BRAND COMMUNICATION IN DIGITAL MEDIA SPACE: SOCIO-DISCOURSE DIMENSION

Abstract. The article deals with the investigation of the media brand routine’s socio discourse characteristics, where the brand is an image of a social object embodied in the complex of strategic ideas. Authors confirm that the use of the virtual media sphere is the key to success and an essential tool for business strategies implementation. Social interaction as a discourse activity, taking place regarding to and concerning the brand in media space, is considered as an integral and discursive formation made up of the discursive practices’ system. Using concepts of discursive practices, discursive actors, and discourse communities allows rendering discursive brand communication models in terms of Le Groupe Ducasse project. Discourse communities are identified according to discursive roles. Taking into consideration activity identifiers, all discursive practices can be divided into two major groups: efferent and afferent, and Le Groupe Ducasse brand’s communicative-discursive model can be described in two series of counter messages. Two types of discursive roles are specified: socio-categorical and situational. Socio-categorical roles, characterized by communicative behavioural stereotypes, are constant, developed according to socio-professional communities, and have afferent background. The brand’s leader, community of people involved with it, community of food experts, connoisseurs, and journalists are among them. Situational character of
discursive roles is common for the representatives of the wide Internet community: consumers, potential customers, situational communicators. Brand discourse has interdiscursive character, and considered to be an activity directed discourse, while discursive practices help to implement the main strategic goal of image formation.

Keywords: brand communication, brand discourse, discursive formation, discourse community, discursive role, digital media space.
та ситуативні. Соціально-категоріальні ролі, що характеризуються комунікативними стереотипами поведінки, є постійними, виробленними відповідно до соціально-професійних спільнот і мають аферентне підґрунтя. Серед них лідер бренду, співтовариство причетних до нього людей, спільнота харчових експертів, поціновувачів, журналістів. Ситуативний характер дискурсивних ролей характерний для представників широкої Інтернет-спільноти: споживачів, потенційних клієнтів, ситуативних комунікантів. Дискурс бренду має інтердискурсивний характер і розглядається як дискурс, спрямований на діяльність, а дискурсивні практики допомагають реалізувати головну стратегічну мету формування іміджу.

Ключові слова: бренд-комунікація, дискурс бренду, дискурсивна формація, дискурсивна спільнота, дискурсивна роль, цифровий медіапростір.

**Introduction.** The modern world is characterised by the rapid dynamic changes of the socio-discursive activity induced by globalisation processes, and intensive technology progress. Tendencies towards openness, interaction, knowledge demonopolization, caused by introduction of digital technologies in generating, retrieving and sharing information, have arisen modern media landscape changes and brought about new source media – digital media platforms, social networks, thematic blogs, professionally oriented resources, traditional media available in digital formats etc. New digital information transmission rapidly penetrates various social and public communities from interpersonal to institutional communication. Both business structures and public organisations and institutions pay more attention to communication with publicity, developing and maintaining their image not only though traditional media but with the help of new digital media as well. Such a tendency gives rise to the appearance of new types of media actors, socio-discourse communities, and discursive practices.

It is obvious that new digital means of communication have gained widespread acceptance in business recently, and a great amount of present-day media space is devoted to so-called brand communication. ‘Brand’ is often understood as a formation having a socio-psychological meaning and being an image of social object, a complex of personal and conventional meanings objectivising in a recipient’s mind as a response to an incentive – a brand name [1]; it is also defined as a complex of strategic cultural ideas [2, p. 29]. ‘Brand communication’ is specified as an activity aimed at establishing brand’s socio-psychological relationships with its consumers through developing an image model in the media space.
While the issue of brand communication and discursive activity, concerning the brand, have been widely discussed in journalism, psychology, and marketing, their linguistic features still remain open for research. Thus, developing new approaches to scrutinize brand communication with the help of linguistic means is urgent and essential. Particularly conceptual construct and nomenclature are to be developed and specified, that will allow to research discursive processes’ analysis, concerning brands, in terms of linguistics.

Hypothesis. The hypothesis of the research assumes that social interaction as a discursive activity, taking place regarding to and concerning the brand in media space, can be specified as an integral and discursive formation made up of the discursive practices’ system. Polysaspected study of media existence of some brands’ discursive practices and their introduction as integral and pragmatically substantive formations may help to confirm the hypothesis.

