

CONCEPTS OF IMAGE AND REPUTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN PRACTICES

DORA KABAKCHIEVA

SENIOR ASSISTANT PHD, LECTURER AND PR AT
SHUMEN UNIVERSITY "KONSTANTIN BISHOP OF PRESLEV"

BULGARIA
PR@GSHU.BG

ABSTRACT: THE CONCEPTS OF IMAGE" AND "REPUTATION" ARE VERY OFTEN USED AS SYNONYMS IN EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION AND IN SPECIALIZED LITERATURE. THESE TERMS ARE MIXED UP, REPLACED AND IDENTIFIED WITH ONE ANOTHER. BUT THESE SHOULD NOT BE EQUATED. REPUTATION COULD NOT BE MIXED WITH IMAGE AND VICE VERSA. THE IMAGE IS BASED ON THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT. IT IS A UNILATERAL EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION. REPUTATION IS A RATIONAL PERCEPTION. IT IS KNOWLEDGE BASED CONCEPT THAT IS ACQUIRED BY MULTILATERAL COMMUNICATION (BEING OF MEDIATED OR DIRECT NATURE). IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO BUILD REPUTATION WITHOUT IMAGE REQUIRED. ON THE OTHER HAND, IMAGE WITHOUT CONSTANT PROCESS OF IMPROVING REPUTATION IS OFTEN CONSIDERED AS BLEAK AND VAIN ENDEAVOR.

KEY WORDS: IMAGE, REPUTATION, REPUTATIONAL MANAGEMENT, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

IT is the lack of standardization in terminology that causes obstacles in the process of building strategic communication system. It is needed to differentiate initial concepts - reputation and image in order to enable harmonization in an organization efforts to communicate adequately with interested parts and thus to work towards achieving common goals. The essence of both terms is defined incorrectly in their everyday use in different fields. These two terms are usually used as synonyms even in specialized literature and in practice. They are mutually replaced or identified with one another. This very fact leads logically to replacements in the ways to work with them. However, a more thorough research on their nature shows that there is no even a sign of equality between them, although they are closely related categories.

THE image is a concept that originates from the Latin word for *imago* (image, vision) and is associated with another Latin word - *imitari* (mimic, imitate). In everyday speech it is used in combination with verbs such as "create", "reflection", "show", "amplification", "distribute", "sell". Usually, it is said that the image is "projected", "manipulated", "ridiculed", "supported" or "rose". There are many different meanings of the term. In dictionaries it is most often explained as "impression, opinion about a person, team, institution created by interested people - individual style and appearance that characterize the person, group of persons or institution."

IN a more pragmatic plan image is considered to be a set of all positive or negative impressions of a given subject. It is considered also as an image created by the media, literature, events or by the individual himself/herself. Essentially, the image is a tool for communication with the mass media's consciousness.

THE term acquired a wider meaning in relation to public communication - "it is a set of concepts, characteristics, relations and attitudes - visible and invisible, awareness and unconscious (and occurring at a subconscious level) that the organization and the stakeholders build themselves in the process of deliberate or spontaneous communication with each other." (Raykov 1999: 101) It is considered as a general portrait that is created in the minds of different groups of people and it is based on what the organization has stated and intended what is actually doing.

ACTUALLY, it comes to consciously created product that incorporates current needs (in terms of values and norms) and demonstrates the potential qualities of its medium. It is usually the "model of the ideal performer of a social role or a function adapted to the allowance of public expectations and requirements" (Petrov 2005: 141, 142) that lays the grounds, i.e., its carrier "is dressed up" as a general matrix of public expectations requires.

THE image itself is a result of information about real-world objects and phenomena gained from various sources irrespective of the context in which it is placed by different researchers. It creates a second reality, which strongly affects the public decision-making process and it is subjected to modeling and monitoring by the organization itself. It's not just a picture or a precise copy of an image that have to be seen, played or described. The image incorporates certain parts of the overall picture of an organization that have an emotional impact on stakeholders. At the same time, it may not reflect in any way the social and economic characteristics of this organization, the characteristics of its market behavior and the consequences of its activities, the principles and methods of its business. Its aim is to create a constant positive attitude towards the subject.

THE term "image" became popular in the US in the 50s of the 20th century to describe the aura of a person, a service, a corporation or a certain nation. In the 70s and 80s it was already considered as a key to the success of organizations in all areas.

THE image helps in making quick choices in the context of the blurring boundaries of postindustrial society and answers the question - what is it? It is a key factor in shaping the views of stakeholders and is of relatively stable perspective nature, influencing people's values, thoughts and memories of a phenomenon or object. The image creates an order in reactions, actions and opinions and predicts the attitude of a person to a certain problem. It is the positive or negative attitudes to a particular organization or person that is considered by society to be social consciousness itself. The emotional perceptions determine social willingness for cooperation. It means that the image is comprised by two components - logic (opinion based on knowledge) and emotional (feelings) ones. Human consciousness usually considers both concepts simultaneously. These two form the complete concept of image that is intended to be imposed. The role of the emotional component is to stimulate the interrelation between individual and an organization – e.g. when a customer buys a product or an employee works hard. Opinions without emotions are not effective - someone or something else should stimulate action. Also emotions without any opinions could "touch" you, but you will not have a logical answer which company is "logically" best.

