

Business communication in an oversaturated digitalised market with the indication of postdigital

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Just a few decades ago going digital was an aim, a question of innovation and prestige for many companies worldwide in a market that was increasingly taking on the characteristics of the global. All of them tried to find their place in a new digital environment to gain advantage, to be a step forward before other companies could realize the importance of such positioning, but this time not only in terms of prestige and innovation, but as an imperative with the aim of preserving their businesses. Digitisation made it easier to reach the end consumer, so for companies engaged in tourism and hospitality management there was a necessity to quickly learn all the mechanisms of how to better present themselves and their offer on such a market. This was the point in which the issue of successful communication became crucial in establishing a successful relationship with potential consumers. It became important to know the customers, their needs and wishes, to create the desire and accordingly, to adjust the language companies use for each of those segments. It became crucial to comprehend which language to use to address the consumer, the choice of words, and the right level of politeness or formality. The authors of this article will observe how the choice of language and communication has changed over the period of digitisation in years and will examine how the possible future customer relationship may look like in a post-digital period and in which way it will affect their purchasing decisions.

Keywords: *business communication, digitalized market, hospitality and tourism, postdigital*

1. Introduction

The concept of business communication has gained considerable popularity in the last few decades through the emergence of large companies that tended to operate in the global market. Business communication then became an indispensable skill for anyone who intended to engage in this type of relationship that encompasses different fields and requires an understanding of the other party in and outside the company. To reach the consumers and compete on the competitive world stage, companies have devised ways to reach them. It was this need that put the emphasis on business communication topics such as customer relations, customer behaviour, advertising and others. To better direct the message to the end consumer, it has become increasingly important to choose the right way of communication with customers; to find the right selection of words and to shape the message the companies try conveying in the most efficient way possible. In this sense the digital, online environment has served as both, a help and a challenge. It served as a help because it provided all companies with the possibility of positioning in the online market at very low costs, and as a challenge because surviving in such a market implies being constantly in touch with customer needs and behaviours as well as keeping up with the growing requirements of a new digital market.

2. Business communication

Successful communication lies at the base of every relationship. Family relationships, relationships between friends, love relationships between partners or those between members of a company or organisation, they would all be unimaginable without establishing successful communication. In other words, there is no successful relationship without successful communication. Since human potential is a key component of every organization or company, companies take great care of effective communication among their members and that serves as the basis for creating a successful business relationship with other business partners as well as with the end consumers of their products and services.

That is the main reason companies have paid so much attention in fostering customer relation, in tracking customer behaviour as well as in finding the ways for customer retention. It has become important not only to find mechanisms and tools on how to reach the consumer, but also how to keep their loyalty over time in an ever-growing competitive market. It is interesting to observe how the word communication is explained in several English dictionaries.

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2021), communication is “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour”. It can refer to personal rapport or a verbal or written message. Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defines communication as the act of communicating with people and “the exchange of information and the expression of feeling that can result in understanding”, the process of sharing information, especially when this increases understanding between people or groups. Oxford Advanced American Dictionary (2021) defines communication as “the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information”. Except for the idea of exchanging symbols and signs, transmitting certain message, we can notice how the words behaviour and expressing ideas and feelings resulting in mutual understanding between the parties makes part of these definitions. Successful communication does not imply just a mere transmission of information, but it also refers to human behaviour, feelings, and ideas resulting in mutual understanding. That is why business communication concentrates on developing several communicating skills in order to raise awareness of the importance of creating a bond with its customers.

According to Sehgal and Khetarpal (2006, p. 6) “Communication is a nervous system of an organisation”. Moreover, it coordinates the efforts of all members of a company or organization to achieve certain goals. Generally, communication can be divided in verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication can be oral or written, depending upon the way in which the message is expressed. Oral communication includes face to face conversation, dialogue, interviews, meetings, conferences, telephonic conversation. Written communication is expressed through written language symbols, colours and signs. It has acquired great significance in the past few decades within the business environment especially with the emerging digitalisation. Non-verbal communication on the other hand does not include speech or words. It refers to gestures, facial expressions, signs, and body movements, tone of voice, style of writing and choice of words. In other words, the so called body language is thus part of a non-verbal communication. It refers to bodily movements and gestures, facial expressions and eye movements. In face to face communication, through body language human thoughts, feelings and positions come to a surface and are often reflected unconsciously. According to Lawson et al. (2019, p. 58) communication can also be explained as “the process of sharing information, ideas and knowledge between people using accepted

