LEADER’S SELF-PRESENTATION: CHANGES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT: New channels of communication and new gadgets reshape the definitions in every sphere, sending social interaction to the new level of expedition, awareness and transparency; not to mention creating the leader’s desirable image and public relations. From the non-binding socializing networking, social media quickly became an important and powerful tool for establishing leadership. This unprecedented communication channel had opened totally new ways for leaders to their public and plenty of topics for social research. The main insight in Erving Goffman’s theory was that there is a bond between the peoples’ acting in everyday life and the theatrical performance. This allows us to review the socializing and creating content online similarly as one of the stage performances. In the context of representing oneself in the new media channels, the leader’s communication is reviewed. Further, the process also changes the role of the follower and raises new questions such as the risk the self-presenting leader takes entering the changing media and the control he has or has not on the communication channel.

KEYWORDS: Self-presentation, Leader’s communication, Goffman, Social media, Followers.
Napoleon ahead with his faithful troops or J. F. Kennedy heading his fellow citizens had no idea which tools will be essential for the leader to conquer the new and win the trust and loyalty of their followers. New channels of communication and new gadgets reshape the definitions in every sphere, sending social life and interpersonal relations to the new level of expedition, awareness and transparency; not to mention creating the leader's desirable image and public relations management. From the non-binding socializing, social media online quickly became an important and powerful tool for self-presentation needs, one of which is establishing leadership. This unprecedented communication channel had opened totally new ways for leaders to their audience and plenty of topics for new social research. As the follower also is not the same follower as he was until the social networking (Bermudez, 2017), leader and the construction of leadership status is changing at the level close to the paradigm as well.

Virtual reality is an ideal medium for personal identities. Limits of “real” and “unreal” identities are very blurry as well (Fraser, 2010). We presume that social identity derives from others (Giddens, 2005). Creating one's identity is a complex and even mysterious process. Psychoanalysis from Freud to Lacan postulates that any our identity is an illusion. Yet one thing is of no discussion – the whole creation of identities is social in its roots (Fraser, 2010). Sociology actually has already built a certain way into the topic when Erving Goffman stated that when an individual comes in contact with other people, that individual attempts to control or guide the impression that others might make of him by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner. At the same time, the person, the individual is interacting with, is trying to form and obtain information about the individual (Trevino, 2003). E. Goffman conceptualized the self-presentation in everyday life as an ongoing process of information management and distinguished between the expressions one gives and the expressions given off, specifying that the latter are more theatrical and contextual, usually nonverbal and presumably unintentional (Papacharissi, 2002). Goffman's main insight was that there is a bond between the people’ acting in everyday life and the theatrical performance. This allows us to review the socializing and creating content online similarly as one of the stage performances. Presentation of the self online has concerned scholars who study how people manipulate, reinvent or reveal aspects of their identity in the context of online communities (Papacharissi, 2002). In order to analyze online interpersonal interaction in Goffman's theoretical approach, David R. Brake suggests dividing writer's conception of the audience into three aspects: the number and character of the audience, the audience's reaction to what has been written, and the potential changes in both of these over time (Brake, 2014). Manipulation and persuasion
are the core strategies of establishing leader’s power. The question of persuasion is associated with leader’s communication now including the role of social media and the control of it.

Virtual identities are being constructed as personal extension of “I” in many aspects, which can be extremely liberated by the means of internet. Social interaction in such websites as MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Orkut is free, open and unrestricted. Power now lies not only in entrenched institutions but is diffused to margins, where users join the social activities and strategies spontaneously (Fraser, Dutta, 2010).

According to the semiotic model of leadership, the leader’s communication is essential for his charisma or strength of his image, so the Goffman’s performance becomes very relevant here. The problem as it comes to the leader’s communication management still remains: how and to what level the leader may control his “performance” or construction of self-presentation by creating virtual content.

The newest survey reveals that the threatening initial risk of plunging into the socializing online for CEO is actually worth it. The opinion given by 90 percent of research respondents was that social media had become the indisputable part of CEO’s public relation strategy. The social activity of the leader was also viewed as facilitating factor while company is struggling with brand reputation crisis. The supporting argument is that the company’s leader’s direct contact with stockholders or clients is considered as the surest and most true face of the company. 73 percent of respondents unequivocally affirmed the question: Do you think that participation in social media makes CEO a more effective leader? One year ago, only 58 percent told “yes” to the question above.

