THE MASKS OF AN ORGANISATION. METACOMMUNICATION ELEMENTS IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA

Lavinia SUCIU, Simona ŞIMON
Politehnica University of Timişoara

Abstract: Gaining a *modus vivendi* status in the contemporary society, the new communication means bring new values to the construction of meaning. The complex interaction between the technical instrument and the message points out the way in which, by articulating the enunciation, the technical devices turn into metacommunication elements and thus contribute to the meaning production. Our observations focus on the online organisational communication and pursue the creation and perception of the identity image. The comparative study on which our research is based on Samsung's digital communication in Romania and France. Taking into account Thierry Libaert's theory according to which the brand strategy is determined by four factors: the desired image, the possible image, the projected image and the perceived image, our study reveals the various masks used by the issuing organisation in relation to its receiver.

Keywords: communication, organisation, stands, metacommunication, image, digital.

1. Introduction

The large-scale spreading of the new electronic communication is something that we have all perceived and talked about lately. The new communication technologies have brought about major existential changes – not only an evolution, but, according to some people, also a genuine revolution -, especially in terms of social experience. The mentality mutations occur in close relation to the technological ones – as M. Mc Luhan prophetically states – and are identifiable both in the individual and in the structures. The contemporary organisations have evolved from closed to the society to open to the society communication structures that need to adapt their messages to the simultaneous plane created by the new technologies. In this context, it is not surprising at all to discover that the organisation is concerned with its branding in the electronic media which, according to the digital communication specialists, favour corporate communication. According to marketwire.com, 83% of the businessmen consider that social media is important to their operations. This fact is proven by their professional use of various social networks such as YouTube (76%), Facebook (72%), Twitter (69%), Blogs (68%), Google+ (67%), and LinkedIn (66%) (Social Media Marketing Industry Report, accessed 28.01.2013).

2. The Masks of an Organisation. Metacommunication Elements in the Digital Media

The purpose of the present paper is to outline the role of metacommunication elements used for building the brand strategy in the digital media. Therefore, we focus on the Samsung organisation and its communication in the digital media both in

Romania and in France. We believe that such a comparative approach is suited for pointing to the metacommunication elements employed by the issuing organisation in order to take a stand with regard to its receivers. The various stands the issuer takes with respect to its receivers are in fact the various masks an organisation has and manages with the obvious purpose of building a positive relationship between the two communication partners.

The starting point of our study is Thierry Libaert's statement that the brand strategy is determined by four elements:

1. the desired image
2. the possible image
3. the projected image
4. the perceived image (T. Libaert, A. de Marco, 2006).

In other words, the brand image is the result of the organisation's desired and projected image, taking into account all the possibilities at hand and the actual perceptions. If the image projected in the organisation's online communication is easily identifiable with the one perceived by the receiver, then the desired image is actually the result of the sender's intention. In order to decode the desired image put forward by the issuing organisation, the receiver has to identify a series of elements, of signs that are complementary to the projected image and show the way in which the sender wants to be perceived by the receiver.

Taking this into consideration, our comparative study implies two research axes: the identification of the projected image and the identification of the desired image. On the projected image axis, we point to concrete elements (information type, message form, structure and style), on the one hand and on the other, to abstract elements (information quality and quantity with respect to the brand). The analysed communication forms of the Samsung organisation are the web page, the Facebook page, the forum and the blog. The research was conducted between 19.02.2013 and 03.04.2013.

Starting from the hypothesis that the metacommunication elements are in relation with the desired image and associated with the elements contributing to the projected image, we mainly analyse the metacommunication elements, which actually help the receiver decode the global message transmitted by the sender.

2.1. The analysis grid

In order to comparatively interpret the above mentioned communication, we have conceived the analysis grid described below:

I. Identification of the projected image

I.1.1 Identification of the concrete elements: the information type, the message structure, form and style

I.1.2 Identification of the abstract elements: the information quantity and quality in relation to the brand (the consumers' judgments of the positive/ negative brand actions in society)

I.2. Comparative analysis of the concrete and abstract elements

II. Identification of the desired image

II.1. Identification of the metacommunication elements: the social channel, the sender's attitude, the organisation's presence in the communication forms of other

senders, the number of likes, the positive or negative character of the communication in terms of its animation, the frequent use of a certain communication form.

