

THE PUBLIC IMAGE – FACETS AND STAGES IN ITS CREATION

Corina RĂDULESCU*

Abstract

Public image is the representation or the idea that the public envisages as to an institution/organization and that special literature coins as: institutional image, enterprise image, prestige publicity, brand image, product image, institutional communication – all of these phrases representing multiple "facets" of the public image whose unique goal is to create a positive representation of an institution. These facets – which are essentially different – often overlap. Thus, in this paper, we intend to distinguish between the multiple facets that the public image implies and, in order to do this, we firstly refer to the definition, characteristics and structure of the public image, so that we separately analyse its forms of manifestation and reveal the specific difference of the institutional image – which in its pure form aims at creating in the consumer's/citizen's mind an identity and a clear organizational representation, which is particularly different from commercial mark images. In the conclusion section to our paper, we indicate the steps that have to be followed in order to create a positive image for an organization.

Keywords: *public image, organizational culture, institutional image, identity, brand image, product image.*

Introduction

Public image is a generic concept which comprises **multiple facets** and, from this point of view, one can mention the following forms under which image can be identified: **the image of an enterprise, the organization of an institution, prestige publicity, brand image, product image, and institutional communication.** These facets interweave and influence each other resulting in the creation of an entire whole whose common goal is to build a positive representation of the enterprise / organization / institution and of its offers, in other words, to create reputation or prestige, which represents a generally aimed at ideal. However, one can see that these different "facets" of the image often merge into one another. For example, brand image and institutional image often overlap; in fact, they are complementary; at the same time brand image and product image also overlap, though in reality, a brand mark can create a particular image, and, on the other hand, the products themselves can create a particular image thanks to the inner qualities they have.

Consequently, in this paper **we intend** to conceptually define each facet of the public image so that we could more accurately point out the specific difference of the institutional image –

* Associate Professor, Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest, România (email: c_radul@yahoo.com). This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/89/1.5/S/62259, Project "Applied social, human and political sciences. Postdoctoral training and postdoctoral fellowships in social, human and political sciences" cofinanced by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013".

which in its pure form aims to create for the consumer a clear and precise image concerning the identity and personality of the represented institution. For accomplishing this task, we are going to refer to the definition, characteristics and structure (composing elements) of one institution's image and then to minutely analyze the different facets of the public image (institutional image, the image of an enterprise, brand image, product image), to finally indicate a few "steps" that have to be taken in order to create in the consumer's/citizen's eyes a positive representation of our organization.

Building the image of an organization/institution is a long and complex process which implies a set of phenomena that are meant to reflect the institutional reality in its real light – unfeigned and undisguised, starting with its "infrastructure", i.e. organizational culture, and continuing with all communication directions and the quality of the products that are offered to the consumer/citizen; at the same time, the degree to which an organization is socially involved in the community is of major significance for its image. The efforts made by the organization to become "visible" are finally rewarded with trust and fame.

According to special literature, an institution's/organization's image is defined in relation to two "poles": organizational culture and public image. **Organizational culture** is a set of values, significations, behaviours and organizational practices, as well as a way of directing organizational behaviour. It is specific for the informal structure of organizational culture and it aims at specific behaviour patterns, myths and symbols that are meant to support individual and group interests of the organization's members. The other pole – **public image** – the representation or the idea that the public envisages as to an institution or an organization – is, however, more visible than organizational culture, because it is explicitly expressed and it is communicated on the public scene. It becomes real after the consumer or citizen has made an opinion of the character and the personality of the institution.

Consequently, we reiterate – an organization's personality is defined in relation to two reference poles: organizational culture and public image, the two realities complete each other and interact, their relation being a dialectical one. In the present paper, we are going to pay particular attention to the multiple facets which public image can have, as well as to the "steps" that have to be taken in order to accomplish this task, and, in this respect, we emphasize the particular characteristics of the institutional image – the creation in the receiver's mind (consumer or citizen) of a clear representation concerning the identity and specific features of that organization, these representations being different from commercial brand images.

Public image – definition, characteristics, structure

According to special literature, the **public image is defined** as "the favourable representation of an institution or organization in the eyes of its public, with a view to drawing the clients' attention" (Rosemarie Haineş, 2010, p. 142). Public image can also be defined as the representation or the idea which the public envisages as to an institution or organization. In this case, the image is built thanks to the **opinion which the consumer or citizen has as to the character and personality of the institution or organization**. The term public image comprises all the forms that the image can epitomize. In special literature one can find different expressions used to refer to image: enterprise image, prestige publicity, brand mark, product image, institutional communication – all of these notions represent multiple forms or "facets" that the public image of an enterprise or institution can acquire.

Public image comprises a **set of phenomena** that are meant to structure the personality of an enterprise/institution, respectively the personnel's attitude, the enterprise's/institution's social

involvement, publicity of offers, the quality of its products, the success of that organization etc. The consolidation of loyal relationships is applied both in the private and the public sectors. The electorate, like the consumer, aims at short term and immediate solutions for the problems it has. However, loyalty to a party or a brand should cover more than the short term. **Public image depends on many factors**, it is deeply rooted in human perception (and considered similar to human perception) and that is why it is very fragile. Sometimes there might be a gap between the image built by the organization and the image perceived by the public categories. The image **is built in time, but it can be quickly destroyed** if the affected institution does not take measures for protecting its image. Memory and human attitudes are extremely unstable; consequently it is necessary to devise a continuous programme of activities that are meant to maintain the same perception of the public image. The institution, the organization or the enterprise has to adapt to the circumstances in which it pursues its activities in order to keep up with the new times. **The mass media system is a partner** one cannot ignore, a partner that can facilitate or, on the contrary, hinder the creation of a positive image.

From the very beginning we point out the fact that the **private organization does not build its image as the public institution does**. These two types of organizations do not share the same objectives, though, however, both of them share the same principles. That is why the notions used to describe the private sector can easily be applied to the public sector, but the notions used to describe the public sector cannot be applied to the private one. Both types of organizations try to convince the population to choose their offer, and from this point of view both organizations have to adapt their image to the objectives which they establish and the social milieu they address to. **From an organizational point of view, there are two large social sectors:** the public and the private sectors, to which we can add the independent or non-profit sector (Mihaela Vlăsceanu, 1999, p. 56). The public sector is managed by the state (government), while the private sector functions in accordance with the free market laws, which depend on private property and profit. Non-profit organizations are private organizations as far as property and profit are concerned and they are public as far as their goals are concerned, because they offer *collective goods*. Private organizations pursue their activity “in accordance with the *company pattern*, while public organizations pursue their activity in conformity with the *office pattern*” (George Moldoveanu, 1998, p. 92).

Public organizations	Private organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - serve the public; - the citizen is the client and a partner in social dialogue; - depend on public bodies; - pursue their activity in a reasonable and legal way; - pursue their activity in accordance with the separation of powers principle; - elaborate public policies; - their autonomy is limited and delegated; - are financed from the state budget; - are subject to political authority; - are conservatory; - the customer cannot sanction the quality of the activities and the services he is offered; - fundamental value: equity, general interest; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - their goal is to obtain an as big as possible profit; - pursue their activity according to the free market rules; - competition defines the framework within which they pursue their activity; - autonomous and flexible; - political influence is indirect; - privilege innovation; - customer-oriented; - fundamental value: efficiency in maximizing the profit; - precise goals and objectives; - managerial authority is founded on competence; - incentives for obtaining performance; performance-oriented.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - their goals are vaguely and ambiguously defined; - public authority is delegated and, in consequence, limited; - bureaucracy and lack of incentives prevail; - the political factor disturbs the current activity; - today, public organizations tend to adopt a behaviour which previously was characteristic of private organizations (re-inventing governing); - a new social management based on flexibility and decentralization. 	
Both types of organizations have their own	intra-organizational values.

Source: Rosemarie Haineş, *Imaginea instituțională*, 2010, p.23

Similarities and differences between private and public organizations in society

Both types of organizations try to convince the population to choose their offer, and from this point of view both of them need to adapt their image to the objectives they intend to accomplish and to the segment of population to which they address. All important organizations are concerned with creating a better public image for themselves and this is true both for the private sector and public institutions. The **private enterprise** was first of all perceived as an organization which granted priority to the consumer and not to the citizen. However, in time, the private enterprise was obliged to adapt itself to social needs and in consequence it had to pay attention to the quality of its products and to get involved in social activities – to support charity work, to gather funds for humanitarian purposes – to sponsor cultural events etc. Not only economic performance of the private organization is becoming more important, but also the extent to which this organization gets socially involved in the community, as well as the quality of its products, the efforts it makes to create a particular profile for itself – i.e. the same image “indicators” which are important in a public organization.

As to the **public institution representatives** their survival depends on the image they build. Political parties are elected or re-elected according to their accomplishments or to the image that they have built and that may be associated with their integrity or excellence.

Public institutions have more facets. For example, on the political scene any government follows three directions: the political, electoral and administrative. **Politically**, the lawmaker enacts laws that correspond to the citizens’ will and, at the same time, it develops political marketing strategies in order to convince population of its fair political choices. To adjust its action, the government has to identify the population’s expectations and to carefully supervise everything which mass media write and say; daily monitoring of the newspapers is an indispensable tool for identifying the population’s satisfaction and needs and for preventing criticism. TV broadcasting of parliamentary debates offers politicians the possibility to be present on the public scene. **On the electoral scene**, political parties organize surveys to find out the electorate’s expectations, to evaluate the public’s attitude to the actions and activities performed by political parties. The image of political parties fluctuates according to the social, political and economic context, and the way political parties act takes into consideration these fluctuations and

adapts to them. A politician who is **responsible with managing a ministry** becomes an administrator. In this situation, he initiates complex social campaigns and applies programs and services that best fit the populations' expectations. "In order to create a powerful image, these three public sector spheres have to make use of techniques and concerns that are specific for private organizations." (Rosemarie Haineş, 2008, p. 169)

Taking into consideration the fact that the public image relies upon organizational culture - "the infrastructure" of an institution, we would like to point out the **fundamental differences that exist between the public and the private organization values** (we refer to both profit and non-profit organizations), as well as between the projects they implement. Mihaela Vlăsceanu, when referring to the fundamental values of an organization, states in her book *Organizațiile și cultura organizării* (p. 62) that **public organizations** regard **equity** as a fundamental value, which is reflected in the public services and collective goods that anyone can afford and that the organization offers in the name of its general concern for the whole population; **efficiency** is the fundamental value of public organizations, as it is with **private organizations whose main goal is represented by profit**, i.e. the increase of profit; on the other hand, in **non profit organizations** the fundamental value of the organization is represented by **flexibility**. Direct relationships with the citizen and the need to enter a niche together with other organizations in the busy social sphere determine non-profit organizations to choose flexibility as their fundamental value. Besides the values that are cultivated and that are specific for each type of an organization, there are also **secondary values** which structure organizations. D. Katz and R. L. Kahn (1978, p.52) point out five organization subsystems, which they regard as privileged areas in which power is exercised:

- The production subsystem
- The subsystem of institutional relations;
- The functional role participation subsystem;
- The adaptation subsystem which aims at modifying the organization;
- The direction subsystem which deals with administration, arbitration and control.

Other authors identify another organization subsystem, the sixth one, i.e.: communication subsystem in which power is also exercised by other actors who act in the field of institutional publicity, public relations and informatics.

Structure, facets and steps to be taken for building the public image

Useful details concerning the concept of representation

Taking into consideration the fact that image is a representation or an idea which the consumer or citizen envisages as to the character and personality of an institution, we should first of all bring a few explanations for the concept of representation, as it is studied by psychology, and also for the fundamental constructivist statement (illustrative for the Palo Alto School) which asserts that **we build the world when we think that we perceive it** and that **what we call reality is an interpretation that is built through communication**; afterwards we are going to bring into evidence the elements which compose public image.

Phenomenology of social sciences has proved that reality is socially built, stating that the human fact needs to be built even at the ordinary level of mundane relationships and exchanges. All realities which make up our daily life are the result of a collective building activity accomplished through interpersonal exchanges and they are based upon reasoning rules that are commonly shared by our cultural group members. In other words, whatever does not have an a priori significance to somebody acquires a meaning after it was transformed through communication, structured through the organization and then interpreted. We bring into evidence

the fact that, on the one hand, our perceptions depend on our beliefs, wishes and values to a great extent and, on the other hand, the fact that we act as we perceive. At the same time, success or failure of our actions determine the different ways of perceiving, which we are going to present below.

After the **transformation** – through communication, the **combination** – through organization and the **interpretation** of elements – i.e. finding significance for an emerging reality, one has to search for its **representation**. Any representation is, first of all, a mental one and it implies the convergence of a fact, emotions, feelings, and memories etc. – all of them being stored in memory. Reality can be interpreted on more levels. The representation of reality implies another level of interpretation: the “translation” of the perceived element. We refer to translating what we have imagined, structured, built and formed into something which is comprehensible for ourselves and for the others.

Thus, the concept of representation studied by psychology covers more levels of analysis for social phenomena (A. Mucchielli, 1996. p. 80):

a. at the surface level, the outer level (maximum visibility), a representation resembles a painted image, it is what is offered to be seen, what is symbolically restored, i.e. what bears the mark of the subject and his/her activity exactly like in a work of art (painting, literature etc.); we see the topic, the characters, the strong contrasts, the effects of the perspective or the effects of tonality, depending on what we are talking about: a painting or a piece of music etc.

b. at a different level, representation is a form of practical knowledge, a sort of modelling and personal or social integration of the information that one subject possesses.