‘Discursive formation’ is one of the key notions of discourse analysis theory introduced by French philosopher and culture scholar M. Foucault who described the system of discursive formations as ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. The term ‘discourse’ is specified as a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation [3]. M. Foucault called this theory “archaeological method” and used this as a method for the research. M. Foucault’s conception of discourse is based on the attempt to define the mechanisms that structure it. The structure of the discourse is considered in external dimension: linguistic persona, intertextual interaction, discursive formations as verbal exchange models.

M. Foucault’s archaeological method poses certain methodological requirements: 1/ the ability to elicit discourse consistency only through discourse analysis; 2/ discourse is not a homogeneous phenomenon; 3/ discourse analysis does not study particular science or field, it studies archaeological theories instead which are beyond disciplinary and social institutions’ borders, but they are domains that define an individual, what he says, and the society he belongs to. According to M. Foucault discourse object has to be comprehensive and can be embodied in different texts, sciences, disciplines, social institutions.

Following M. Foucault’s theory, V. Burbelo takes it to socio-discursive dimension in terms of the analysis of the national distinguishing features of socio-discursive integration of one of the most important contemporary notions of ‘sustainable development’ that causes new
discursive processes [4]. V. Burbelo suggests a definition of the notion ‘project discourse’ claiming that integrity of this new type of discourse primarily based on the principle of various discursive practices integration. These practices traditionally belong to different fields and different types of discourses and aimed at achieving a particular practical goal. This is a defining feature of a project-centric activity.

Specifying brand communication as a complex of socio-discursive practices is considered to be heuristic potential. Using such notions as ‘discursive practices’, ‘discursive actors’, ‘discourse communities’ introduced by Francophone schools of the discourse analysis at the end of the 20th century gives the prospects for rendering discursive brand communication models with the help of the methods of linguo-communicative (activity approach) and linguo-cognitive analysis. The object of the scholar paper is an activity constituent of brand communication, discursive media interaction on a particular brand between the participants of communication. The subject of the research is to define the peculiarities of their discourses existence, potential roles of the discursive actors – linguistic personae, members of various discourse communities. Cognitive constituent of brand communication – knowledge, meanings, and senses embodied in discursive excerpts can be prospects for further research.

Data. The discursive activity of the world-famous brand Le Groupe Ducasse founded by a famous French chef Alain Ducasse has been chosen for analysis. Ducasse Empire brings together 27 restaurants all over the world, 3 farms growing organic food, the hotel chain “Châteaux et hôtels de France”, a cooking school in Paris, a pastry school, a publishing house, a training centre for professionals as well as a company of culinary events.

Le Groupe Ducasse is one of the world leaders and a trend-setter in haute cuisine. His philosophy is positioning cooking as a special art, shifting emphasis towards the food consumption: traditional understanding of such notions as ‘eating’ and ‘drinking’ have been changed into savoir manger (know how to eat) and savoir boire (know how to drink). The criteria for assessing dishes have also changed: nutritional and flavouring properties are less important now than hedonistic ones. The symbolic meaning of the feast becomes more significant in comparison with the utilitarian characteristics of food, and the consumer is to ‘decode’ the depth and expressiveness of the gastronomic message. Unlike gastronomy haute cuisine reveals its communicative character in the so-called art de la table – in a structured communicative practice carried out in a public communicative space organized around the table based on ritual communicative models of interaction between its participants (see the work of the author [5, 6]), and
A. Ducasse’s strategy is a strong media presence in order to promote his empire’s universe and popularize the project through the customers’ access to the information. Besides the official online platform Le Groupe Ducasse www.ducasse-paris.com, containing various data about the project, several Internet sites and pages for each subdivision are created in many social networks. The name of the group founder appears in newspapers, on television, in the digital media space, and his activities are widely discussed on professional and non-professional forums, at scientific colloquia and socio-political events, in thematic blogs, etc. Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest are the platforms where the brand posts cookery stories, informs about their gastronomic and other activities, hires employees, gives the opportunity to share views and ideas. For example, the number of subscribers to Alain Ducasse’s page in Instagram ran to 473,000 in May 202.

The strategy of creating a broad presence effect in the digital media space characterizes a lot of industry leaders’ activities, whose business is based on the so-called “digital reputation”, built around their names: “Christian Le Squer, Guy Savoy, Alain Passard, Cyril Lignac, Jean Imbert and many others have created their digital personality through social networks. These chefs, some of them are the heads of successful companies, have been working on developing their e-reputation as a reflection of their professional success” [7]. Apparently, the discursive-communicative activity of Le Groupe Ducasse is a broad-ranging media phenomenon simulated by the project, while media discursive practices constitute a diverse process of interaction in mass, intergroup and interpersonal forms in a broad socio-professional, and pragmatically motivated context.