II.2. Comparative analysis of the metacommunication elements in relation to the projected image

The analysis grid is applied consecutively to the communication sequences present on the web site *samsung.ro* and s*amsung.fr*, on the Romanian and French Facebook page of the Samsung organisation respectively (accessed 12.02.2013, 15.03.2013 and 26.03.2013), on the French forums: www.forum-sam.com/ , www.arenait.net/ (FRAndroid) (accessed 23.02.2013 and 24.03.2013) and on the Romanian ones: www.computerblog.ro/, www.yoda.ro/ (accessed 23.02.2013 and 24.03.2013), and finally on the blogs: www.global.samsungtomorrow.com/, www.samsungvillage.com (accessed 07.03.02.2013 and 03.04.2013). We underline the fact that our analysis is not an exhaustive one from the point of view of the communication sequences under discussion. It focuses mainly on those communication sequences dealing with the new launch of the Samsung Galaxy S4 telephone at a certain moment, *t*, our purpose being that of pointing out the online communication of the organisation at that particular moment.

2.2. The comparative analysis

2.2.1. The web sites *Samsung.ro* and *Samsung.fr*

The web sites: *samsung.ro* and *samsung.fr,* and the Facebook pages: *samsung.ro Facebook* and *samsung.fr Facebook* were accessed before and after the moment *t* = 14.03.2013, when the new Samsung Galaxy S4 telephone was launched, that is at three different moments in time: 12.02.2013, 15.03.2013 and 26.03.2013.

The analysis of the French and Romanian web sites reveals the existence of both similarities and differences. While the first ones are reflected in the text (information type and structure) and the image, the second ones are encountered in the use of the metacommunication elements. The metacommunication elements to which the issuing organisation makes recourse are:

- •   Animated (+) character of communication
- •   Dynamism
- •   Interactivity.

However, they are used differently on the above mentioned web sites, viz. they are much more emphasised on the French web site than on the Romanian one. Although both sites have a similar structure - from the main page, we are led to a secondary one where the telephones are displayed -, their presentation is different. On *samsung.fr*, the products are associated with emotions and feelings (e.g. satisfaction, quintessence, smile, etc.) which imply a higher degree of the message customisation. The visual strategies are used to intensify the dynamism (the presence of moving images on the main page). The higher interactivity of the French web site is signalled by the presence on the main page of a questionnaire checking the receivers' perception by means of a tag; such an element is inexistent on the Romanian web site of the same organisation. On *samsung.ro* the interactivity is marked by the receiver's possibility to tick the preferred telephone. What is interesting about these two approaches of the same organisation is the fact that on *samsung.fr* the interaction with the receiver is generated by the organisation and the way in which it communicates, while on *samsung.ro* by the product (the telephone type).

2.2.2   The Facebook pages samsung.ro and samsung.fr.

The analytical comparison of the Facebook pages Samsung.ro and Samsung.fr has driven us to the conclusion that the interactivity on the first one is higher than on the second one. The metacommunication elements identified on the Facebook page Samsung.ro are:

- Sender's positive attitude
- Monitoring and gratifying (the number of Likes)
- Communication realised by conversational means

Although similar in terms of structure and information type (satisfaction/ insatisfaction statements regarding the Samsung products, i.e. the receiver's attitude towards the organisation is spotted on its territory, namely its products), the two Facebook pages are distinguished by the metacommunication elements. On samsung.ro, the issuing organisation is highly present in a face-to-face interaction with its receivers. The communication flow is higher than on samsung.fr, and the conversation rhythm more alert. The sender's attitude on samsung.ro is a positive one, a "Yes" type attitude, as H. M. Bădău describes it in *Tehnici de comunicare în social media* (2001:193 -196). This positive attitude is shown by the huge number of messages and by their quality (i.e. the language used aims at avoiding conflict and contradiction). The construction of some positive messages, which also reflect the positive attitude of the sender, has the immediate effect of building a positive relationship with the interlocutor (A. Mucchielli, 2005). Moreover, the messages on the Romanian Facebook page samsung.ro have English words, phrases or even sentences (e.g. *stay tuned*, *Are you ready for The Next Galaxy?*). That points to one single fact, namely that the message targets a certain group, the youngsters, who understand and use English words and phrases when they speak to each other. The method aims at strengthening a positive relationship by inducing closeness, proximity among the interlocutors.