WHEN E. Bernays was asked how one could efficiently build an image, he replied that the experts did not work with "images" at all but with real objects. It is hard to state there are stakeholders, being internal or external, that have a fully comprehensive range of knowledge on which to build their idea of an object. Therefore, it is always considered that reasonable and average level of knowledge and understanding of the facts is needed to form perception

about real and specific image which should correspond to the nature of the subject itself. Having in mind the last statement, it should be outlined that the optimum image implies best applicable one in a particular situation. The image is just what it is - beneficial or not- and therefore it should not be falsified or artificially polished in order to distort the image/notion of the organization. The ideal image implies a true sense of the subject itself. It is based on experience, knowledge and understanding of the facts relating to it.

THERE are researchers who not only define the term "organizational image" but also clarify its relation to reputation. The interpretations resulted depend on the understanding authors share on the importance of the differences between the two terms. The use of the *image* concept causes difficulties, "because the mental images are hidden and cannot become familiar immediately". In practical terms reputation could be considered as "collective image" (Bromley 1993:19). It is typical for those who did not make distinction between the two concepts.

Both phenomena are of virtual psychological character with cognitive and structural nature, whose formation is influenced by many factors, but it is ultimately needed to highlight the conceptual differences between these two constructs.

THE *image* concept arises many associations connected with a brand name or a company while reputation reflects the overall assessment regarding the extent to which the company enjoys a good reputation and not to its concrete identity. Image and reputation are independent from one another. A certain company can choose the image that is less attractive to the public and still to be considered as having a high reputation.

MOST researchers considers the image as a phenomenon of mass consciousness - a specific, unique and comprehensive image that is deep colored with experiences, emotions and feelings and reflects social expectations. Reputation is something else, although the similarity with the image as a sub-characteristic prevails in society. There are significant differences between these two concepts. The image should be considered as a projection into the depths of the human psyche. It is manifested in emotions, instincts, subconscious impulses. On the other hand, reputation is connected with the process of thinking and with human`s mind. Reputation is in the sphere of conscious.

THE image is an idea in people's minds created for a short period of time and could be substantially changed without any change in the organization itself. Reputation is a dynamic characteristic of the organization behavior of that is formed in society for a long period of time. It is based on sets of information about the ways and methods the organization behavior is built in certain situations. "Reputation is the sum of values that people associate with the company based on their perceptions and interpretations of the image which the company applies in communication in time." (Dalton 2005)

THE image is based on specific information in a specific set time. It is an instantaneous set of conclusions drawn in comparison to or in response to signals received from a particular organization or within a certain period of time. The image is built inside the organization itself. It is intended to organization stakeholders and its ultimate aim is to establish a reputation. Reputation is an overall idea of the organization that is accumulated over a long period of time. It is based on past experience, on personal experience with this organization and on other communication tools.

IN terms of reputation management the image is only a way to share significant reputational characteristics with specific groups of interest. It could be a stable and high

salary for employees. It could be quality control, quality products, and financial stability for business partners. Finally, it could be reliable data communication and operational information opportunities provided for the media.

THOSE who are aware and who makes clear distinction between the two concepts consider image as "precursor" of reputation.

WHEN the institution is focused on creating a positive image, validating it with real actions and informs the interested parts, then it works to build its reputation. It is almost impossible to build reputation without the image required. On the other hand, working only on the image of a person; group or institution without improving the reputation is often bleak and vain endeavor. It is possible to create illusions of a good image by the efforts of professionals but it will only exist for a short period of time - until the interested business persons find a discrepancy between the actual content and artificial image. Reputation qualitatively differs from image in that it is a "long-term" product itself. Reputation is ultimately a rational category which is based on the real experience of the interaction of stakeholders in the organization. It is also based on the evident arguments of conscious alignment and relies on estimates of authoritative experts. The image is considered to be a superficial emotional category based on experience that does not require comparative evaluations and inferences. The image is what the institution consciously forms and imposes to the necessary reference groups in order to look like organization wants in the eyes of others. Reputation is what these groups actually think about the organization. Figuratively speaking, image is a mask and reputation is what lies behind the mask. When it comes to business, "mask" and "face" are supposed to complete each other and to enhance the influence they have without any contradiction. They are two sides of one and the same coin and each of them has its own function and role. Having in mind their specifics, they require different approaches and different use in communication being one of the basic levers for influence.

IT is the ideal position of the company that is typical for the notion of *image*. It is actually what the organization has planned and intended to share with the target groups. Reputation is perceived by the audience as "actual position" of the image. In this sense, the events of the construction of the image actually lead to positioning of reputation.

THE image is considered to be a product of the company over which it operates with, develops and sends positive messages to the general public. A reputation is a reaction of the public to certain actions of this company.

