

**PSYCHOSOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF IMAGES
OF POWER IN MASS COMMUNICATION**

OPREA-VALENTIN BUȘU

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of the current global economic and financial recession, I believe that an approach from the perspective of social communication and psychosocial interactions, at the level of Romanian society, will provide a series of scientific data, which can be a benchmark to deepen some images of power in mass communication. Internationally, it is increasingly visible the struggle of some companies to possess a certain essential element or to control access to any of the sources of power, even if it means financial or hierarchical interests, so images of power in mass communication is a topic which can answer some riddles or generate new ones.

The enormous power of the media comes from the role it plays, that of organizing information for society, of facilitating and orienting the social perception of various phenomena. In 21st century society, the “informational web” created - to which each of us brings our own contribution - feeds the daily consumption of information that ensures, both the thirst for information of people, the understanding of the relationships daily life, but also the design and support of the interests of the individual and of social groups. The press, radio, television and more recently, the Internet have become the vectors of information, through which man feels, lives and communicates instantly anywhere in the world. But what happens when apparently honorable interests hide petty goals, dictated by necessity or deliberately planned? In this context, what credibility do the media have?

The growing dependence of people on it creates the right ground for the use of one of the most formidable weapons, used in a unique way and without the possibility of reply: misinformation. And through it, it is possible to change people’s feelings, beliefs, attitudes and behavior without resorting to violent means. The power of media information on public opinion can be analyzed in at least two time plans: the immediate, short-term influence and the medium and long-term impact, much more important and sustainable.

The information with the character of immediate influence has the role of triggering the process of reordering the existing data until that moment. Information or information flow with a duration measured in years can influence not only the opinion itself, but even the evaluation tools as such; not only the reaction, but even the mentality. Therefore, when we talk about the power of the media, the center of gravity of the analysis is required to focus on medium and long term effects. Each individual realizes, more or less, that he permanently lives in a virtual computer ocean and that none of the primary necessities necessary for the survival of the human being could be viable without adequate information support, the media being the transmission belt between consumed reality and a potential projection of the future.

The power of media information lies in the fact that it provides information to society, highlights more strongly certain phenomena, events, to the detriment of others, organizes in a certain way the social perception of current events.

The frequency and diversity of the transport of images of power correlate directly in proportion to the size and importance of the territorial space of the human community targeted to be dominated.

The intensity of the positive / negative deformations and the degree of closeness to reality / virtual correlates directly proportionally with the gradual levels of authority, respectively of legitimation of power.

CHAPTER I

THE IMAGE - PSIHOSOCIOLOGICAL REFERENCES

“Our wealth is a wealth of symbols. And the same thing, in an astonishing proportion, applies to the power that rests on it”

Alvin Toffler

The Concept of Image

The image is a working tool in the humanities, in the exact sciences, as well as in art. The sociocultural environment, the political regime, the degree of development determine the granting of a privileged place to the production and study of certain images, such as those of power. Analyzing the stratification of the imaginary in historical consciousness, we came to the conclusion that the social energy that fuels the perpetuation of these images and gives them vitality and resilience is Power.

Collective representations, as they are conceived by Durkheim, delimit the individual aspect from the social one and the perceptual elements from the intellectual ones. Durkheim did not solve the problem of social representations. He analyzed the concept of collective representations and used it as much as the sociological approach allowed. Serge Moscovici updated the concept of collective representation proposed by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim in 1898, giving it a new identity. According to him, the representations become social because “they arouse a determined attitude, a situation in relation to reality, a process of production, formation of behaviors and orientation of social communications” (Moscovici, 1976, 43); they presuppose concrete collective relations, social interactions, associations, polarizations, they represent, in the end, a social phenomenon. In Moscovici’s conception, social representations are not just productions or cognitive mechanisms. Their functioning is fed at the same time, from

outside and inside, integrating the social, manifesting themselves as socio-cognitive constructions.

Phenomenological theories take into account unconscious psychic processes, which reveal more complicated mechanisms for the formation of representations and images. Adopting these theories as framework interpretations (Chiciudean and Halic, 2003, 13-42), it results that images are constructed within processes that remain unconscious and are updated at the request of the environment in ways that remain inaccessible to the conscious, but with a certain degree of accessibility for introspection and intuition.