Analysis and discussion. According to the discursive roles, within Le Groupe Ducasse project, several discourse communities and their actors have been specified.

Brand’s Leader. A. Ducasse is the main actor and the motivator of communication. Positioning and integrity of the brand Le Groupe Ducasse’s perception as a social object is based on its leader’s charismatic personality [8], and his status of being one of the best representatives in the profession guarantees A. Ducasse special communicative powers. Brand communication is primarily conducted through the leader’s name, as if it is marked by him, e.g., A. Ducasse is mentioned as a French Superstar Chef in the title of the interview published in “The Daily Mail” [9]. Personal charisma plays an important role, and politics is pursued at a personal level when Ducasse in mentioned as an extraordinary person, le chef le plus étoile au monde [10].
People involved in the brand. In their discursive activity, employees and project representatives make up a certain discourse community defined as involved in the brand, in other words, these are people ‘working’ for it. The nature of the discursive activity of the employees involved in the brand is stipulated by a single pragmatic goal to form a positive image and promote loyalty to the brand, and also by their professional activity, such as restaurant and hotel business, manufacturing, consulting and educational activities, publishing and cultural activities, hospitality, etc. A special communicative role in this discourse community is played by social communicators (brand-communicators in terms of marketology) authorized to communicate on behalf of the project. They are pages’ moderators in social networks, and their posts and comments can be recognized through the use of the pronoun nous (we) first person, plural, e.g., on Facebook home page [11]: “Plongez dans l’univers de notre restaurant Alain Ducasse et The Dorchester avec leur nouvelle page Instagram ! Les coulisses des cuisines, l’équipe, l’art de la table, les nouvelles créations du chef... nous vous dévoilons tout de notre restaurant trois étoiles Michelin à Londres”.

This community also includes PR representatives developing and distributing brand’s advertising, researchers involved, HR managers publishing vacancy announcements on social networks’ sites and on-line platforms: “JOB DATING : Embarquement immédiat pour une nouvelle expérience sur la Seine à bord de notre bateau 100% électrique! Ducasse sur Seine recrute ses équipes de salle et de cuisine... Tous nos métiers vous ouvrent leurs portes”.

An invitation to participate in the vacancy contest made up as an announcement of an urgent ship boarding – embarquement immédiat [12] is a noteworthy discursive fragment. Due to the use of an artistic metaphor, indistinctive for job advertising, the fragment deviates from the official-business style canon; however, it complies with the context of the general brand’s argumentative strategy.

Ducasse’s disciples, and those who collaborated with the brand in the past. Their communicative role is testifiers. It is often actualized in discursive citation fragments of their memoirs (often without reference to a name), such as a fragment from the interview with one of the disciples about the company’s activity published in a prestigious magazine: “Très vite, il joue à Dieu le Père en cuisine, ajoute and disciple. Aujourd'hui encore, il fait tellement peur aux mirlitons qu'ils demandent la permission pour aller pisser” [13].

Communities sharing brand’s ideology. These are discourse communities being aware of its activities and sustaining a positive brand
image. For instance, there is a group called Paris 2024 in Facebook, it was created on the occasion of the 2024th Olympics in Paris. The group brings together unindifferent subscribers. There is an advertising film about the venue – the city of Paris on the group’s page, in which the representatives of different professions formulate a concept that, in their opinion, describes the character of the French capital best. Ducasse was invited to post-synchronize the words about French gastronomy, and the accompanying text was marked with the hashtag (the keyword) #Ducasse [14]. As soon as the film has been released on the Internet it has been widely discussed. The discussion is still going on. Therefore, for the members of the community Alain Ducasse is a brand and appealing to it is a communicative interaction and the proof of being involved with a particular social group sharing the brand’s ideology.

Rivals. Chef E. Brifar recalls that he was suddenly dismissed from a very famous Parisian restaurant through the appointment of Ducasse: “M. Ducasse est un homme exceptionnel, un précurseur doué d’une audace unique. Je regrette juste qu’il n’ait pas eu le courage de me prévenir qu’il allait prendre ma place. Cette affaire a fichu par terre huit années de ma carrière” [15]. Being Ducasse’s rival the author intended to discredit the brand and damage its image though diminishing its leader’s humanness.

A special discursive community is made up of culinary experts, connoisseurs, and journalists whose discursive activities are determined by their professional characteristics. A number of stories posted on the gastronomic Internet platform Atabula.com exemplifies their discursive roles. Atabula is an independent virtual professional platform, a new type of source media in the field of gastronomy in France and abroad, designed for posting and discussing independent opinions in order to inform, interpret and identify new industry trends.

