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PERSUASIVE DISCURSIVE ELEMENTS IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN OF IMAGE RECONSTRUCTION: LOGOS, ETHOS AND PATHOS

Daniela CĂTĂU VEREŞ[1]

Abstract

When we talk about public relations, the image acquires a special connotation, referring to the notoriety of a public person, a company or companies, in search of public sympathy. And the public's sympathy or support can be captured by responding to their wishes and expectations. Organizations wishing to rebuild their image following the loss of credibility in front of the public, as a result of events or actions in which they participated, run various campaigns designed to put in a favourable light their image by assuming social responsibilities, communication through social media or the mass media.

Keywords:

Image reconstruction campaign; public relations; rhetoric; Egger Romania; press.

The image, in a general sense, represents a set of linguistic signs, a reproduction of lived or imaginary reality in the construction of which various mechanisms of expressiveness and persuasion participate, in an attempt to impose itself as reality or truth. In this sense, the construction of an image makes full use of rhetoric. Moreover, in the analysis of an image, three disciplines go hand in hand: semiology, semantics and rhetoric. When we talk about public relations, the image acquires a special connotation, referring to the notoriety of a public person, a firm or company, in search of public sympathy. And the public's sympathy or support can be captured by responding to their wishes and expectations. Organizations wishing to

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rebuild their image following the loss of credibility in front of the public, as a result of events or actions in which they participated, run various campaigns designed to put in a favourable light their image by assuming social responsibilities, communication through social media or the mass media. Defined as "a determined, extensive, coordinated effort to achieve an interconnected target or set of goals that moves the card organization to achieve a long-term goal, understood as an expression of its mission"[1], the public relations campaign, implicitly for reconstruction of the image "provides the press with the material of the articles intended to talk about the object, event or service that motivated the campaign" [2]. Most of the time, the involvement of a company willing to regain the public's sympathy is usually done on a social and humanitarian level, through persuasive actions, and not manipulative.

Semiology, defined by Ferdinand de Saussure as "the general science of all sign systems by which people communicate" [3], involves their interaction by using sign systems in social life, according to conventional interpretations specific to a culture in a particular era. This interaction is associated with elements of rhetoric (ethos and pathos) to configure certain images from the immediate or imaginary reality, according to the expectations and motivations of the participants in the communication act: the sender and the receiver. In the image reconstruction campaign, the image is a representation of a thing, an idea, a person, activities in order to impress, to convince on the general notions of value or necessity. In this sense, the campaign targeted by our analysis is an attempt to reconfigure in the collective mind a favourable image about a certain entity (person, organization, etc.). In order to analyse the discursive elements specific to the image or reputation reconstruction campaign, we propose the case of Egger Romania, which has been in the media's attention in recent years, on the one hand, through articles denouncing anti-ecological activities, such as unlimited logging of Romania's forests, and, on the other hand, through articles that seek to restore the company's image by evoking social and humanitarian actions.

The history of the evolution of the company's image in the regional press

In the geographical area of action of the Egger Company, its image has been the subject of the press countless times, either through critical approaches with a strong negative impact on the company's reputation, or through articles meant to reconstruct its image. The Austrian company Egger has been on Romanian territory for more than ten years, currently having several offices in the country, in which it has invested several hundred

million euros. Romanian press articles approach the image of this company differently over time. [4] On the one hand, the object of activity of the company (wood processing) produced reactions in the media, being considered as a "forest slaughterhouse" [5] or a source of regional pollution. On the other hand, since the first criticisms appeared in the press and even until February 2020, most press articles try a favourable reconstruction of the image, by reporting some series of social and humanitarian activities in which the company took part. [6] We will quote in this sense the most recent article published in February 2020: „EGGER Radauti contributed over 335,000 euros, in 2019, for health, education and for helping those in need. The EGGER Company provides financing for the endowment with furniture and medical equipment for the Psychiatry Department within the Radauti Municipal Hospital. In addition, it financially supports the rehabilitation of the headquarters of the Ambulance Centre in Radauti. At the same time, it equipped with modern equipment 3 laboratories from the Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, made book donations in 20 schools in the county, mainly in rural areas, and continued the partnership with the Suceava Red Cross for organizing first aid courses in over 70 schools. […]"

The collective mind between the *logos* and the *pathos* of the emitter

In the action taken to regain sympathy or rebuild reputation, the chances of success are based on mobilizing the pathos that sensitizes the receiver. Thus, the credibility of the organization can be restored if the action answers the series of questions evoked by P. Cabin in his book La communication, état des savoirs [7]: Who? (the person who wants to regain his favourable image), What the hell? (actions taken in this regard), How? (means and channels used: media, Internet), To whom? (target audience: population of the region), With what effects? (re-credibility, regaining reputation, image reconstruction).

