects the target, splitting the negative world of Toscani-led advertising ("L'âme damnée de Benetton")[17] and the positive world of the Luciano Benetton-led commercial enterprise.

The results discussed here also support the observation, made by a number of authors (Moscovici, 1980; Moscovici & Mugny, 1987; Mugny, 1991), that the influence exercised by an active minority is mainly indirect. According to them, minorities bring about a cognitive restructuring and a change of attitude which, at a latent level, often corresponds, if not to open and explicit condemnation, at least to clear, partial rejection.

The positive effects achieved by Benetton in the evaluation of its specific brand can also be interpreted on the basis of the "agenda setting" model – a model of the cognitive effects of social visibility (Shaw, 1979). The most important difference between minority influence theory and agenda setting theory is linked to the conflict. Minorities obtain visibility because they infringe upon set concepts, under-

mining the community's mental schemes and arousing the interest of the media (as a result of their own unorthodox positions). In contrast, according to the theory of agenda setting, social visibility, with its effect at public opinion level, seems to be created directly by the media. According to the agenda setting model, the more an occurrence is spoken about, the more the occurrence is taken into consideration and accorded importance. Paradoxically, therefore, high social visibility could be the cause of the amplification of the perception of the Benetton's economic and business effectiveness. The more Benetton is spoken about (in either a good or bad way), the more it is perceived as a colossus in the communication and business world. Indeed the resonance of Benetton in the media seems to have influenced not only the public (Benetton is one of the five best-known brands in the world) but the media itself, which at times seems to transform itself from mere instrument to unwitting object of influence.

The strong link between the shock advertising campaign and the echo effect in the print media is shown by the distribution of articles published about Benetton in the print media. Figure 5.14 shows that the highest concentration of articles published from 1980–98 in three newspapers (*The Times, New York Times,* and *Los Angeles Times*) falls exactly within the 1991–5 period when the amount of shock advertising was increasing. Computer-aided content analysis (using Alceste) of the whole corpus of articles shows that the *New York Times* focused mainly on Benetton advertising as a source of scandal and controversy during the 1992–3 period, whereas before 1992 and after 1993 it focused mainly on the Benetton business.
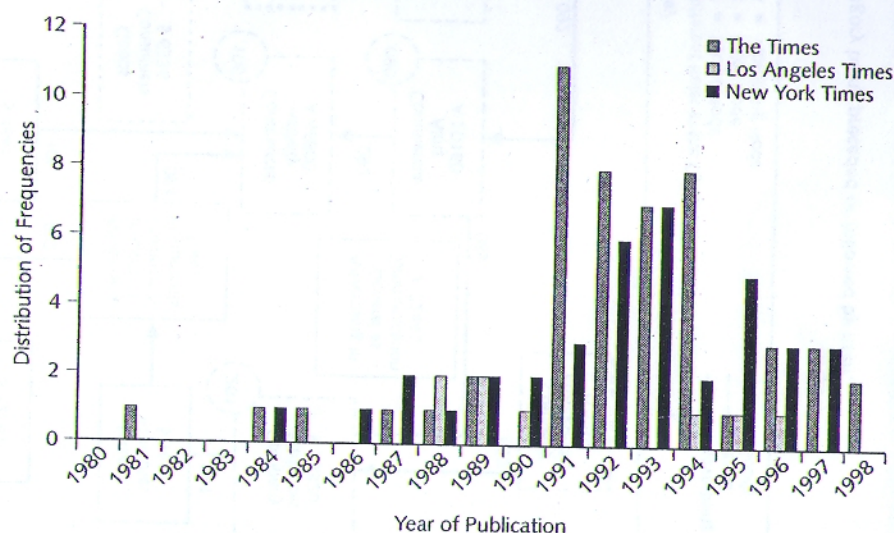

Figure 5.14 Distribution of frequencies of articles about Benetton appearing in *The Times, Los Angeles Times,* and *New York Times.*

This economic representation of the Benetton financial empire also occurs in Benetton's self-representation on its website. The website is organized into three main sections: *Who We Are, What We Say, What We Make*. Analysis of all website texts shows that Benetton's history of scandals appears in *What We Say*, economic questions in *Who We Are* and *What We Make* (associated with product). The company's identity (*Who We Are*) and products (*What We Make*) are attached to the visible, concrete world of Benetton's commercial empire, which is presented as a social alternative to reality and described in *What We Say* in terms of diversity.