Social psychology analyzes the images and representations of people from the perspective of the experiment. Theoretical approaches taken by Serge Moscovici, I.C. Abric and W. Doise are fundamental in the study of the representations of people and social groups (Chiciudean and Țoneș, 2002, 9-29). The combination of the three dynamics (communication, image-representations, psychic processes), in the sense of psychosocial paradigms, is the node of the definition of social representations and images: “are principles generating positions related to specific inserts that organize symbolic processes in social relationships” (Doise, 1995, 92).

J. Piaget’s constructivist approach is concerned with the structure and dynamics of representations. The image is situated in phenomenological theories in the sphere of personal experiences and individual behavior. Immediate, ongoing, human experience is essential for image formation. Man manages to give it a certain meaning, building his representational models on the world. The formation and crystallization of the self-image and the images about the world in which he lives are possible due to the implicit internal mechanisms, generated in man by his own experience.

Although the notion of social image is widely used in contemporary discourse and generously taken over by the media, its issue is still vaguely treated in the broader framework of representations, cultural matrices, collective consciousness, etc. The traditional approaches are numerous and, at least partially, incompatible, so that the notion of social image is limited to a series of concepts and interpretations specific to the particular theoretical contexts in which they were developed. In fact, social images are specified, studied, thought, insofar as they express the position, respectively the value hierarchy of a community.

The term “image”, according to V. Stancu (1992), refers to an attribute of psychic life, based on the ability of the human psyche to construct mental representations, but not to the material reproduction of a given reality. It can be said that the image has an overwhelming role in terms of influencing the decision-making power of the individual or a community. Formed relatively recently as a scientific discipline, the science that deals with the study of the image is called imagology. The Dictionary of Psychology defines imagology as “a field of psycho-sociology that deals with the multidisciplinary scientific study of perception, opinion, attitude, judgment, and the global image that a national ethnic community has formed over time. (Other) nations or nationalities, under the influence of direct contacts, through representatives, but especially through cultural-ideological products widely spread by the mass media”.

Vasile Dâncu lists some meanings attached to the term image trying to come up with a definition. We thus find that the term is associated with often vague or contradictory notions. The most frequent use of the notion of image is defined as a series of systematic mental associations, which serve to identify a subject, object, institution or phenomenon by assigning a socially constructed quality within a culture, an image with stereotypical value. First of all, it is an illusion that the image is a universal language that, due to its analogical capabilities, naturally, naturally and instantly transmits the meaning of the image. There is often a confusion between perception and interpretation, the fact that I recognized certain elements of the image does not mean that I understood the meaning conveyed by its author.

Secondly, there is the doubt that we could ever correctly perceive the author’s intentions, often he is not even aware of the true intentions. Detecting meanings is not an illicit operation, even if we cannot make an exact inference to the author’s intentions, these, moreover, not having too much importance, the interpretation being sovereign.

The social image in relation to the interpretation given to the image, as a product of human-specific information processors, can be interpreted as sets of implicit criteria, rules and interpretations, which are formed over time by themselves, inherited and transmitted through tradition and culture.

Mihai Curelaru, in a paper dedicated to social representations, states that “we cannot talk about a single definition of social representation nor about one generally accepted by researchers (...) The heterogeneous

character of this concept (opinions, beliefs, norms, values, schemes) does not allow (...) such an approach and no definition convergence” (Curelaru, 2006, 30-33). Moliner, as quoted by Mihai Curelaru, offers a very interesting definition, which is based on the interaction between social entities. If this interaction did not occur, the representation would not make sense, it would not exist.

From another perspective, general psychology defines the perceptual image as a result of perception, which is based on general laws (law of perceptual integrity, law of perceptual structurality, law of perceptual selectivity, law of perceptual constancy, law of meaning, law of projectivity of perceptual image).

The law of projectivity of the perceptual image reflects the fact that, “although the perceptual image is elaborated cortically, it is projected at the level of the object” (Zlate, 1999, 92-93), giving man the certainty of existence, the image of objects and the possibility of his being among these objects. This explanatory model operates on distinctions between perception and representation, starting from the differences found between the primary images and the secondary images.

“If the perceptual system operates with primary images, which are formed in the presence and through direct contact with the object, the representative system operates with secondary images that, at least currently, are independent of the object” (Zlate, 1999, 92-93). But not all theories distinguish between primary and secondary images. In many cases, only cognitive evocations that refer only to the sensory aspects of absent objects and events are analyzed, and mental image is generally discussed.

Phenomenological theories place the image in the sphere of personal experiences and individual behavior.