The same survey reveals that smart engagement of the company’s top management to the social media demonstrates their accessibility and technological education. This contributes positively to their relationships with customer or follower. Speaking of the openness of political government and thus its specific fields gives the communication of public sector a new quality. (Gwanhoo Lee, 2012). So what is the real possibility for the leader to apply the results of the survey mentioned above? Simple logic votes for the statement that in the century we live, it is out of question. What would be more worth the discussion it is the successful and unsuccessful speaking of the leader who is representing himself in the social media. New media is a new stage for the leaders to perform and construct their desirable social identities and get significant numbers of loyal followers.
Even so, as the author quoted above, Pablo Bermudez reveals the problem of social media user’s concentration, engagement, involvement and depth. The other authors he quotes himself also hypothesize that social media user in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century is a shallow multitasker, whose attention is totally indeed focused on the media itself as a message (McLuhan, 1964). It becomes meaningful to quest not only the paths of the leader’s self-presentation in social media but also the follower’s, who is a strict requirement of maintaining the virtual image of the leader.

According to Erving Goffman, an individual’s performance is validated by the serious attitude of his observers. They are asked to believe he actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess (Goffman, 1959). Scholars analyzing charismatic leadership state that the followers who have direct interaction and contact with their leader tend to assign him more charisma or power. This phenomenon is also described as the proximity effect (Barvydienė, 2015). Thus, charismatic leaders (in this narrow case it means powerful and influential) use the whole arsenal of rhetoric and symbolism. If history knew about charismatic leader who didn’t communicate, in this survey such a leader would be more exceptional and unique as in most cases silent leader stops existing (Bielinis, 2005).

The basic definition of leadership phenomenon associates leader with the creation of a new social reality, rise of a new vision, destination setting, storytelling and other similar processes. Through these processes, the leader creates a meaning, he aims to set the actual and significant images into the followers’ minds (Fairhurst, 2011). Briefly, the leader’s communication strategy as well as its separate means do strengthen the leader’s power and public image when they hit the target and followers accept the vision. Usually the following tactics are marked out as invoked by powerful leaders: metaphor, storytelling, contrast, rhetoric questions, appealing to values or moral beliefs, the reflection of the group sentiments, setting the high goals, communication of trust (Antonakis et al., 2011).

Another important aspect associated with the leader’s strength is the empowerment of followers. Having in mind this particular aspect, the communication of the leader in social media seems even more essential. Millions of social media users form the groups of followers, clients, and electorate. Adequately entering this network as a stage of performance the leader passes into the next level of information. Still he has to except the fact that he is no longer the controlling side. Social media is a perfect illustration how the control passes on to the side of followers. Leader plunges into the process of creation and it means that more
than ever there are no more clear instructions and norms of acting. This may be very satisfying, but there is also the confusing part. The leader has more possibilities to stay in touch with his followers, but he can easily lose the control on the media and his participating.

Alas there is no only true definition of leadership as there are plenty of approaches towards it. Ergo we would rather define it pointing out some distinct and clear qualities. The most common could be as follows (Stoner, Freeman, Gilbert, 2000, p. 32): the leadership is a process of interaction; it involves followers; it involves power; the leader uses different forms of power to influence the behavior of followers; the leadership is closely related to values.

Let’s have in mind that the leader, especially if he is strong and charismatic, is associated with powerful speaking, rhetoric and persuasion skills. Speaking of the power, the followers tend to attribute to their leader; researchers show that between contents and the form of the message, the form is winning (Hollanday and Combs, 1993; Awamleh and Gardner, 1999). Strong leaders are usually masters at nonverbal rhetoric as they may express exactly the features they want followers to believe they possess, or in the terms of Goffman, they build their front, the part of individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for the observers of the performance. Goffman also distinguishes such parts of personal front as insignia of office or rank, clothing, sex, age and racial characteristics, size and looks, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions, bodily gestures and the like (Goffman, 1959). For the researchers’ convenience, Goffman suggests also to divide the stimuli of the front into “appearance” and “manner”. It’s important we tend to expect the confirming consistency between these two.