Discourse dynamics arising from associative networks produced in answers to the "Benetton" stimulus

As regards the second hypothesis, Figure 5.15 shows the DiscAn[18] results for the associative networks in terms of the discourse dynamics activated by the stimulus word "Benetton." It shows the links between the categories of words elicited from subjects in response to the brand name[19] and illustrates the semantic connections of the "Benetton" representation in terms of all its advertising, marketing, and production activities. This network seems to occur despite the contrasting polarity indexes for the advertising and brand name representations and confirms the effectiveness of the company's communicative strategies.

The most obvious result is the central role of "goods," which seems to act as the organizing nucleus for all the other source/relay elements. As regards "sources," "goods attributes" and "Benetton advertising attributes" have the highest level of activity. "Goods" is the biggest "absorber" with the highest level of activity. The role of "goods" is central: all the other categories on the map (advertising, brand name, economic/commercial aspects) revolve around it.

Associations produced in response to the stimulus "Benetton" refer to different areas. First, the area relating to "production" was described, then the area relating to Benetton advertising, specific Benetton campaign images used in the research, advertising in general, economic/commercial activity, the source and its attributes and the campaign message. This semantic route can be traced on the map via source categories in the upper half and absorber categories in the lower half.

The dual role played by advertising in the semantic dynamics is particularly interesting. It acts as a source (i.e., it is greater than 1) for the Benetton stimulus, particularly for the "message outcome," "emotional correlates" and "message intention" categories, and as an absorber (i.e., it is less than 1) for advertising in general. This highlights the more active part played by Benetton advertising as an activating source for semantic routes compared with advertising in general, which seems to have a more receptive/passive role.

The results for advertisement images show links between the descriptive level
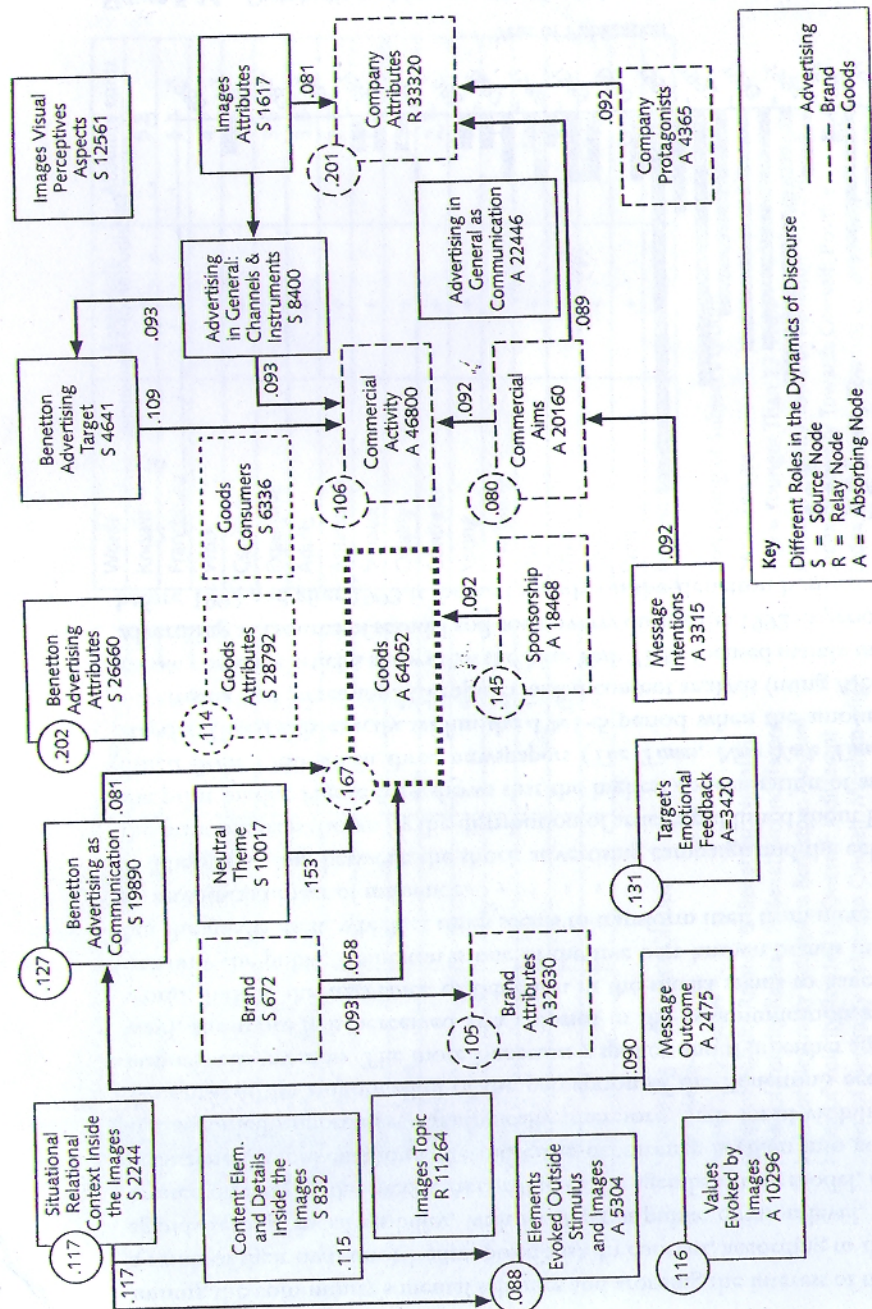
Figure 5.15 Semantic map: Graphic visualization of DiscAn results.
Note Factor Activity > 800; Probability > 800; ◯ Loop = probability of one category being preceded or followed by itself.

Key
Different Roles in the Dynamics of Discourse
S = Source Node
R = Relay Node
A = Absorbing Node

——— Advertising
– – – Brand
····· Goods

(Figure 5.15 node labels:)
Images Visual Perceptives Aspects S 12561
Images Attributes S 1617
Company Attributes R 33320
Company Protagonists A 4365
Advertising in General: Channels & Instruments S 8400
Advertising in General as Communication A 22446
Benetton Advertising Target S 4641
Commercial Activity A 46800
Commercial Aims A 20160
Goods Consumers S 6336
Benetton Advertising Attributes S 26660
Goods Attributes S 28792
Goods A 64052
Sponsorship A 18468
Message Intentions A 3315
Target's Emotional Feedback A=3420
Benetton Advertising as Communication S 19890
Neutral Theme S 10017
Brand S 672
Brand Attributes A 32630
Message Outcome A 2475
Situational Relational Context Inside the Images S 2244
Content Elem. and Details Inside the Images S 832
Images Topic R 11264
Elements Evoked Outside Stimulus and Images A 5304
Values Evoked by Images A 10296

Figure 5.16 Social Representations of Benetton brand. Semantic map derived from DiscAn: different roles in the dynamics of discourse.

(Figure 5.16 labels:)
Source Node → Communication Advertising Topic
Relay Node → Brand
Absorbing Node → Goods

("context elements" and "details present in the images" are both source nodes); the interpretative level ("topic" is a mediator and relay); and the evaluative level (values evoked from the images is an absorber node). As regards links between advertising and company production aspects, "Benetton advertising" seems to open up a discourse about the "product" – a surprising result since this discourse had been removed or denied during the advertising campaigns. Benetton advertising seems to play a diffracting role in the associative dynamics as if, starting from the advertising message, the associative discourse was facilitated to act as a source for a number of semantic paths. These are clearly more complex links than those which start from the brand name and its attributes or from "product attributes" and "consumers," all of which tend to revolve around the product.

In conclusion, in the description, interpretation, and evaluation of Benetton advertising, the associative discourse expands in the direction of economic/commercial aspects and source attributes and eventually focuses on the "product" and "protagonist figures" of the Group. Figure 5.16 summarizes the map of the Discan results and highlights how the discourse dynamics move from the world of communication to the world of company and finally on to company production and products. These empirical findings, which link Benetton advertising to Benetton goods, may be the reason for the success of Benetton's communicative strategies and one of the reasons why its advertising is able to deny the product while at the same time placing it in the center of the representational field, and provoke fierce controversy while at the same time increasing company profits.

Moscovici's statement (1976b) that "the original and extreme points of view have much greater probabilities of exercising a strong attraction than of being rejected" seems decidedly appropriate to this study. In fact, despite the criticisms

Figure 5.15 Semantic map: Graphic visualization of DiscAn results.
Note Factor Activity > 800; Probability > 0.08; ◯ Loop = probability of one category being preceded or followed by itself.
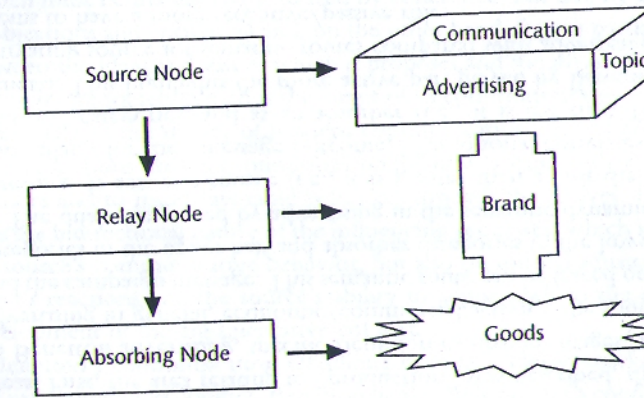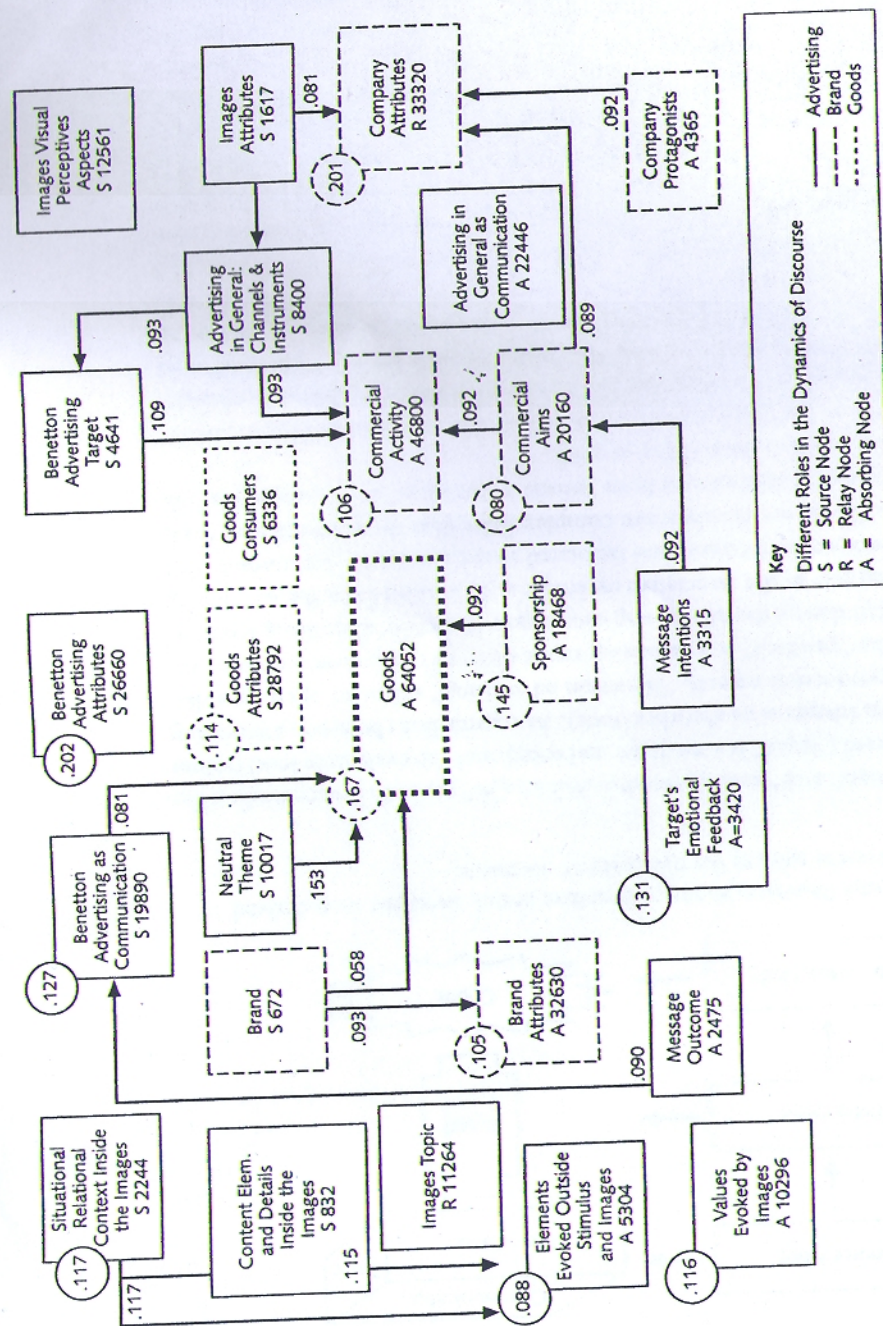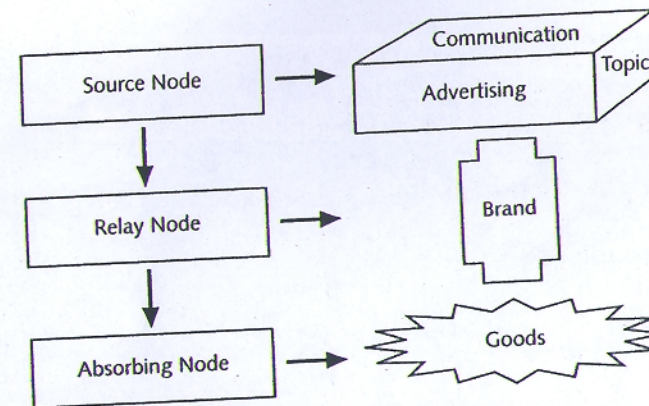