REPUTATION is primarily what you submit to its surrounding medium. Its structure comprises of two components - image and content constitutes. Image component is of "formal" nature and answer the questions "who" (collegiums, management) and "how" (corporate style, appearance, ability to build communications). The content part answers the questions "what" (speak) and "why" (they do that).

THE designation of the image best fits the first part of the proverb "First impression is from your dress, last impression from your wits". The second part of the proverb corresponds to the concept of reputation. The image is based on the emotional impact - it is a unilateral external communication. Reputation is a rational perception, evaluative knowledge acquired by the means of multilateral (mediated and direct communication). Reputation is considerably more complicated concept of image.

THE image is a snapshot picture of the company at a particular time. It is of relatively short nature and is easily to be corrected. There is a common expression: "He changed his

image". All this could not be applied to reputation. If we continue with the analogy, the reputation can be presented as a photo album, which was created to fulfill the time - the sum of long accumulated experience and expertise. For example, a certain university sends new messages to its applicants by focusing on the quality of education it offers. The institution is trying to form image-oriented stakeholders of its educational products and services to employers and their problems. But the reputation of a prestigious university education can be built only after the message has been received, accepted, meaningful, and has multiple confirmations by the respective audiences - students, employers, the media, etc. In other words, the task of the university is to create an album with multiple "pictures" to illustrate its new position and to create history for people from the target market segments.

THE two basic concepts could be systematized in the following brief definitions defining their essential characteristics:

IMAGE – It is the image of the organization that is planned to be created in the minds of the target audiences by the means of communication. It is based on the emotional impact and predominantly formed by external communication elements that are unilateral and reach the audience as a result of classic direct marketing or PR communications for a relatively short time.

REPUTATION – It is a rational perception, evaluative knowledge acquired in the path of multilateral (mediated and direct) communication and in a wider period of time. It is built of a much larger amount of components - corporate image, brand trust, history of the organization, awareness of its activities, mission, goals and so on.

IN summary, there is an attempt to define the boundaries of both constructs that would look like this:

IMAGE	REPUTATION
<p>The image of the organization planned to be created in the minds of the stakeholders through communication. Based on the emotional impact and advantageously formed by the external communication elements that are one-sided and reach the audience due to the classic direct marketing or PR communication for a relatively short time.</p>	<p>Rational perception, evaluative knowledge acquired in the path of multilateral (mediated and direct) communication and in a wider period of time. Built from a much greater amount of components - corporate image, brand trust, history of the organization, awareness of its activities, mission, goals and so on.</p>
<p>Product that is an "ownership" of the organization. It is purposefully created to "makeover", develop and "sell".</p>	<p>Product that is an "ownership" of the entire community, founded as a "response" to the movement of the image of the company.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">IMAGE IS CREATED A model image that generates messages and signals.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">REPUTATION IS MANAGED Already formed attitude, feedback available.</p>
<p>It largely reflects the emotional perception of the organization (like - I do not like) and exists without the need for direct experience of interaction with it.</p>	<p>It is formed on the basis of reliable knowledge and assessments (e.g., reliable, affordable, convenient partner). It implies rational analytical approach, often supported by one's own experience and personal interaction.</p>
<p>It is possible to influence in decision-making process for cooperation (only as a way to derive significant reputational characteristics).</p>	<p>It has a key role in decision-making process ("for" or "against") on cooperation with the organization in one or another form.</p>
<p>It creates and is amended relatively quickly.</p>	<p>A "long-term" product. To be sustainable it is built</p>

It is possible with the efforts of experts to create the illusion of a good image, but it can only exist for a short period of time - as long as the interested parties find a discrepancy between the objective content and artificially created image.	significantly longer. Thus it operates longer. Its construction is carried out in the course of the overall work of the organization and affects relationships with all stakeholders. The ultimate goal is the formation of positive public opinion.
Favorable image can attract new partners and customers.	REPUTATION that is built for years makes those who have already made choice to remain loyal to it. It guarantees indirectly, that they will not be misled.
THE IMAGE IS A TACTIC INSTRUMENT.	REPUTATION IS A STRATEGY.

WHETHER an organization has professional bodies to work for the purpose of building and maintaining the image and reputation, its image among the public (and especially among its priority multi stakeholder) exists. The choice whether this idea can be formed and managed professionally in a favorable direction for it or be left to spontaneity where outcomes are not known remains for the organization itself. And vice versa, if a certain company has developed strategically both good image and reputation these can always be used in support of its activities.

REFERENCES

1. **BROMLEY, D.B., 1993:** REPUTATION, INAGE AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT. CHICHESTER: JOHN WILEY
2. **DALTON, D., 20.10.2005:** INTRODUCTION TO PR AND MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, LECTURE COURSE IN NEWSPAPER "DNEVNIK"
3. **PETROV, M., 2005:** THE PERSONAL IMAGE. CONSTRUCTION, CONTROL, RECEPTION., SOFIA
4. **RAYKOV, Z., 1999:** PUBLIC COMMUNICATION, SOFIA