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Internal Press as Dialogue-Unison

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Abstract. Research argues that the rhetorical dialogue theory (Yu.V. Rozhdestvensky) is a sound approach to the analysis of corporate media. The first part of the research briefly outlines the evolution of corporate media and dwells on communication technologies used in magazines for employees today. Digital technologies have reinforced the emotional impact produced by the multimodality of media texts and made the narration which embodies various corporate values more explicit. Then the discussion addresses the rhetorical dialogue theory underscoring three main types of dialogue which manifest themselves in management: dialogue-difference, dialogue-unison and dialogue-theatre. In the third part the focus moves to some features of magazines for employees, refracted through the lens of the dialogue-unison perspective. It is shown that in-house magazines do not communicate any new knowledge and demonstrate no opposition between personnel and management. Thus, due to a new media environment, a full accord of the board and employees results in a dialogue-unison.

Keywords: rhetorical dialogue theory, digital technologies

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Внутренняя пресса как диалог-унисон

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Аннотация. Утверждается, что риторическая теория диалога (Ю.В. Рождественский) является надежным подходом к анализу корпоративной прессы. Первая часть исследования кратко описывает эволюцию корпоративных медиа и останавливается на коммуникатив-

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ных технологиях, которые используются сегодня в журналах для персонала. Цифровые технологии усилили эмоциональное воздействие, оказываемое мультимодальностью медиатекста, и сделали нарратив, который включает в себя различные корпоративные ценности, более выразительным. Затем следует рассмотрение риторической теории диалога, в которой выделяются диалог-различие, диалог-унисон и диалог-театр, реализуемые в менеджменте. В третьей части в центре внимания оказываются характеристики журналов для сотрудников, рассматриваемые через призму диалога-унисона. Показано, что внутренние журналы не передают какой-либо новой информации и демонстрируют отсутствие противоречий между руководством и персоналом. Таким образом, благодаря новой медиасреде абсолютное согласие между руководством и персоналом реализуется в форме диалога-унисона.

Ключевые слова: риторическая теория диалога, цифровые технологии

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Introduction

Corporate media belong to the system of corporate communication channels. The latter can be divided into two main types according to the criteria of relation to the company: outsiders and insiders. The functional subtypes comprise events, advertising, corporate media and a specific category — social media [1]. Corporate media are further classified on the basis of the audience: clients, business partners and personnel.

It should be emphasized that at present companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of strengthening communication with employees [2; 3]. This is the reason why personnel magazines possess authority and stand out in the system of corporate media.

The purpose of this research is to explore how personnel magazines contribute to the strategic function of corporate communication whose goal is the motivation of employees, and what is the role of the medium in this process.

Evolution of Corporate Media

The fact that “the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” [4. P. 8] can, on the micro level, be illustrated by the evolution of personnel magazines.

It is possible to single out the following stages in the evolution: 1) paper printed brochure; 2) electronic version of a printed magazine; 3) electronic magazine; 4) interactive employees newsletters; 5) corporate social media.

Stage 1. Paper printed brochure

The roots of corporate media can be traced back to the 19th century when the first printed media came into being. For example, in the 1830s Daniel Friedrich List, a German economist, published a bulletin for workers. An American pastor Reverend Abel Charles Thomas organized a monthly periodical “Lowell Offering” which collected works of poetry and fiction by the female textile workers known as the Lowell Mill Girls of the Lowell, Massachusetts textile mills. His readers were employees of Lowell, Massachusetts textile mills and their families. The target audience of Isaac Merritt Singer was his clients. In the newspaper readers could find recommendations concerning the use of Singer sewing machines [5]. The interaction with readers was exercised through readers’ letters to the editor.

Stage 2. Electronic version of a printed magazine

Since that time, corporate media have changed drastically because with the advent of the Internet the media environment has changed. The Internet facilitated social interactions by allowing users to circumvent borders between nation states, national markets, the local and the global, the public and the private, mass communication and interpersonal communication, professional and amateurs, production and consumption of information. At present, digital environment affects human actors, technological actants, audience positions and the activities through which these interact [6].