One of the authoritative culinary experts published an article titled “Alain Ducasse, l’imposteur” (“Alain Ducasse – impostor”), acting as a hostile opponent. In the cited fragment Ducasse is referred as a businessman, having no relation to gastronomy, while his empire’s success is assured by the work of the chefs, he manipulates, and the work of communicators having made up a nice legend:

“Alain Ducasse n’est aujourd’hui qu’un chef d’entreprise comme beaucoup d’autres. C’est un businessman de la restauration haut de gamme mondialisée, un CEO qui place ses hommes dans ses différentes filiales. Tout autre discours n’est qu’une belle histoire de communicants : un gentil conte pour enfants naïfs. De même que ce n’est pas le patron de Redbull qui est champion du monde de Formule 1, le succès de Ducasse en cuisine n’est pas le sien. La réussite arrive grâce au travail de brillants cuisiniers, hommes de l’ombre, jamais cités”[16].
There is a number of comments of the professional community representatives in response to the article. One of the comments is the one by the *Le Monde’s* journalist having interviewed Ducasse. He acts as the brand’s supporter sharing its ideology and agrees that Ducasse is not the best chef in the world while emphasizing on his unsurpassed skill of choosing the concept for the restaurant design and his empire being a powerful educational tool:

“Ce n’est pas forcément le plus grand cuisinier mais il est sans aucun doute le plus grand concepteur de restaurants, le meilleur gestionnaire de son univers. C’est un meneur d’hommes. La maison Ducasse, c’est une machine à former” [17].

The wide Internet community: consumers, potential customers, situational communicators are those whose discursive activity is not determined by socio-professional characteristics. The actors of this discourse Internet-community, familiar with a specific element of the brand's activity, verbalize their attitude towards it in the form of discursive fragment-comments [18].

Taking into consideration activity identifiers, all discursive practices can be divided into two major groups: initiated by the brand (efferent) and initiated by the broad audience (afferent). So *Le Groupe Ducasse* brand’s communicative-discursive model is bilateral and can be described in two series of counter messages.

Efferent practices’ sources are such discourse communities as the brand itself, its staff, experts, journalists, consumers, rivals, etc.

This discursive model can redirect efferent and afferent discursive vectors positioning itself as a centre of their mediation and information orientation to the general public.

Analysis of the brand’s discursive practices allows specifying two types of discursive roles: socio-categorical and situational. *Socio-categorical roles*, characterized by communicative behavioural stereotypes, are invariant and developed according to socio-professional communities, and have afferent and pre-discourse background, e.g. general interests, goals, tasks,
values, behavioural standards. They are the brand’s leader, community of people involved with it, community of food experts, connoisseurs, and journalists.

Situational character of discursive roles is common for those who share (don’t share) the brand’s ideology and for the representatives of the wide Internet community: consumers, potential customers, situational communicators.

As opposed to categorical, situational (operational) roles can change in the process of interaction. They can be both a variable transformation of a socio-categorical role-invariant, and expressing accidental roles’ standpoints determined by the interaction.

**Conclusion.** The data analysis allows drawing the conclusion that the use of digital media space is the key to success and essential tool for *Le Groupe Ducasse*’s business strategies implementation. Discursive interaction of the communities and their authors concerning the brand is a heterogeneous discursive structural system actualizing a brand as a form of social object due to the new means of discursive activity individualization in the media space: different multimedia forms of messages in (inter-)individual and (inter-)group modes of communication. Discourse communities’ differentiation according to their characteristics allows specifying (socio-) categorical and situational roles relevant to each community.

Discursive practices concerning *Le Groupe Ducasse* brand make up a discursive polygenre system of a global dimension within which knowledge specification, the processes of generating, transmitting, and sharing information take place via different media channels aiming at creating a positive brand’s image and forming a loyal attitude towards it.

It is specified that discourse communities interact in two dimensions: within the groups (provides a high level of the brand’s media presence and interaction around it); inter-groups (leads to the brand’s strengthening, creating further meanings in its perception image). Within the group communication all the discursive practices can be divided into initiated by the brand (effferent) and initiated by the broad audience (afferent) ones.

Therefore, brand’s discourse has inter-discourse character while being an activity-directed one providing, expressing, and encouraging the main strategic goal achievement of the image creation.

**Prospects for further research** in this direction lie in brand communication discursive models’ simulation due to linguo-cognitive analysis of meanings and senses incorporated in discursive fragments, and the possibility to extrapolate the research achievements to the similar discursive formations’ analysis.
References:

Література:


