
#ŻYTNIAGATE

SOCIAL NETWORKING COMMUNITY MANAGERS

LITERACY

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Abstract

The topic of internet sources, authorship, and all over the context in which these are used, applied and interpreted is here presented based on a case study of an online communication campaign of the company that happened to be the biggest fail of the year 2015 in Poland. On one hand, we approach the situation from the point of view of semiotics, interpretation of visual materials and socio-cultural context. On the other hand, we introduce the topic of responsibility, level of education in general, internet literacy of communication agency employees and their competence and knowledge as the result of educational process.

Keywords: community, manager, education, photography, social media

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, a sign can be interpreted within certain culture only in case if it is used in analogically built up language system of signs, also called a code. Each code consists of a set of signs and also a set of formal categories enabling clustering of signs into classes. These classes are in mutual close relations and function within a set of rules enabling construction of elements of a dictionary of composed communicants. Semiology differentiates two branches of signs: *a signifiant* – the explicit part of a sign, the outer resemblance of a sign and then the part linked to the meaning of a sign, *a signifié* – it is collateral to the part signalling a level of a sign composition in the sense of its meaning [1].

On the other hand, semiotic approach puts accent on arbitration of the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié* that relies on social and cultural universality [2]. In this sense, each meaning depends on the context – as such the meaning is not primary in respect to the language however it is created thanks to the language and based on the language [3]. As per Umberto Eco's concept, this matter of fact acquires a general character: "*Signs are [...] a provisory result of the encoding rules temporarily constituting correlations of certain elements, out*

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of which each one is modified for the purpose of situation conditioned by the effect of the code [cultural situation – author’s annotation] and belong to other correlation, as they constitute a new sign” [4].

2. The code of photography

One of the first theoreticians who started to deal with semiotics was Roland Barthes. He called his interest in this branch of study, the rhetoric of an image. Barthes’ aim was to comprehend the way how photographs acquire their meaning. In the sphere of photography, where each photograph mirrors its object, the matter of encoding is considered to be a difficult one. Barthes believes that a photograph is not a code itself [5] but a ‘transparent’ interpretation of what it represents. Other theoreticians consider a photo to be an imprint, a foot-print or a physical equivalent to reality [6]. Umberto Eco suggests that there is an interlink between the technological process of ‘code transmission’ and photographic codes (the use of light, brightness, etc.) [7]. Their arranged nature makes these codes conventional – nowadays, these are the general attributes of a good photograph and as such, established and generalized. Such an understanding comes from the fact that an object, a human-being or a place is captured in a photograph once and forever – in its actual structure and timeliness once the foot-print of the photographed object pertains to its motivation, unlike it is with the language, where the relation is arbitrary. In this sense, different systems of codes are found in a photograph structure in levels that enable the comprehension of these codes, by the recipients, too.

Since Erwin Panofsky [8], the history of art generally accepts a three-level set of meanings. There exists natural, conventional, inner meaning (the actual content) that is based on simple identification of objects, the motive of the object, or the aspects such as – objects and expression. Then there exists the secondary, conventional, iconographic meaning linked to the topic comprehension that reflects the true, real or fictional ‘history’ that is also called predestined (in the sense of abstract-concept ‘allegory’). The third meaning is the inner, symbolic one. Here we do not speak of the motive itself but of the existence of an integrating rule that enables a natural motive to be comprehended also in its conventional thematic [9].

3. The polysemy of photography

In his works *Le message photographique* (1961) and *Rhétorique de l’image* (1964), that are speaking of the semiotic in photography, Barthes analyses the way realistic systems of signs (such as photographs) hide its own conventionality and present it to be natural. This photographic ‘naturalness’ is subsequently used by dominant cultural groups to represent certain natural values and ideologies. Barthes also argues that the meaning of a piece of art is not predefined or present within the piece of art itself – however, it is only temporarily caught up by the recipient in the process of perception. As such, in

different contexts as well as by different recipients, the works of art acquire different meanings, implementing into the work of art one's own intertextual web – links to other texts, pictures, ideas. In this sense, Barthes works in his theory with the terms *denotation* and *connotation*. The understanding of connotation refers to Saussure's theory of signs and accepts his bilateral division of signs into signifiant and signifié. Connotation focuses on the signifying element as the main element defining connotation. The differentiation in between connotation and denotation is in the field of photography exceptionally notable: denotation is comprehended as mechanic reproduction of an object on the photographic film via a camera and connotation, on the other hand, enriches this image by adding it a humanistic element. As such, the field of connotation incorporates within itself the choice of an object of photography, the light used, as well as technical parameters. This all lies in the hands of a photographer; however, it does not result from the essence of photography itself – the way a picture is taken and the object of this process.