2.2.3. The analysis of the messages posted on the Romanian and French forums reveals an elaborate structure of the latter ones which are organised in subforums in order to facilitate access and reading. Some similarities regarding the structure and information type are also identifiable. The metacommunication is signalled by the organisation's presence in the messages of some other senders, which shows implication, participation, and interest in what is going on in the society. It is important to emphasise that the number of messages referring to the organisation is greater on the French forums (www.forum-sam.com/ , www.arenait.net/) than on the Romanian ones. In the latter case, the organisation is present in the messages through its products (the organisation's territory), viz. indirectly.

2.2.4. As far as the Romanian and French blogs are concerned, google.ro and google.fr are structured identically, viz. they contain a short article in English which is followed by comments.   Taking into account the moment *t*, a communicational discrepancy between the two blogs appears: the receivers' weak reaction on the blog: www.samsungvillage.com before and after the moment *t* (7.03 and 3.04, respectively) in comparison to the blog: www.global.samsungtomorrow.com/   on which 61 comments were written on the 14th March, i.e. the moment *t*. Consequently, the metacommunication elements that can be singled out are: the high degree of conversational communication on www.global.samsungtomorrow.com/ and the positive

attitude of the sender. The direct or indirect presence of the organisation in the messages of other senders is noticed on the blog: www.businessinsider.com.

2.3. Conclusion of the analysis

In order to draw a conclusion, we are going to outline below the identified "masks" of the Samsung organisation:

- Issuing organisation = collaborator, close partner, friend when the following metacommunication elements are used:
  - the positive attitude of the sender
  - the animated (+) character of the communication
  - high degree of conversational communication
- Issuing organisation = social actor involved in the problems of the closed ones when the following metacommunication elements are used:
  - interactivity
  - the presence of the organisation in the communication forms of other senders
  - monitoring and gratifying the Likes.

The comparative analysis points to the different metacommunication elements chosen by Samsung, as an issuing organisation, in order to create a brand image in Romania and France, respectively. It is largely admitted that the choice of a certain communication form with the receiver is not an arbitrary one. Thus, in the virtual media, one can notice the drawing up of a communication code according to which the sender that chooses to communicate on a blog wants to be perceived as a leader in a particular field of activity, while the sender that is active on Facebook wants to be perceived as a creator of certain communities/ events (H. M. Bădău, 2011: 185). Consequently, we consider that, in Romania, the organisation chooses a "mask" that is aimed at building and/ or strengthening a sender-receiver relationship based on closeness, while in France, at outlining the organisation's role as an active and receptive social actor.

3. Concluding remarks

The analytical research has pointed to the way in which the metacommunication elements are used in order to build a brand image in the digital media. The importance of metacommunication is outlined by its enormous contribution to the creation of various "masks" used by the issuing organisation in relation to the pursued objective and the target group. In the reception plane, the role of the metacommunication elements is that of facilitating the interpretation of the organisation's communication and of signalling the sender's position. The frequency and intensity of the metacommunication elements used by the organisation to communicate emphasise its interest in building a certain type of relationship with its interlocutor.

References

1. Bădău, Horea Mihai. 2011. Tehnici de comunicare în social media, Polirom, Iaşi.
2. Libaert Thierry, de Marco Andre. 2006. Les tableaux de bord de la communication, Dunod.
3. Mucchielli, Alex. 2005. Arta de a comunica. Metode, forme şi psihologia situaţiilor de comunicare, Polirom, Iaşi.

4.   ***. 2012. Social Media Marketing Industry Report 2012, in "7 Steps to a Successful Social Media Strategy", www.marketwire.com [accessed 28.01.2013].

Webography

Business Blog
www.businessinsider.com [accessed 24.03.2013]
Computer Blog
http://www.computerblog.ro/telefoane-mobile/galaxy-s4-putea-lansat-14-martie.html
[accessed 24.03.2013]
IT Blog
http://www.yoda.ro/smartphones/samsung-galaxy-s4-mini-primele-imagini-au-aparut-pe-internet.html [accessed 23.02.2013]
IT Forum
www.arenait.net/ [accessed 24.03.2013]
Samsung Forum
www.forum-sam.com/ [accessed 23.02.2013]
Samsung Electronics Official Global Blog
www.global.samsungtomorrow.com/ [accessed 07.03.2013]
Samsung Official Blog
www.samsungvillage.com [accessed 03.04.2013]