Figure 5.16 Social Representations of Benetton brand. Semantic map derived from DiscAn: different roles in the dynamics of discourse.

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Moscovici's statement (1976b) that "the original and extreme points of view have much greater probabilities of exercising a strong attraction than of being rejected" seems decidedly appropriate to this study. In fact, despite the criticisms

often expressed towards Benetton's strongly transgressive advertising, the representation of the brand name (fueled precisely by this advertising!) is positive in almost all the people interviewed.

This result seems to show that "scandal" pays, not only in terms of fame and social visibility, but also, paradoxically, in terms of image. The relative gap between attitude to the message (highly polarized, i.e., the object of favorable and unfavorable opinions) and attitude to the brand name (almost invariably favorable) is, in fact, coherent with one of the guiding principles of the theory of active minorities: the principle according to which the social influence exercised by heterodox groups which behave coherently in defense of their positions is, though pronounced, mainly indirect.

The self-presentation of the Company as a deviant group within the conformist scenario of advertising is shown in the picture "madmen ready for the straitjacket," which appeared in February/March 1996 in newspapers and posters, and recently on the home page of the Benetton website. In it, the whole Benetton Management team is portrayed with Luciano Benetton in the key position wearing a full straitjacket while all the others are wearing straitjackets over colored trousers. The colors, which break the glacial monotony of the white straitjackets, blend with the smiles on the faces of these "madmen," connoting the "crazy firm's" positive, cheerful, and creative approach.

Conclusion

It's clear that the results of this research are limited to one case and the population we studied. This research confirms the success of Benetton's communicative strategy. Social discourse "by" Benetton "about" social issues sets off a social discourse "about Benetton" which itself sets up a metarepresentation of the brand name: the brand name is expanded and emphasized within self-reflecting circuits which feed off the contrasting forces activated by the source of the message. This process suggests a paradoxical effect (as shown in Figure 5.17): despite powerful resistance to accepting Benetton's communicative style in a large portion of the target, a positive representation of the brand name is still created through communicative strategies capable of arousing controversial attitudes (anchored in polemical social representations) to the advertising campaigns.

But, could we explain it a little bit more completely? What did critical advertisement change? From what we have seen, is it what characterizes it that enables it to have a certain success? A way of answering is suggested by the connection between Benetton's style of advertisement and the behavioral style of an active minority with the fashion world, so to speak. We note its consistent character and the total refusal, until recently, of all that is asked from it to soften its content and/or deny it
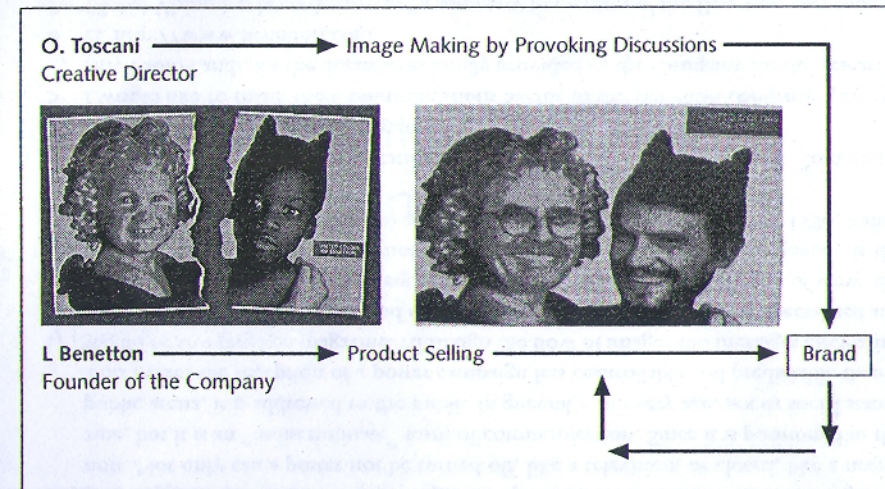