According to the procedural-organic paradigm, people have bioprocessors and interpreters (Culda, 1996). Through bioprocessors, humans belong to the bioorganization, because bioprocessors control the processes that maintain the body and its interface with the encompassing existence; interpreters make specialization possible, transform the individual into a human being; they are constituted by taking over and processing the information provided by the bioprocessors, then they are differentiated and they become more and more autonomous.

Criteria and rules appear in different conditions, so we must distinguish between criteria and rules that are formed in interpreters and remain unexplained (implicit) and criteria and rules that appear explicitly in theories, doctrines, ideologies, etc.

In image production, the operation of interpreters connected to bioprocessors is crucial, as bioprocessors can block or activate criteria that function as images.

Social images depend on the informational horizon in which they are constituted. It can be stated that there is no image in itself, there is the image of a certain person about a certain social object, formed in relation to the characteristics of his information processors.

It is plausible that these processors are conditioned by age, gender, religion, membership / non-membership in organizations, level of culture, level of education, but also by their condition during processing.

In order for the image to be manageable, and its definition to become an effective tool in managing the perception of the organization, it is necessary to operationalize this definition, which must allow for practical consequences: the development of methods for image management.

I believe that the first step to be taken in this approach is to identify the content of each type of message and then establish the relevance of these messages to crystallize the social image of the organization.

Image Typology

Regarding the typology of the image, there were several points of view. It is possible to operate several classifications according to:

1. image character:
 - distorted image positively / negatively;
 - image close to reality or virtual.
2. number of images:
 - a general representation of the institution;
 - numerous subimages.
3. the degree of image imposition among the general thumb:
 - pregnant image;
 - deleted image.
4. degree of diversification:

- Diversified or slightly diversified image depending on several characteristics (quality, acceptance, etc.)

5. atomic model of the image:

- focused image / scattered image or ambiguous image (this classification was proposed by analyst Bogdan Teodorescu). Beliefs act restrictively and normatively on individual and group images and behaviors.

The conclusion to be drawn here is that the notion of social image implies a direct connection with the attitude and behavior of individuals guided by beliefs and prejudices. Human groups acting in a certain social context manifest an “expected”; behavior in the situations they face depending on the permissiveness and prohibitions imposed by the most widespread beliefs, prejudices and opinions at a given time in society.

A careful study of the changes that take place in the economic, political, social and organizational fields makes plausible the statement that the social image increasingly conditions the performance of organizations, the relationships between them and the relationships between people and organizations. Social images thus become component parts of the organizational heritage and components of the process of its efficient reproduction. As a result, the promotion of a positive (desirable) image becomes an essential element of the organization’s assertion, an important objective of its successful management strategies.

An image deficit or an unfavorable image generates questions about the viability and credibility of the actions and activities initiated and carried out by the organization locally or globally. First of all, it must be emphasized that in order to avoid erosion of the image, an organization must act in several directions and in the long run, so that its relations with the “receivers” are positive, fair, constructive.

Economic, political, social life represent spaces impregnated with diverse, inhomogeneous and often contradictory images. The formation of attitudes of people and organizations towards other organizations is dependent on these images that propagate through communication in the global information space, acquiring and assimilating, in most cases, accepted images (fashionable images, already formed images, images stereotypes, etc.), not true images, compatible with organizational realities.

Consequently, we consider justified the statement that the image attributed to an organization can become a source and reason for unequal

treatment applied in situations considered normal or in crisis situations. In most cases, the predominantly negative image of one organizational component becomes a pretext for discrimination by eclipsing the positive images of the other components, even if they hold the largest share in the overall image of the given organization.

The structures specialized in managing the image of the organization must know permanently the impact of the messages resulting from the functioning of the organization by identifying, evaluating and signing the actions with positive or negative impact on their own members and on the partners. The messages deliberately issued by the organization must follow: information on the status and operating parameters of the organization as a whole and all its constituent elements: enhancing (highlighting) the information generated by the operation of the organization, first of all, messages with the largest share in the formation of its positive images; explaining the meaning and significance of all public activities of the organization, first of all the specific and the unique ones; reducing the negative impact of messages generated by crises or malfunctions; maintaining in the attention of the relevant target audience categories the interest for the vital problems of the organization.

The social image of an organization / personality is structured on several levels. Thus, we distinguish a level structured according to the origin / source of the social image and a level structured according to the position of the organization / personality whose image is investigated in relation to the communicative act.

The resulting image can be broken down into components:

- the induced image (II), obtained by analyzing the messages transmitted by the object of the investigation;
- the broadcast image (BI), obtained by analyzing the information regarding the object of the investigation transmitted by other sources;
- the reflected image (RI), obtained by analyzing the information regarding the way in which the image induced by the target group of the communication was received.

Regarding mass communication (Coman, 2004, 44-46), the qualities of a news, according to studies, are:

- novelty;
- impact - the choice of information is made in relation to the consequences that the respective facts have or may have on the public;

- proximity;
- magnitude - the number of participants is perceived as an index of the importance of an event;
- prominence - the only events with few heroes that attract the public's attention are those involving personalities from the cultural, political, sports, economic world, etc.;
- uniqueness;
- conflict;
- human interest - this criterion can be perceived as a synthesis of all the other factors that ensure the quality of news information;
- familiarity - news must refer to things that people know and understand;
- educational value;
- dynamism;
- concreteness;
- current context.

The political image behaves like a “brand” (Frigioiu, 2007, 14), in the sense that it helps to individualize the product for its promotion and sale in advantageous conditions.

The Social Image of Organizations

The role of social images of organizations

Marketing studies show that, in most cases, buyers who are loyal to certain products, services or organizations do not distinguish themselves from others in the same class, which offers them similar benefits.

When it comes to managing the image or brand of the country, we can only join Wally Olins, who predicts that in a few years, “brand management will be seen as a perfectly normal manifestation of what is now called concerted governance” (Frigioiu, 2007, 145), because, in the current conditions, “politicians everywhere realize (...) that every nation has an identity: they can try to administer it; otherwise, it will administer them” (Frigioiu, 2007, 145). As we have already shown, the image of the organization is part of the heritage it holds.

Brand image is both the mental representation of an object or an attitude, and the sum of values and beliefs about a particular product or

service gathered in this expression. According to marketers, the brand image is “a reflection of the personality of the brand, it is what people think about a brand, namely their thoughts and expectations” (Evans, 1994, 448).

A brand is “a name, a term, a symbol or a design or a combination of these elements intended to help identify the goods or services of a seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 1998, 558). According to the renowned theorist and practitioner Philip Kotler, the brand is more than a complex symbol, it guarantees the quality of the product and the service through a series of relevant meanings: the characteristics of the product; the advantages offered by the product; values; design; personality; user. By what they suggest, in fact, the essence of the brand is defined.

There are many situations in which the image of the organizational brand (corporate image) and the image of the product brand (commercial) interact and replace each other.

Things become even more complex if we consider the scope of the notion of brand outlined by Wally Olins: “brands mean clarity, safety, consistency, status, belonging ... identity” (Olins, 2004, 27).

It should be noted that the corporate image, as a unitary structure, consists of two components: the logical component, based on beliefs and beliefs, and the psychological component, based on emotions (Olins, 2004, 27). These two components appear simultaneously in people’s consciousness, creating, in most cases, the necessary conditions for the crystallization of a unitary corporate image. The logical component creates security and trust in the company, and the emotional component stimulates the individual’s desire to interact with the organization in the two important situations: employee of the company and / or consumer of its products and services.

The brand of the product (commercial) is generally defined as a synthesis of mental representations of a cognitive, affective, social and personal nature of the product among buyers. Being a motivational component, of a subjective nature, this image is the result of the perception, in a certain way, of a product by users or consumers (Kotler, 1998, 36).

A positive and differentiated image individualizes the product and makes it visible, ensuring a favorable position in the global offer, while a negative image can compromise the market success of a high quality

product. This situation entitles the authors of *The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing* to state that “in marketing the battle is not of products, but of consumer perceptions of products. Perception is reality. The rest is an illusion. Reality and perception of reality overlap somewhere in people’s minds to such an extent that there is no longer any possibility of differentiating between the two” (Ries, Trout, 1993, 44-45).

In these conditions, it must be emphasized that the future of a trademark is built on a positive past - resulting from positive experiences and perceptions - favorable to the product.

The Identity of Organizations

In their complex interactions, organizations make available important resources that underlie their activities for internal or external purposes. These activities, with very different purposes, also have the effect of individualizing organizations in relation to each other. Regardless of its type and specificity, any organization has certain features that identify it, separate it, make it stand out from other organizations that populate the extra-organizational environment. The identity of the organization is a way of its survival by capitalizing on its visible manifestations, by the products it distributes, by the services it provides, by arranging the environments in which the company’s products or headquarters are placed, by its public behavior.