Personnel magazines were not an exception. New technologies have gradually transformed the in-house magazine from a paper printed brochure to an electronic format. Now the majority of in-house magazines of big manufacturing corporations exist in two versions: paper version for field workers and electronic one for office employees. The two versions are identical. Digital technologies strongly affect the technological aspect of polygraphy: full-colour, information visualization (photos, illustrations, infographics), variety of fonts and graphic design. Employees’ eyes get caught on the most important information. Thus, variety in text lowers the chances of magazine skimming. The use of different fonts and formatting makes the content more attractive. And one more advantage of electronic versions of in-house magazines: they can be delivered directly to employee screens reducing e-mail overload.

Stage 3. Electronic magazine

Electronic magazines proper have no printed analogues and are created specially for digital consumption. They preserve all the features of electronic versions of printed paper magazines but make use of a number of other digital technologies.

It is common knowledge that the Internet merges together the features of written and printed texts and audio-visual media, linearity and non-linearity (hyper-text structure), individualism and multiple identity [7]. As a result, different communication media in electronic personnel magazines increase their emotional impact, contribute to the personnel engagement, increase reader time and readership enjoyment [8]. Additionally, the development of the Intranet has made editors powerful gatekeepers and agenda setters within organisations [9].

Stage 4. Interactive employees' newsletter

Interactive in-house newsletters are even more employee-centric and action-focused than the types of personnel magazines discussed above, because they make it possible for an employee to not only passively consume information but also be an active member of communication and react to the message. By clicking a link, an employee can load the information which seemed interesting to him/her, quickly respond to a question, give back fresh ideas through surveys.

Stage 5. Corporate social media

Interactivity is an essential feature of social media which have become part and parcel of our everyday life. In any case, employees go to external social networks to self-actualize. Management cannot stop them; therefore, it is better to turn their communication within the organization.

Corporate business networks allow employees to communicate faster, bypassing hierarchical and geographic boundaries. Communication can be conducted in different languages. Senior executives can also be actively involved in communication with their personal blogs, interacting with employees. Thus, a new culture of interaction based on exchange emerges.

Corporate social media help companies to practice corporate social responsibility and support those projects that are closely linked to local communities. Employees participate in such projects as volunteers and help the company to promote its image as a corporate citizen.

It follows that on the micro level corporate media the principal tenet of media ecology: the media environment has the property of permanent variability — that is, according to McLuhan, any media environment is constantly transforming and modifying society [10]. Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affects human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival [11]. It should be emphasized that new technologies transformed corporate magazines from a medium of information into an instrument of shaping and promoting corporate culture [12; 13]. These ideas are further developed in the paper below.

Dialogue Theory

To make a full contribution to management, personnel magazines must be strategic, support strategic objectives, and focus on relationships. To achieve this goal, public relations in general and corporate media in particular rely on the principles of a managing dialogue [14. P. 309–313].

The concept of dialogue has been investigated from diverse disciplinary perspectives:

- Michael A. Peters and Tina Besley endeavor to elaborate a system of the main forms of dialogue as they have been developed by Western philosophy, focusing on the diversity of conceptions especially in the modern period [15].
- From a communication perspective, dialogue represents “a form of discourse that emphasizes listening and inquiry, with the aims of fostering mutual respect and understanding” [16]. The discursive nature of dialogue manifests itself in linguistic and paralinguistics means, including prosody and body language [17] which are used to reach common understanding even in a computer-mediated information-exchange situation [18].
- The sociological perspective, dialogue studies are represented in the works of Jurgen Habermas, who argues that in dialogue the process of achieving mutual understandings communicators can result in achieving social integration and solidarity [19].
- A great impact on the development of literary studies was produced by Michael Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue [20]. By introducing the concepts of ‘dialogism’, ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘chronotope’ Bakhtin emphasizes the significance of dialogue as a means of demonstrating the interconnectedness of literary works and reveals the nature of language as dialogue [21; 22]. More than that, his ideas serve as a theoretical, and analytic research construct not only in philological studies but also in other fields of inquiry, for example, dialogic pedagogy [23].
- Dialogic theory has long become a methodological basis of public relations in so far as it describes the basic management models in public relations, its techniques and instruments [24–27]. The concept of dialogue is applied in media relations, internal public relations and other spheres of activity [28–30]. The dialogical approach to public relations places the emphasis on the management of relationships between an organization and the publics on which it depends.
- The neo-rhetorical theory of dialogue, which views public relations as a socially mediated speech communication, was developed in Russian linguistics by Yuri Rozhdestvensky [14]. It is firmly rooted in his concept of four stages of communication history (the oral, the written, the printed and the electronic) which has very much in common with the ideas expounded by M.Mc Luhan, one of the founders of media ecology [31]. Rozhdestvensky states that the transition from stage to stage is determined by introducing new communication technologies [32].