Figure 5.17 F = f (C, Rs): Fashion as function of communication and social representations.

all efficiency. As we know, such consistency creates a conflict through a "virtual" worldwide debate. This conflict or controversy is amplified through the multiple communication genres, including advertisement (icons), interview and press releases (texts), images and texts together (*Global Vision, Colors*, website), and prosocial actions. As we already know, this may be deliberate intention to be sensed as an "active minority," at least in the advertisement community. Achieving social visibility (de Rosa, 1998, de Rosa & Smith 1997, 1998a) is linked to a favorable evaluation of brand. This has also been observed by colleagues saying that Benetton's advertising message has the merit of being noticed and being talked about (Kotler, Clark, & Scott, 1992; Semprini, 1996). We will see what this message is typical of and why it succeeds in its attempt to change the practice established by publicity. In any case, it's a critical practice in the sense that it's normal practice for an "active minority." However, that is just a means towards an end. The end is to innovate, to generate a new social representation of the company that adopts such a strategy. Or, to say it in a commercial way, "the goal is to sell" the brand.

If, in addition, we were to summarize how social representation is shaped during communication, we would say that the two processes (defamiliarization and decontextualization) observed in the Benetton advertisement work along side the processes of anchoring and objectivation. That, by making unfamiliar what is familiar, creates a code for distinguishing and recognizing Benetton's messages as messages that are advertised. Rather than being noise or redundancies, they become events or happenings.

But before coming to a conclusion, let me lightly touch a question of the philosophy of mind suggested to me by Moscovici.[20] A brand name, like Benetton, is usually a proper name. When we speak of social representation, for example, "the social representation of Benetton," we give it a meaning, making Benetton a referent of what is talked about. It is tempting to think that this meaning would express the semantic link, a specific content describing the Italian brand. But Putnam's (1975) analyses have suggested that this semantic link is instituted by a social practice, a "baptism," just as when we call a person Raul or an illness AIDS. Through conventional means we give a person or an illness a name that becomes specific whatever it is, and following that, the changes in the associated representations. This is very important for the theory of social representations and communication (Moscovici, 2000). In fact the process of communication, in particular advertising, could be seen as a baptism process where the family name, afterwards a brand, becomes a referent, one of the referents about what is in the society and the representation which that more or less shares.

In this sense, we could say that publicity does not create a brand image, but a brand to which opinions or behaviors refer in the fashion world in whatever way it is represented at a given moment, or the product (perfume, shoes, etc.) that represents it. It is quite obvious, from our study, that Benetton has become a referent both in the advertising and fashion world. All this complicates what would seem simple in the accepted view of communication. This makes us more sensitive to certain paradoxes. For example the following paradox: the association between social representations and Benetton's name is quite positive. And yet, the messages, their styles face a resistance in a large portion of the public.

But, as we could expect, in all innovations the change achieved by an "active" minority does not exclude a critical judgment of its behavioral style or its qualities. It could be that the resistance is concentrated more on what, as a last analysis, is only a means (behavioral style, tension strategy) and less on what is the veritable end (have people accept an idea, an image, and so on).

It seems that the case was finally closed by the last campaign "Looking at Death in the face" which has symbolically broken the binomium Benetton – Toscani, avoiding the risk of the discourse's inflation and of repercussions caused by redundant rhetorical devices, that is, by the familiarization of defamiliarization. We can see that "death" has paradoxically produced death right within the communicative space conquered by Toscani in the Benetton Company. We will see how Benetton will reposition his brand after the divorce with Toscani, and how, if, and in the name of which "brand" or "patron" Toscani will continue to shock the world. Whatever will be the development of this story (including a remarriage), the communicative genre invented by Toscani will belong to the history of the very special cases within communicative studies.