As we have shown above, identity can only be defined in direct connection with the image. In a global vision regarding these two concepts, identity and image constitute the same reality perceived by two distinct social entities: the organization and the categories of public. Starting from this unique reality perceived from two different perspectives, Wally Olins (2004, 18) defines corporate identity as “the explicit management of all the ways in which the organization presents itself to its audiences through experience and perceptions”, while the corporate image is, for the same author, “What audiences ... perceive from the identity that was created and projected” (Olins, 2004, 18). Therefore, based on identity and image, organizations are differentiated, positioned and evaluated comparatively, both internally and especially externally. Organizational identity is recognized as an important management resource and is often invoked when

talking about change management. As a direct consequence of this fact, organizations must be equally concerned with both external and internal perception, between the two being relations of mutual generation and conditioning: “a good image inside must necessarily have consequences on the outside” (Bachmann, 1996, 17).

There are a multitude of definitions of identity, developed from different perspectives, based on theoretical models often incompatible. This situation is appreciated by John M. T. Balmer as uncertain and confusing due to various factors, among which we mention: approaches to the subject from the perspective of different paradigms and disciplines; sometimes inappropriate terminology; insufficient distinction between identity and identity management of the organization; disagreement regarding the objectives of the company’s identity; lack of dialogue between academic circles and researchers and between researchers of different disciplines; the effect of fashion and the association of identity with design; poverty of academic studies of applied research; exaggerated concentration of studies on holding companies, multinational companies or parent companies; lack of a clear distinction between real identity and desirable identity (Balmer, 2001, 251).

Analyzing the definitions given to identity in the literature, Sue Westcott Alessandri distinguishes between the tactical level definitions needed to observe and measure the identity of organizations, and the strategic level definitions needed to analyze crisis situations in the life of organizations. Trying to combine these two approaches, the author defines the identity of the conceptual and operational organization. From a conceptual perspective, identity is “a presentation of its own, strategically planned and oriented on clear objectives, in order to gain positive images about the organization in people’s minds. The identity of the organization is shaped in order to achieve a stable reputation over time (Westcott, 1997, 176). From an operational perspective, identity is defined as “the sum of all the observable and measurable elements that the organization manifests relative to its public behavior and its all-encompassing visual presentation (Westcott, 1997, 176).

“The design and realization of the organization’s identity are complex and long-term processes that involve the analysis of the environment in which the organization operates, of the relevant target

audience categories, of the strategy considered optimal for achieving the goal. In Wally Olins' view (2004, 3), the identity of the organization must be designed taking into account four defining elements for it: who it is, what it does, how it does it and where the organization wants to go. Starting from these elements, the identity will manifest itself functionally at the level of four visible areas: products and services (what the organization does or sells), environments (where the organization operates), communication (how the organization explains what it does) and behavior (how the organization behaves with employees and the outside world).

Organizations, depending on their structure and specificity, will determine which areas will become dominant in the identification communication, thus opting for a certain type (category) of identity: monolithic identity or unique business identity (specific to organizations with a single name, a single visual system, high visibility and high market positioning); endorsed identity or multiple business identity (specific to organizations that form a group and are perceived as part of the group by visual or written endorsement; in other words, specific to organizations that grow through acquisitions and takeovers by other organizations, but want to keep intact own identity associating it with the identity of the corporate organization); brand-centered or brand-derived identity (specific to areas of activity - pharmaceutical, food - where the identity of the main organization - corporate - is not important to the consumer) (Olins, 2004, 128).

The symbols reveal the "philosophy, values, ideals, beliefs or expectations of the organization's employees" (Stanciu, Ionescu, 2005, 45) and have meaning and significance for both those inside the organization and those outside the organization.

Ceremonials and rituals confer symbolic and emotional valences to actions with significance in the organization's relations with the social environment in which it operates and with its own members: investiture ceremonies, etc. "The term *ceremony* (s.n.) first designated the rites of a religious cult and this meaning has been preserved. However, it has expanded to the field of profane public activities that necessarily require an extraordinary pomp. In both cases, the ceremony appeals to a symbolism evocative of ideals shared by all participants" (Dussault, 1996, 33). *The ritual* is "a repetitive and socially standardized symbolic behavior" that