According to this theory, the art of management, which, among other activities, includes public relations, presupposes design and planning of dialogues, and then their consistent implementation. As public relations is aimed at persuading different target audiences — citizens, customers, employees — to accept an innovation, it is essential to carry out a number of dialogues [33; 34]. To this end public relations works out systems of arguments which correspond to the interests, intellectual development and social background of each target audience [35]. Since employee loyalty is very important given the numerous positive outcomes associated with it, it is imperative that managers endeavor to implement dialogues that foster employees' identification with organizations.

Rozhdestvensky observes three types of dialogues: dialogue-difference, dialogue-theater and dialogue-unison. Three types of dialogue lead to different results.

Dialogue-difference is the most important type of dialogue because it can lead to an action. In dialogue-difference, the first and second remarks of the dialogue are different both in form and meaning. The dialogue-difference occurs in oral speech, when, for instance, a project is discussed at a business meeting. Such dialogue makes it possible to develop more subtle and specialized decisions, to collect and analyze detailed information in order to generate an idea and justify it.

In the dialogue-theatre the first and second remarks are different but there is no actual exchange of remarks, because a number of participants do not utter them, they are the audience. Their verbal reaction to what is said by the speaker is in their inner speech. The dialogue is actualized in the conclusion when listeners express their common opinion. For example, at an annual meeting of shareholders we observe a very special exchange of “remarks”: the speaker (the CEO) makes a speech but his/her audience reacts to it by voting or applause at the end of the meeting. The dialogue-theatre forms the audience's intention and leads to decision-making: the annual report of a company presented by the CEO is generally approved by shareholders.

Dialogue-unison is realized in mass communication and advertising. In the dialogue-unison the first and second remarks of the dialogue form a formal semantic and textual unity [14. P. 325]. Dialogue-unison presupposes the interaction of two communicators (creators of the text and the target audience) who share the same background knowledge, interests and ideas. It always confirms some information and is a vehicle of certified data part of which confirms cultural norms. Thus, a fact reported by the media must actually be valid and true to life. Information reported by a personnel magazine is always certified by references to concrete management decisions which are in accord with corporate strategy and culture. The dialogue-unison helps the target audience to better understand the current position of the company.

The next section examines in detail the impact of the medium on personnel magazines as an example of dialogue-unison.

Personnel Magazines as Dialogue-unison and the Role of Digital Communication Technologies

To gain a deeper insight into the nature of personnel magazine as a dialogue-unison, it is necessary to view it through the prism of the conditions in which the magazine is created, the structure of its content and the media format of the magazine.

Production Process Conditions

The process of production of the internal magazine has specific features: [14. P. 375]:

- The initial stage of the management dialogue is invention which “is impossible without taking into account the external and internal corporate environment” [14. P. 319].
- Production of a corporate magazine must be enacted in concrete, recurring practices—dialogue between board of directors and the editorial board, dialogue between editors, journalists and designers in the process of preparing materials for publication, dialogue between the medium and its audience—relevant for diverse situations.
- The dialogues are conducted by means of oral communication, documentation and funding.
- Such practices must be routine (e.g., approval of an issue by top management), if they are to be an element of corporate communication, yet the potential for spontaneous interventions needs to be kept alive. Across time, dialogues need to be able to refer to the past without being locked in it. New practices and traditions can and must evolve to ensure that the corporate medium does not stagnate.
- Production of corporate media is to a great extent regulated by a set of legal and ethical norms. In Russia, for example, such norms are established by the Federal Law on Mass Media of the Russian Federation, the Code of Professional Ethics of Russian Journalists, and the corresponding Corporate Codes of Ethics. It is common knowledge that in traditional media news coverage of issues concerning general matters is likely limited as a result of journalists’ emphasis on novelty and drama. News content is also biased toward sensation and conflict, which inevitably attract the attention of the public. Such an approach to corporate life is absolutely out of the question, because the Corporate Code Ethics confines the scope of journalistic narrative to the interests of the company, not society in general. This is confirmed in the course of the dialogue between top-management and the editorial board. The Corporate Code of Ethics, in a sense, is a starting point and a guide for the personnel magazine editor because it describes the mission and vision of the company and its principles of doing business which should be promoted among employees. Such codes are company specific and reflect the ethical issues that arise from the company’s economic sector and markets in which they operate.

To sum up, production of in-house magazines has limitations which affect the nature of dialogue-unison: magazines should deal with the issues related to the activities of the given company and contribute to the formation and promotion of its positive image among employees. In-house magazine is sort of the centre of social gravity for employees cultivating their sense of ownership of the company's activities, its success and development prospects.

Content Structure

The content of the dialogue-unison is meaningful intention, determined by the purpose for which the dialogue is conducted [14. P. 382]. The content of the dialogue-unison of corporate media is the intention of journalists to concentrate on the topics of significance for the current state of the company and its place on the market today against the background of declared corporate principles of doing business. The intention manifests itself in the headings of the magazine, for example, "Recognition of Achievements", "Stories of Success", "Our Anniversaries", "Creative Laboratory", etc.

A personnel magazine, therefore, becomes an important way to ensure that corporate values are embedded in the fabric of the business as a whole. Then staff is aware that the company's stated values are being integrated into all the organisation's goals, strategies and operations. The exposure of employees to corporate values is carried out in each particular article not by appeals and slogans, but by showing examples of their implementation in life.

Media Format

The means to convey the main idea of a publication or an issue are discussed in the course of the dialogue between editors, journalists and designers within the framework of the editorial board. The design, colour range, various fonts, photos, pictures, and animation together communicate a specific and targeted message to make the most of the collection of words on the layout. Otherwise stated, at this stage the media format of the magazine comes to the fore.

As has been mentioned above, at present the media format of personnel magazines is affected by digital technologies. Now, a modern personnel magazine demonstrates the fact that the "content" of any medium is always another medium" [4].

Indeed, the magazine is a kind of "media matryoshka": a spoken word — the CEO's speech, a story told by an employee, an expert's opinion — is recorded, then the recording can appear in a corporate radio programme, or on corporate television news, the transcript of the programme becomes an article with infographic and images printed in an electronic magazine, and later can be reprinted by employees in corporate social networks. It increases the

engagement of employees in corporate communication. Monitoring corporate blogs in its turn, can provide the board of directors with new ideas concerning the corporate strategy.

Each technology adds something to the original message, develops and modifies it. Oral speech is transposed into a printed text, visualization in the form of images, infographic and animation substitutes for some fragments of the printed text, in social media printed text is a hybrid of written and oral speech with its own phraseology, syntax and style, etc.

The magazine places its topics in wider contexts by means of links. The hyper-text structure can provide background information and draws historical linkages of the event described of the sort uncommon to television news. The device broadens the context and at the same time keeps the issue under discussion in the focus of readers' attention.

Electronic Personnel Magazine as a Complex Ecosystem

In electronic in-house magazines, top management decisions, company objectives and achievements can be promoted in a visually appealing infographics or animation. Graphs and charts are a simple way to visualize complex data or information. These easy-to-read ways of presenting strategically important content may improve trust and reinforce the relationship of management and personnel.