As the researchers’ of leadership rhetoric distinguishes the nonverbal means which extremely influence the followers’ mind (Frese, 2003; Towler, 2003), the more interesting is leader’s communication online which has a textual and anonymous nature. Of course, self-presentation is different comparing face to face and online interaction. Nonverbal elements enhance or validate verbal communication. If these two types of signals conflict, then self-presentation is questioned by others and the individual is exposed. In cyberspace, however, it is easier to bridge the potential disparity between the expressions given and those given off (Dominick, 1999). The absence of nonverbal elements may allow individuals to be more inventive. There is a greater control of expressions given off and thus less risk that identity manipulation may be exposed (Papacharissi, 2002).
According to David Weinberger, the co-author of *Cluetrain manifesto*, “[Hollywood celebrities] cease to be famous when we see them as they are,” a concept he demonstrated by showing several gossip magazine pictures of celebrities without their makeup. “Blogging, however, is all about taking off the ‘makeup.’ They’re exposing themselves as fallible human beings.”

The same holds true for the rest of the web celebs. “What’s famous on the web looks like it was done by a human hand,” says Weinberger, “they still feel like ours. It’s not just the homespun quality of what’s famous on the web. It’s how fame works – it’s becoming much more DIY. Fame is now living in a long tail, or a long continuum of ways to be famous.” This is how social media is changing the nature of glory and power of self-presenting and image making.

On the other hand, the success of truly effective speaker in the purely textual setting may balance if he doesn’t take other advantages of online performing. Ten years ago, the leaders of the world were just getting acquainted with the new reality on YouTube. Analysts were hoping that political leaders would stop being so artificial since they know their true personalities will come out anyway (Lizza, 2006). So again, on one hand, the leaders get brand new channels and opportunities for networking, blogging and etc., on the other hand, they stay in constantly visible state, their messages and posts are transformed and this can’t be easily monitored and controlled. Every [political] leader faces the challenges of poor self-presentation management and problem of failure (Thompson, 1995). Immediately spreading the news, social media contains the best evidences about leader’s speeches not matching his actual position. It seems that the power of professional media passes to anyone with an appropriate gadget connected to the internet. Referring again to Erving Goffman, speaking of misrepresentations, he also mentioned that the discrepancy which may occur between fostered appearances and reality may be fatal to the reputation of performer (Goffman, 1959). So again, the new stage for leader’s performances is risky, and strong personality is no more enough for the successful self-representation.

In this communication process, the leader becomes a symbol or a virtual construct, the leadership alienates from the leader himself while it is represented through media (Boje, 2005). To maintain a clear, pure and consistent image of the leader in the times of YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook is still rather challenging.

Powerful operating system functions in today’s leadership communication in order to restrain both negative and positive effects of the informational flow on the leader: political communication participant is not isolated from the figure
but it would be questionable theses that the leader himself is capable of managing the processes. Hereby, the leader becomes reliant on public relations’ specialists, experts and etc. We could say, in some way further following Goffman, that the features of the leader become less recognizable and, on the whole, his communication with the audience more complicated. He is more than ever an object of manipulations and may be the more successful and less risking; he acts himself independently without the help from professional staff. We could conclude that the leadership communication in the time of social media is already beyond the abilities of individual subject.
REFERENCES


LYDERIO SAVIPREZENTACIJA: KĄ PAKEITĖ SOCIALINĖ MEDIJA

SANTRAUKA

Naujieji komunikacijos kanalai ir naujųjų ryšio priemonių naudojimas naujai apibrėžė daugelį sričių, suteikė socialiniam interaktyvumui naują lygmenį, pakeitė žinomumo ir skaidrumo sąvokas. Neabejotinai pasikeitė ir pageidaujamo lyderio įvaizdžio kūrimo sritis bei su ją susijusį viešųjų ryšių funkcija. Iš nerūpestingo bendravimo internete socialinė medija bėganti tapo svarbiu ir galingu lyderystės įtvirtinimo įrankiu. Šis visiškai naujas komunikacijos kanalas atverė lyderiui naujas auditorijas ir kartu platų lauką naujiems socialiniams tyrimams. Pagrindinė Ervingo Goffmano teorijos įžvalga yra ta, kad esama ryšio tarp žmonių kasdienių veiksmų ir vaidinimo teatro scenoje. Tai mums leidžia tirti socialinio pobūdžio turinio kūrimą tinkle panašiu būdu. Saviprezentacijos naujoje medijoje kontekste siūloma tirti ir lyderio komunikaciją. Šis procesas keičia sekojį vaidmenį ir kelia naujas klausimus, tokius kaip lyderio saviprezentacijos rizika kintančioje medijoje ir galia bei įtaka, kurią lyderis turi ar jos neturi įvaldydamas šį komunikacijos kanalą.

RAKTINIAI ŽODŽIAI: saviprezentacija, lyderio komunikacija, Goffmanas, socialinė medija, sekėjai.