From the analysis of the press articles, we find that the organization makes joint efforts of re-credibility in the society, investing in medical materials, but also in direct and indirect means of advertising in the press. Thus, we find that the articles constantly associate the image of the Egger group as a professional on the wood market and the social-humanitarian actions in which it takes part. The image is conveyed through several channels (press and Internet) to the target audience, causing them to decide in favour of joining the new image. Terms associated with educational and medical vocabulary for charity meet the pathos-specific means meant to arouse emotions, as can be identified in the speech of the company's

technical director: „EGGER is constantly involved in the development of the local community, of which we are part. The evolution of the society is impossible without children. They represent our future and that is why we considered it opportune to get involved in this project together with the Save the Children association. We decided to support this organization because we like well-done things and concrete results. We are happy that we manage to get involved where it is needed and we do it with love and with all our heart". [8]

The communication strategy of this organization is designed to establish in the collective mind a favourable image resulting from the combination of a series of linguistic elements impregnated with meaning, true texts containing sequences of *ethos* and *pathos* belonging to the sender (history, professional achievements, future intentions regarding the support of the company's development) transmitted to the receiver (the general public in the region, affected or not by the industrial activity carried out by the company). [9] In fact, newspaper texts highlight humanitarian and social achievements, followed by Egger's status as a perfect professional (who invests in technology to avoid pollution or sort wood suppliers to discourage illegal logging), in order to eliminate from the collective consciousness the accusations brought on the subject of excessive exploitations of the forest fund in Romania.

Levels of the image reconstruction process

In the communication process aimed at reconstructing the image in the collective mind, indirect advertising has its role, which is to make known a product, a service to the community or an institution that brings services to members of a community. We thus witness an act of advertising communication for repair purposes, which presents a specific communication framework, composed of the advertising production framework: the initiator of the act (company), the producer of advertising material (institutional communicator who transmits to the press the content to be made public) and the transmission channel to the public (publication). The frame of the card reception the target audience is situated at the limit between the effects of the *pathos* and the capacity of understanding that the receiver has, being a later frame of an initial speech that caused the degradation of the company's image. The effect of communication in the image repair campaign follows an axis of linearity that clearly traces the fields of professional competence and social / humanitarian intervention of the company, the linguistic *pathos* playing a primary role here (choosing terms with maximum affective and emotional load: children, future, development,

maternity, floods).

In an act of communication of this type, the effect is produced and expected on three levels: cognitive, affective and conative. These levels are reached when the target audience interacts with the elements of communication provided by the issuing card. And the expected effect is a feedback in the sense of the public's adherence to the new image. Only by receiving the expected feedback is the communication confirmed. At the cognitive level, the knowledge of the public is taken into account and all the information about the *ethos* of the object of the campaign (person, company) is provided. [10].The public is in a situation of listening, finding elements related to the professional achievements and social involvement of the object of the campaign. At the emotional level, the public's capacities to analyse, evaluate and express a point of view are mobilized. The conative level corresponds to the stage in which the decision of the public to adhere to the reconstructed image is triggered.

Therefore, the elements that make up an image reconstruction campaign through the press follow a triple logic of persuasion: the rhetoric of the logos, the rhetoric of the ethos and the rhetoric of the pathos. If the *logos* emphasizes the reason and coherence of the facts presented to the public, the rhetoric of the ethos emphasizes the structure of the target audience that will express its adherence according to its own needs to which it will respond or not the object of the campaign. In Egger's case, the notion of *ethos* refers to "the set of physical and mental determinations attached through collective representations" to the object of the campaign that responds to concrete social needs. Equipping maternity hospitals with medical equipment, for example, is a pragmatic need of the community, and its coverage helps to overcome and correct the image of "forest slaughterhouse" associated with Egger Company over the years in the press. Thus, the negative image laden with destructive symbolism becomes far too distant for a community of people with a relatively modest standard of living and immediate pragmatic needs.

As for the rhetoric of *pathos*, it translates into terms full of emotions and the precise description of some facts and achievements in which the company candidate for the rehabilitation of the public image participated. The image campaign conveys a form of disguised persuasion through the use of means (linguistic and images) whose function is to program / trigger an action (ie public adherence to the new image). The semiotic situations created are true semiotic stimuli that transform the collective mind in the sense of adhering to the reconstructed image. Fontanille speaks in this sense of a "heterogeneous configuration that brings together the elements necessary to produce and interpret the meaning of a social interaction" [11].

The collective mind situates its level of understanding and acceptance in relation to the semiotic indications that trigger emotions, the recourse to elements of *pathos* thus becomes essential in this type of campaign.

Conclusion

Pathos, ethos and logos come together in redefining and reconstructing the image of an entity willing to regain the sympathy of the collective mind. How is it possible to repair a negative representation of one's own person once it has entered circulation? What are the discursive and argumentative means of the speaker in a discourse situation and in a given socio-historical context, in order to offer the community a credible ethos? The case of Egger Romania Company brings some solutions in this sense, combining discourse and argumentation in the process of image reconstruction with the sciences of language and communication supported by rhetorical argumentation that inevitably combines logos, pathos and ethos.

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