rules". For Lawson et al. (2019, p. 58), communication is learned behaviour, a skill that can be learned and improved. The process of communication itself consists of number of elements such as: sender, receiver, channel, message, noise and feedback. In business communication, having a positive response or feedback is extremely important. It is a proof of how successful certain communication has been. In order to create a meaningful message, the sender must have a clear communication goal in his mind. Whether we talk about a single user, an individual or a company, we must be clear about the message we wish to pursue to our receiver, the end user or a customer. In this sense persuasion is an important skill used by many business professionals and professional communicators in order to modify or change people's attitudes, opinions or beliefs. So, when communicating for business purposes, one of the most important issues is to know who our audiences are, whom we are targeting or addressing. Companies invest a lot of time getting to know their audiences by taking into account their motivations, desires, beliefs, tastes, previous experiences as well as the cultural background which in some cases may be a determining decision making factor. The message that has been launched must be relevant to the potential receiver or an audience.

There are two types of audiences; primary and secondary audience. For Lawson et al (2019, p. 90) "Primary audience is the person or a group of people towards which a message is targeted". They receive a message deliberately from a sender. Secondary audience is a person or a group of people other than those that have been intentionally targeted, but can also receive the message the companies have sent to their primary audience. So, for the companies working on big online platforms, it is an ever challenging task to address such a demanding diversified audiences, how to address and retain their primary audience and how to keep their message appealing to potential or secondary audience which at any time can turn to become their primary audience. This is why the issue of persuasion as a communication skill has a very effective role in business communication. When we communicate a message, we try to persuade others to believe something or to do something; to take certain decision, to buy a product or a service (Lehman & DuFrene, 2011). It can be conducted through different mediums over a determined period. Persuasion is an important technique because it involves customers' needs and desires. Talking about business communication, with the accent on hospitality and tourism management, the main goal of persuasion is to create a desire as well as to raise the level of desire in people.

By creating a desire or raising the level of desire towards a service or product, potential customers come to the crucial moment of deciding to make a purchase of product or service.

Talking in terms of business communication, by raising the level of their audiences' desire, companies encourage consumers to take action in terms of buying a particular service or product. It is a classic example of business communication where information or message goes from sender to recipient and where a feedback stands as the last link in the chain of successful communication. When we consider the tourism and hospitality sector, communication feedback refers to the consumption of a particular service or product. This is because "The one way process of communication is incomplete, as the sender does not come to know whether his message has been understood by the receiver or not. The process will be complete only after the sender receives the feedback from the receiver" (Sehgal & Khetarpal, Business Communication, 2006, p. 8).

Since the contemporary processes of communication in tourism and hospitality sectors are primarily conducted via digital technologies and in a digitalized environment, exceptional care is needed from businesses in order to crystallize and target their messages appropriately.

3. Words in a digital environment

The relationship between language and ideology and the discourse it creates is particularly important. Fairclough (1989) thus, writes about the ideological nature of language which implies discourse as a social practice determined by social structures and conventions. This relationship has been particularly addressed by sociolinguists who have promoted an approach called critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Wodak, 2015). In this way, they focused on everyday discourses in education, media, literature, law, medicine, and economy because they all create characteristic texts that can be empirically studied within sociolinguistic theory (Wodak, Cilia, & Reisigl, 1999). The connection between language and tourism has been analysed by different authors such as Thurlow & Jaworski (2010) who focused on a discursive analysis of tourism context. Thurlow & Jaworski (2010, p. 12) wanted to "start mapping the globalizing processes and discursive strategies that underpin the symbolic economy and language ideologies of tourism more generally". Under the influence of globalization, tourist encounters in cross-cultural and international settings have expanded enormously (Lauren & Lew, 2014, p. 334). All this has the effect on destination placemaking and marketing.

Potential travellers from various parts of the world search the World Wide Web for information about a desirable tourist destination like Croatia. It is a widely known and neglected fact that the search results can be different depending on which search engine is used or in which country the tourist information is searched for. The words a tourist types or speaks into a search engine are search terms that lead to an abundance of results. A short combination of search items or keywords may connect a potential tourist with a local travel agent. Stakeholders in tourism must be precise in the choice of keywords leading to their website. Words, images, and sounds can trigger a wish in the potential tourist to make the first step and contact a tourist agent for example. When searching the Internet for travel information, the choice of words determines whether a connection is established between the service user and the service provider. Good word choice can also be related to politeness. The difficulty with politeness in tourism lies in the fact that even polite words can be attributed with a derogatory meaning. It should be noted that there are people travelling to various places in the world who do not even want to be called tourists but travellers, adventurers, explorers or at least not tourists. Language teachers find it interesting that the word tourist is used even with a derogatory meaning by both tourists and annoyed residents in overcrowded travel destinations. Even the words tourism and tourist destination are frowned upon by specific types of travellers who do not want to be part of any mainstream form of tourism. The fact that the word tourist can have a derogatory meaning emphasizes the extent to which word choice is important and relevant in linguistics as in tourism.