It should be borne in mind that a printed text cannot provide feedback between the creator and the recipient of the text, since the recipient does not have at his disposal a technique that creates a mass-produced text for mass consumption. Therefore, he/she can respond to the creator of the text, or rather to one of the representatives, only by letter or orally, and this is a response only to a fragment of the text. It follows that the text of the mass media flows in one direction: from the creator to the recipient, which violates the principle of dialogic speech activity proper.

Certainly, journalists use various sociological methods which provide them with a statistical generalization of the mass audience's thoughts and feelings. The data make it possible to orient the content and ideological direction of mass media texts. In this case, the fundamental dialogic nature of oral speech is imitated [14. P. 145].

Nowadays however, due to the e-mail address in electronic magazines, editors are in a more favourable situation. Again, we face an example of all pervasive technology which affects scale and pace of professional communication, because e-mail creates a feeling of immediacy and the urge to read and respond to an e-message at any time or place [36] e-mail does not result in immediate exchange of remarks between the editorial board and readers because readers comment on a certain event discussed in the magazine, not on the whole issue and the process is spaced in time. But e-mail has become indispensable, for it makes it easy to get feedback.

Electronic personnel magazine has a variety of other valuable tools for getting detailed analytics on how management decisions are perceived. By using interactive elements like videos and images the editor can get detailed reporting that later allows management to make data-driven decisions and orient the information towards the needs and interests of personnel. Thus, new technologies have reinforced the nature of dialogue-unison by orienting the content exactly towards personnel interests. The electronic personnel magazine, on the one hand, keeps employees connected, engaged and informed about what is happening in the company and, on the other hand, provides management with measurable results across an organization on employees' perception of corporate business strategy.

It follows that electronic personnel magazine is a complex ecosystem in which different communication media are closely interwoven. They help the editors to engage employees in the organization's priorities because they subtly but consistently convince employees of the need to treat their work with great responsibility and make the maximum contribution to the common cause. In personnel magazines, the "voices" of management and employees merge in the "duet".

In other words, due to digital technologies, personnel magazines can strengthen the positive sentiments among employees, thus resulting in a growing support of corporate strategy and the unity of management and personnel.

It is worth mentioning in this connection, that when the international panel judging "The Swedish Publishing Award" considered "Agenda Magazine" (the in-house magazine of the Volvo Group), it pointed to its consistency in presenting information in different languages and a strong visual appeal — however, the emphasis was on the general effect. The statement of the jury was: "For a well-made and airy magazine which, without a lot of fuss, manages to create the feeling of We." The Editor-in-Chief commented: "I am very pleased. Especially with the emphasis from the jury on the "we" — part as that is one of the most important purposes with the magazine, to act as a common denominator and a uniting link for the Volvo employees around the world" [37].

The "We" — effect is achieved, among other things, by turning to the technique of corporate storytelling, that is plot-related narratives which are a vehicle and transmitter of some corporate value. Such stories help companies to communicate with their audiences in informative and engaging ways.

In schematic terms, corporate storytelling is understood as a constellation of individual narratives that permit the circulation of information, ideas, opinions— ideally in an unfettered manner — resulting in the formation of corporate image. The narratives serve to facilitate communication between board and personnel.

The main value of corporate stories is in the links with which they saturate the surrounding world, in establishing the relations between people, events and phenomena. Stories connect us to the world. Thus, to create the positive

corporate image stories published in corporate media elevate the simplest events in the life of a company to the level of metaphorical generalization. In the course of writing a story the journalist selects only those facts which contribute to implementing corporate values in an indirect way. A series of individual stories illustrating different aspects of corporate activity creates the illusion of regularity.

By telling about very prosaic events (the use of the company products helping to solve ecological problems in a region, improvement of equipment making driving safer and more comfortable, providing economic opportunities for female employees, etc.) the in-house magazine presents the company as an organisation that cares about environment, about people and its own employees, about the convenience of life not even so much in developed countries as in third world countries. Separate stories viewed within the framework of even one issue create a fabulous image of the company: it is perceived as a fairy-tale noble giant who saves cities from constant floods, helps preserve the historical heritage of an entire nation, gives people a source of life — fresh water, invents fantastic vehicles, reveal talents and help people to develop their skills.