Notes

1   Carlo Brambilla (2000) Benetton e Toscani si lasciano dopo 18 anni. (April, 30). *La Repubblica* p. 25.
2   Luciano Benetton is in charge of sales, Giuliana Benetton of production, Gilberto Benetton of administration and Carlo Benetton of machinery (cf. Kotler, P. Clark, J.G., & Scott, W.G. 1997 4th ed., p. 2)
3   This, in our view, was a strategic company decision aimed at achieving large-scale social visibility at low cost. However, A. Semprini (1996, it. tr. 1997) argues from a sociosemiotic perspective in favor of "ingenuousness," which in his view served to increase the conflictual and controversial social discourse of the Benetton brand name. According to Semprini, this ingenuousness was determined by the poster medium's inability to segment the target. The result was indiscriminate exposure to messages without prior selection by the source of the message:

Because of its maximum visibility and its position in the public space, posters provide a particularly direct message. It is a form of communication from which there is no protection and which it is impossible not to see. The brand messages thus achieve greater visibility, but also amplify negative aspects in terms of reaction and interpretation. Not only can a poster not be turned off, like a television, or closed, like a magazine, but it is an "indiscriminate" form of communication. Since it is positioned in the public arena, it is addressed to the public in general – of every age, sex or social status. This makes the reception of a poster campaign less controllable and predictable than it would be in a targeted magazine. Although the flow of images and messages circulating in society seems to be chaotic and omnipresent, it is actually channeled, specialized and divided up in order to reach an equally segmented public. From this point of view, the poster is perhaps the least discriminatory advertising medium. Its consequence is the amplification of the controversial effects of communication. (Semprini, A. 1996, Italian trans. 1997, pp. 80–81)

4   Moscovici (personal communication, 1998) during the 4th International Conference on Social Representations, Mexico City.
5   I would like to thank the Communications Sector of the Benetton company, particularly Paolo Landi, for the documents kindly provided by the Company for this research.
6   cf. http://www.benetton.com
7   Global Vision has been defined as "a summary in pictures of the Benetton company; it contains 320 pages with chapters on company philosophy, architecture, product, licensing, advertising." (New projects/ Nuovi progetti, p. 11).

dynamics depends on the intensity with which each node absorbs, diffracts or transmits. DiscAn the d+/d− score for each node. A score of 1 means that it is a relay node, if it greater than 1 it is a source node and if it is less than 1 it is an absorber node. The total of the internal and external semigrade scores for the respective frequencies (d− f) + (d+ f) shows each node's contribution to the global activity of the corpus and its relevance in terms of discourse as well as semantics. A map of this activity can also be produced from this data (de Rosa & Losito, 1996).

19 Only category nodes with activity factors of over 0.0800 were used for analyzing results, but, due to limitation in the graphical representation, only category nodes with activity factors of over 800 were included in the map.

20 Moscovici (personal communication, Spring 2000) during my stay in Paris at E.H.E.S.S. as Socrates European Teaching Staff.

6

Social Positioning and Social Representations

Alain Clémence

Introduction

The purpose of the social representation approach is to study common sense knowledge about abstract objects or theories. The development of common knowledge starts when these objects or theories become a problem in a given social context. When this happens, more and more people begin to debate around these objects and theories and begin to be involved in the construction of a specific theory.

Social representations are defined as theories of common sense applied to general topics, for example, intelligence, AIDS, violence, computer, gender, health, psychoanalysis, and work, that are discussed in a society. These theories are constructed and used to deal with abstract and complex questions in everyday life. Such questions are, how intelligent is my child? What is the origin of AIDS? Why are some people more violent than others? In answering such questions, we rely on the way intelligence, the origin of AIDS, or violence are defined and discussed in the public sphere. We also rely on the knowledge exchanged and shared around us, among the groups we are involved with. Yet, we can always take a position of our own, which means that we have to refer it to the common points of reference that constitute the normative content network of the social space we are living in. In order to understand this process, it is important not only to know that our reasoning is based on cognitive functioning such as categorizing or doing inferences, but also to know how and why we give specific signification to a given information. This chapter is devoted to the approach of social positioning, i.e., the process by which people take up position about a network of significations. First, I shall present some historical as well as theoretical background of the approach. Secondly, I shall focus on methodological considerations illustrated by a case study.