The abundance of digital information about a tourist destination makes it difficult for a potential customer to choose a single specific offer. Likewise, a remarkably diverse spectrum of tourist expectations and the desire for a unique holiday experience leaves tourist agents no other choice but to offer either mainstream experience or to specialize in a certain type of service and tourist offer. Defining a target market is a key step in achieving equilibrium of tourist expectations and tourism offer. In tourism, a target market is represented by potential travellers who share common interests and preferences. Likeminded people share similar ideas and preferences which are reflected in the utterances and texts they produce. Online video platforms give a first-person insight into tourist needs. An impressively increasing number of tourists or travellers likes to blog or vlog about their holiday experience. Blogs and vlogs can be used to get insight into their needs and interests, but also into their language use since

texts within blogs and vlogs hold corpora which are useful for corpus analysis. Corpus analysis is useful not only to linguists and language teachers or marketers but to anyone interested in big data analysis about humans. It is worthy to read the longer paragraph which states that:

Qualitative corpus analysis is a methodology for pursuing in-depth investigations of authentic language use representative of purposefully selected communicative situations. The samples of language are digitally captured, documented as to their origins and ecology, stored as electronic language corpora, annotated as needed, and made available for digital access, retrieval, and analysis via a computer. (Hasko, 2020)

There are numerous digital tools that help in data analysis. Big data increases scope and enhances wide range of possible target markets (Renouf, 2019). Members of a certain target market may share certain interests and preferences which are recognisable in their language. A wonderful example displaying potential of data analysis gathered from texts even outside the field of tourism is described by Gourley (2021), a trained physicist who turned his scientific mind to analysing data about modern war and conflict. He recognised the useful data within the streams of news we consume, furthermore he analysed data gathered from various newspapers and recognised a pattern which enabled him and his team to generate an equation that could predict the likelihood of a war attack killing a predictable number of people in a specific country.

Linguists, language teachers, translators, writers, reporters, and even passionate language learners do read and analyze human speech daily. Their skills are used in marketing as well. While searching for useful texts in the field of Croatian tourism in a digital environment, the authors of this paper encountered the term digital nomad and how it triggered the change of Croatian legislation to enable digital nomads their work and stay in Croatia. On a conference organized by the Entrepreneur Magazine (2020), the famous entrepreneur Mr Jan de Jong explained that he had been inspired by Mr Paul Bradbury's articles about digital nomads and presented the concept of a digital nomad as a way to turn Croatia into a year-round destination on a conference called Tourism. Furthermore, Mr Jan de Jong decided to contact the Croatian Prime Minister via letter, which resulted in change of Croatian legislation in favor of digital nomads. To sum up, a combination with positivity can introduce a change in Croatian tourism and legislation. According to Bradbury (2021) where he explains on his website, Total-Croatia.com, that where once all you needed was to have a 'Zimmer Frei' sign outside your apartment, today the rules are different. Furthermore, he concludes that booking agencies, AdWords, keywords, quality furnishing and great photography are the order of the day. Today, it is important to stress human values and incorporate digital engines or tools in order to identify one's market. However, the internet and tourist market are saturated with too many messages, and it is not easy for tourist stakeholders to differentiate themselves as appealing to tourists. With millions of people working and learning from home during the pandemic, internet networks are set to be strained to the hilt (Alba & Kang, 2020). At the crossroads between real and digital world, tourism stakeholders need to find the right message in order to address the potential clients.

4. Postdigital era

Contemporary academic discourse has been focused on the importance of digital changes and imperatives of including increasingly relevant digital technologies in almost every aspect of human life. Moreover, the current pandemic has further emphasized our reliance on these technologies in various fields such as education, trade, arts, economy, and tourism. According to the UN report (2020) it is stated that digital technologies have advanced more rapidly than any other innovation in human history and that they have profoundly transformed societies. Although they

can be perceived as a great equalizer in terms of enhanced connectivity, financial inclusion, access to trade and public services, what we are witnessing today, however, are threatened privacy, eroded security, inequality and saturation which go beyond the usual rhetoric of progress and novelty associated with digital technologies. There is growing concern over the actual, concrete, social and material influence of the digital (Jandrić, et al., 2018). Unlike salutary inevitability of digital technology especially relevant for the USA as an exceptionally technocentric nation that uncritically fosters these technologies all over the world (Marez & Sturken, 2006) which justifies its sense of global dominance (Dinerstein, 2006, p. 583), Negroponte states that "Like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only in its absence, not by its presence. Face it – the Digital Revolution is over" (Negroponte, 1998, p. 12). According to Alexenberg (2011), we are living in a postdigital age where postdigital is concerned with our rapidly changing relationships with digital technologies and art forms which can be seen as the humanization of digital technologies or more precisely:

Postdigital (adjective), of or pertaining to art forms that address the humanization of digital technologies through interplay between digital, biological, cultural, and spiritual systems, between cyberspace and real space, between embodied media and mixed reality in social and physical communication, between high tech and high touch experiences, between visual, haptic, auditory, and kinesthetic media experiences, between virtual and augmented reality, between roots and globalization, between autoethnography and community narrative, and between web-enabled peer-produced wikiart and artworks created with alternative media through participation, interaction, and collaboration in which the role of the artist is redefined. (Alexenberg, 2011, p. 10)

The term postdigital has in recent years been applied across many disciplines, with a range of contradictory meanings ascribed to it. These debates relate postdigital perspectives to posthumanism and Stiegler's perspective (1998), unlike Haraway's (2006), is that humans are effectively inseparable from their relationships with technologies. The term postdigital has been claimed to point towards a departure from an understanding of the digital as novelty and also towards considering what the next big novel form based on digital technologies might be (Taffel, 2015). In terms of everyday life, everything is transformed into information, by the intermediaries of different software and it is this which makes everything controllable (Taffel, 2015, p. 9).

This article explores the ways that people experience and understand tourism and its offers. The experience economy was offered by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (2011) as a new way to think about connecting with customers and securing their loyalty. The idea of staging experiences in tourism to leave a memorable and lucrative impression is now more relevant than ever. The first step is to understand the customers and reach them and thanks to communication companies, businesses are operating in a new world where products, services, and even people's surroundings are customized. In tourism, stakeholders, whether tourist agencies, hotel chains or local caterers, are trying to deliver not just personalized, but individualized, experiences to meet digitally mature expectations. In short, those that successfully grasp digital identities will achieve an evolving individualized view of each customer and target better since digital saturation¹ is raising expectations, possibilities, and risks so businesses are seeking new ways to differentiate themselves.

1 The term saturation can refer to different fields of human activity as it is the "act or the result of filling a thing or place completely so that no more can be added" as the definition states in Cambridge dictionary (2021) or "the supplying of a market with as much of a product as it will absorb" in Merriam Webster dictionary (2021). Another definition is from Oxford dictionary (2021) which states that it is "the state or process that happens when no more of something can be accepted or added because there is already too much of it or too many of them". In other words saturation refers to congestion, superabundance and engorgement with something.

5. Conclusion

Our society is completely saturated by the digital. Moreover, digitalized market is today saturated with a huge attempt to attract ever growing number of potential customers. It refers to the process in which the digital is performed, tried out, stabilized or destabilized, how users are enrolled and practices disrupted, and the ways in which the digital technologies are integrated into markets and consumer practices (Cochoy, Hagberg, McIntyre, & Sörum, 2017). With the arrival of digitization, consumption has turned digital resulting in a complete change of consumer society. Moreover, through the arrival of digital market devices such as tablets, laptops, smart phones and mobile apps and the spread of social media, blogs and forums, consumers have been faced with a large range of offer at hand reach. It enabled marketers as well to study the market, their potential consumers, their needs and desires, to adjust their business communication and to better address their target market. Thus the digitization has led to a certain level of saturation where the recipient of the message, in other words the consumer, is constantly under the influence of diverse number of written messages. The companies are fighting in a global market trying to find their own competitive edge, something that would make their message always more appealing. Business communication skills have imposed certain standards in the way the language is used which over time has led to standardization. Both, companies and consumers know the rules of such a relationship and finding new ways of differentiation has become more challenging than ever before. Saturation of digital market with messages will inevitably lead to a postdigital era. This will mean nothing but a mere return to a more humanized way of doing business where individualized will be followed by humanized, where written word will assume more the aspect of spoken word presenting thus a new challenge in the communication process.

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