Barthes considers photography to be an *analogon* [10], a pure denoted communicate. The denotat (an object of the photographer) is in case of a reporter's photography (not an artistic one) comprehended by the recipient as a reflection consisting of the signs of truth [10, p. 197]. In this context, Barthes claims that the photographs cannot lie that they can only show the world as it truly is – the denotat on the picture is the same as the denotat in reality.

Photography comprehended as a message without a code is by Barthes seen as having sense only if it is a traumatizing photography, as such presenting tragic, sad events, images that stay for long in the conscientious of the recipient and leave them speechless. In other words, such photographs cause a break in the connotation process. The other photographs are subject to denotation as well as connotation procedures, even though at first sight, it may appear that the structure of visual communicate is arbitrary in the outer factors, holistic and exhaustive/complete. Barthes does not argue that the essence of connotation is not found in the communicant itself, however is linked to any factors; he speaks of the means of production, the placement of photography, alternative descriptive text, etc. as well as the factors of ideological and aesthetic character [5, p. 49-50]. Barthes claims that photographic images are polysemantic – emphasizing its own elements, bearing a chain of signified elements. This way, a recipient may choose one of the elements and ignore the others.

Photomontage is a very specific variant of photography. In other cases of photography process than the one of photomontage, when the limits in between individual parts of a picture are not distinctive and the placed elements deliberately mix among themselves, these are most often apprehended in the category of a metaphor. In this case, each element of a picture is a sign that bears its own meaning and interpretation of which is determined by other surrounding signs as well as cultural competence of the recipient.



Figure 1. Original photography was upgraded for the purpose of a fan page post

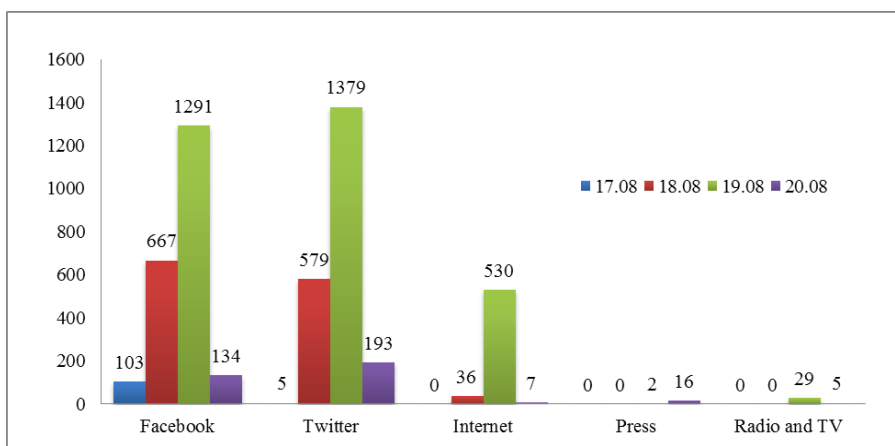


Figure 2. The development of number of mentions of the controversial post in media based on media monitoring, Source: PRESS-SERVICE Monitoring Mediów Sp. z o.o., Frase: żytn*

4. Old denotat - new connotation

On August 18th, 2015, the trademark Żytunia Extra published on its Facebook *fan page* a post with a photography (Figure 1a [http://www.strefabiznesu.pomorska.pl/sites/default/files/imagecache/830-wide/cck/image/305182/obraz_zytnia.jpg, accessed 20.02.2016]) that shortly afterwards became the most discussed topic of the marketing public as well as of Facebook users and internet media. Based on this one post a whole bunch of criticism arose. The main reason for it was the fact that the published photograph captured the happening in Lubin in 1982. This photography is one of the symbols representing the fight against communism in Poland (Figure 1b [Krzysztof Raczowski, 1982, http://www.lubin82.pl/foty/adamowicz_740_nowy3.jpg, accessed 20.02.2016]) and at the same time it is an iconic capture. The critical voices condemned the unsatisfactory knowledge or ignorance of tragically historic events. Not everybody can be attributed to the group of history unconscious individuals as not all of us we may know each and every element of

history if it is not the main point of their interest. At the same time, though, it is unacceptable to become an ignorant or a thief in certain sense. The negative situation emerging from the photography usage might have been easily avoided.