It should be added in this connection that stories can be told by employees and the editor's task in this case is to make them deeper and more emotional. Readers are anchored in a human story. This is the reason why corporate values become closer to personnel if the events described are viewed through the lens of a real employee.

A good illustration of this device can be found in the in-house magazine "Vremja mashin" ("Time of Machines") of the Russian concern "Russkije mashiny" ("Russian Machines"), the largest Russian diversified holding company that unites industrial and engineering assets, with more than 75 000 employees.

Presenting a new model of the minibus "GAZelCity" in the article "Wait for City", the editors give the floor to its developers. The publication consists of a few parts each of which has a subtitle. The opening part "The new frame minibus "GAZelCity" will soon be on the roads of the country" is a business-like story told by the head of the service centre for repair and maintenance of equipment at the automobile plant "GAZ". It is followed by a fairly emotional story told by the head of the bus assembly shop about the process of launching the new model. The story concludes with a statement "There is still a lot of work ahead, but the main thing is that we have formed a competent team and have the desire to make a new product the way the consumer wants it to be. This, as the experience of the previous project shows, is the key to success!"

The next story told by the Honored Designer of the Russian Federation, about how the process of developing such projects has changed creates the historical background for the process of developing the new model. The author has been a witness of the changes, so by sharing his personal experience he adds authenticity to the narration and makes it emotionally coloured.

The media text presupposes the inclusion of fragments of “someone else’s speech” in the main text in the form of various types of quotations and allusions. Journalists have to quote other people to achieve credibility and realism of their narratives. But in this particular case the whole article is a “quotation”. Brought together the stories told by a few employees create a multilateral description of the event — launching the new model — reflect the storytellers’ opinion on the subject of the publication, offer a clue to their personality in how they use language and express emotions. The “chorus” of employees who are familiar to readers is far more expressive and effective in terms of influencing the recipient of the message than the “solo” of a journalist, at best, citing specialists. By means of storytelling, the magazine creates a model of a company employee to be followed.

To sum up, personnel magazine represents dialogue-unison in the sense that it leads to the unification of management and the target publics. It transmits and certifies the information which confirms the lawful actions of the company and its employees. A new digital environment as a complex message system manifested in corporate media imposes certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving on company employees. In the case of personnel magazines, it becomes obvious that new communication technology influences particular professional situations and interactions between management and employees, affects corporate culture and creates a new social model of the employee.

The framework of dialogue-unison seeks to address the questions of management and provides empirical starting points for analysis of the relationship between company leaders and employees. Given that the foundation of the corporate culture frame is the board personnel, this frame is interested in the processes of making people develop into loyal employees, who should come to see themselves as members of and potential participants in the corporate development process.

Neil Postman argues that in media ecology “an environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of feeling, thinking and behaviour. It structures what we can see, say and therefore do. It assigns roles on us and insists on us playing them [38. P. 161]. Due to new technologies, the modern in-house magazine becomes an ecosystem which imposes on personnel certain ways of feeling, thinking and behaviour. It reinforces the link of employees to the core corporate values, and in this way assigns to them the role of active corporate ambassadors.

Conclusion

The modality of dialogue-unison, which is at the basis of personnel magazine, has not changed over the years: as a variety of dialogue-unison, personnel magazine, firstly, provides employees with the data confirming a high reputation of the company on the market and, secondly, helps them to see their

place in the company. Personnel magazine is an analytic construct that seeks to identify the possibilities of people acting in the role of employees. People must be able to see themselves as members and potential participants with efficacy in corporate life. This is central to the issues of corporate belonging and corporate participation.

The feeling of corporate belonging, however, is not simply given, but is constructed via word and deed. The crucial role of digital technologies used in personnel magazines, which create a very special media environment, consists in making the dialogue-unison more effective by involving employees into the process of interaction, and turning them into co-authors.

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