Based on *Press-Service Monitoring Mediów* (Figure 2) that summarized the effects and resonance of the case in media on August 17th, 2015 (a day before the publication of the post on Facebook) the information referring to the topic of Żytniej appeared in press, radio, TV or other social media just minimally. On the day of the issue publication, there appeared 1282 posts and on August 19th, by 4PM, there appeared 1930 posts already. The advertising messages that would correspond to the media space dedicated to the topic those days equalled 363 thousand PLN (83,690.69 EUR).

The most active there were the social media. On Facebook and Twitter only, there appeared 2771 materials related to the topic. Altogether, there appeared 393 media messages. Radio and television published 10 materials, in press, there appeared two information (more information appeared on August 20th) [J. Korucu, *Żytnia Extra po wtopie na Facebooku: promocja skandaliczna, ale skuteczna*, <http://metrocafe.pl/metrocafe/1,145523,18598201,zytnia-extra-po-wtopie-na-facebooku-promocja-skandaliczna-i.html>, accessed 20.02.2016]. A more detailed data are presented in Figure 2. Even though the advertisement brought up public nuisance, it soon became viral just like any well-planned viral campaign launched on the Internet. The overall recognition of the brand increased.

On the fan page of Żytnia Extra, the photography of mortally wounded Michał Adamowicz, shot in the head by special forces of public militia (Paramilitary police formations (ZOMO) Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia) in the period of pacification of otherwise peaceful demonstration reminding the first anniversary of August accords signature (Mutual understanding accords signed in between the strike board and the communist government concerning, among other points, the independence of the labour unions, censorship, shortening the flat awaiting period, increase of salaries and pensions, export of not only redundant groceries, etc.), appeared. The photo was taken by Krzysztof Raczowski.

It is sad, that this picture of Krzysztofa Raczowski, updated as a vulgar, tasteless and unwitty *mem* appeared on the internet linked directly to Żytniej. The photography was copied by both, the bloggers and the press. There multiplied the infraction of protection of a personality (in connection with dead people) on the photo. The right of portraying as well as the right of authorship of Krzysztof Raczowski were broken. Last, but not least, non-proprietary as well as personal rights and the integrity of a work of art and the author's bond to their work were broken all at once. We shall not forget all these facts. Moreover, in Poland there is abolished any alcohol propagation by means of traditional advertising, especially in the direct connection with its trademark (the responsibility of the company Polmos and the agency in regards to the breach of law concerning alcohol advertising in Poland - the only acceptable commercial is the one advertising beer, under the condition of abiding several conditions).

These cases are regulated by the Law of education to sobriety and prophylaxis against alcoholism (the prohibition of vodka advertising and propaganda results directly from Art. 13 (1) paragraph 1 of the same law). Here in Slovakia, this is being regulated by the Ethical codex of advertisement praxis stipulated in Art. 28, paragraph 2 and the Law of advertisement and the changes and amendments of certain laws and regulations in paragraph 5.

At the moment when the public nuisance arose, the advertisement was pulled back and disappeared from social media. Polmos, the producer of vodka assigned the responsibility not to be theirs; however they blamed the case on the advertising company Project sp. z o.o. from the town of Toruń. The advertising agency subsequently blamed the fault on an unknown employee who showed 'lack of professionalism and unlimited ignorance'. 'Solidarność' announced that they would raise a claim on the attorney general as they suspect the situation to be against the law (a criminal act).

As Urszula Płosarek claims Community Manager shall approach the situation taking into account the following: „*communication via social media is not a pure content sharing. It is an opportunity to gain information, to engage in concrete idea, to build up the relations in a community and strengthen one's identification with the company, too.*“ [U. Płosarek, *5 kluczowych kompetencji Community Managera*, <http://emplo.com/blog/5-kluczowych-kompetencji-community-managera/#.VsiMT9BK33g>, accessed 20.02.2016] Rachel Happe also claims that there are several main skills, such as *engagement skills, strategic skills, business skills, content and technical skills* [R. Happe, *50 Skills of Community Management*, <http://www.communityroundtable.com/best-practices/50-skills-of-community-management/>, accessed 20.02.2016]. These five main skills may be subsequently divided into several subcategories of skills and abilities (altogether, there are 50 of them). Similar approach shall be applied in case of communication of individuals via social networks [11]. *Community manager*, who picked up this specific photography for the purpose of posting it, did not look for the author, the overall context of its creation and they did not consider its content. All they did was editing the picture with vodka subtitle as a so-called *caption*. The mistake happens to be the assessment that a picture of five men carrying their drunken friend after a men night out would be a good illustration for the product: „*Kac Vegas? Scenariusz pisany przez Żytnią*” („An hangover, scenario written by Żytnią“). Below is the comment of the author of the campaign. „*Gdy wieczór kawalerski wymknie się spod kontroli. Wina Żytniej?*” („If a gentlemen's night comes out of control, who is the one to blame? Is it Żytniają?") The situation makes an undisputable impression that the author of the campaign lacks knowledge, professional approach as well as sensitivity to the matter. The situation captured in the picture might have been easily interpreted based on facial impression of the men carrying their fellow. There arises a question if the so-called *community manager* let themselves be influenced by incorrect hint of their own fantasy and misinterpreted creativity, they did not have sufficient knowledge on their job or simply if the trademark Żytnią Extra confined their campaign into an incorrect person's hand.

5. Conclusions

As most of the comments on the internet suggest, the mistake happen to be on the side of the Community Manager who is blamed to miss the knowledge on history and cultural elements (This photograph belongs to one of 5 most often used pictures for the purpose of depicting an illustration of communist Poland [J. Kotarbiński, *5 tragicznych zdjęć zniewolonej Polski*, <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/opinie/5-tragicznych-zdjec-zniewolonej-polski/bwgc0q>, accessed 20.02.2016]). Even though, most of the people do not associate this very specific photography in the cultural and historical context when it was created, they cannot be blamed for it. Comprehensibly, not all of us may be the subject matter experts in communistic history of Poland. (This is also the reason why the Polish Institute of National Remembrance sent educational materials concerning the period of August 1980 in Poland to the alcohol producers.) Still, once we are paid for the job to be done, we shall do it professionally and responsibly. Lack of this approach is the main reason why the branch of creative industry often produces such misinterpreted cases that can be easily avoided. The company Żytnia Extra reacted quite promptly to the scandal by deleting the post from their profile. At the same time, they expressed their soreness to the users in written (“On behalf of the team of Extra Żytnia we would like to express our regret to all those, who might have felt offended by this publication. We would like to draw attention to the fact that the photography usage was definitely not a result of insufficient respect to the situation however of our unawareness. We have made a mistake and therefore, we would like to apologize for this happening. We will take all the necessary action to avoid such a situation in future.”), where they claim the source of the picture as well as the true harsh nature of its existence, that they had not been aware of before. The fact, nevertheless, remains the same. If the team had approached their job according to lawful principles and in a professional manner, such a situation would have never happened. The issue originated in lack of professional approach to work that is often the result of superficial approach, quick and easy result expectation from the studies (that is a result of malfunctioning system of financing the schools that sometimes end up in mass production of titles only) from the side of students who are the clients. It also originates in incorrect approach of the pedagogical employees at universities (as well as at high schools). Personal experience proves that absolvents of universities often lack the same basic qualities such as low orientation in history of culture, art or nation’s history, but most of all they lack the ability of finding connections in between individual information [12]. As proven by this case, except of theoretical knowledge there is a clear absence of practical skills where by simple search for the context of the situation and its source, the incident arousal may have been easily avoided [13]. The issue comprises the distinctive character of digital information, its anonymous usage and ethical limits [14].

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