Consequently, at inner level, social representations are a system of representation and they determine our relations to the world, as well as to the others, while directing and organizing behaviour and social communication. They function as a cognitive system of interpretation and influence our vision of the world (Weltanschauung). At a different level, also at an inner one, social representation is a foundation of the socially acquired knowledge which builds a common reality for a social aggregate. As P. Watzlawick said – **human relationship is a pure construct**, a matter of opinion which, in the most optimistic scenario, partners share to a smaller or greater extent. The world is a world of interaction, where the individual is defined in relationship with the others and also through his own relationship. In any process of communication, P. Watzlawick says, partners offer themselves in order to define their relationships or, to put it directly, each person tries to determine the type of relationship he has with the other one. The notion of influence is intimately linked to the notion of interaction and to the one of interaction system. “Any behaviour adopted in relationship with a person, no matter who this person is, finally proves to be a communication of the way in which the relationship with this person is seen and, consequently, of the influence it has over that person.”

A. Elements which make up the image of an organization

Taking into considerations the explanations given as to the different levels of analysis, with more or less degrees of visibility that exist in the structure of public image, as well as in the human tendency to “build” and interpret the perceived reality (intentional character of perception), we are going to bring into evidence the elements which make up the image of an institution.

According to **M. Cohen and P. Gschwind** (1971, p. 73) the public image concept overlaps two types of images, which are often mistaken: **material** and **immaterial image**.

1. Material image refers to what is tangible and palpable: **nationality** (is taken into consideration when the organization pursues its activity in several countries), **size** (the enterprise with a higher number of employees and a high turnover can offer more advantages than a small enterprise), **dynamism** (is associated with high technology), **products and services** (are the

ambassadors of the enterprise), **physical image** (all visual elements: from products to premises). **Visual identity** of an organization (the spirit of the organization) includes: the logotype (an expressive image), the monogram, the graphical elements, the institutional colours. In most cases, an enterprise or an organization is judged according to its physical image, so the enterprise/the organization is interested in harmonizing this image with its fundamental objectives. Visual identity is a form of institutional communication because it expresses and represents the presence of the organization in all its forms of existence; visual identity materializes an abstract concept, i.e. the spirit of the organization. Visual identity translates organizational culture and personality. The code of colours and sounds, the way in which the brand or the organization's name are written, the chosen visual symbol – all of them make up the **business card** of the organization. The endurance of visual identity supports its fame and the way in which the organization is perceived.

When referring to the logo, Jean-Marc Decaudin (1995, p. 133) pointed out the following qualities which he considers to be fundamental:

The qualities of a logo

Loyalty	The Logo translates institutional image
Legibility	Simple, legible on all documents, the logo has to facilitate its memorization
Differentiation	The logo does not have to be mistaken for the one of the competitors
Unification	The logo has to be recognized and accepted by the internal and external public
Adaptability	The logo has to be present on business cards, invoices, labels
Endurance	On average, a logo lasts between 10 and 30 years

2. Immaterial image is made up of several types of image which overlap: social image, financial or stock exchange image, employer image and the global reputation of the organization. Immaterial image represents the personality of the enterprise or organization as it is perceived by different types of public. Personality is built rather through subjective perception than through objective evident details. Institutional image makes deep psychological factors, such as sensitivity and emotion, interact.

J. Perlstein, in his book *L'angoisse du gardien d'image; La publicité, nerf de la communication* (p. 73), comes with an approach which comprises different **communication levels as to the building of an image**:

1. identity elements: name, nationality, size, enterprise position, the region in which it is located, its financial situation and export capacity;

2. performance parameters: production, efficacy, products or services, perspectives, management, financial relations and export capacity;

3. affective relations: congeniality and capacity to speak the truth, contribution to the wealth of a country, conservation of energy, the will to reduce pollution problems etc.

Concerning the same aspect – the elements which make up the image of an organization, **Thierry Libaert** and **Andre De Marco** (2006, pp. 106 – 109) suggest that public image is a sum of **three factors**:

1. **notoriety:** this value can be measured by surveys, asking those who are questioned to classify organizations which pursue their activity in the same domain. Notoriety of an organization is associated with its leading position: the name which first comes to our mind when we refer to a category of organizations that deal with the same type of activities is the name of the organization which enjoys the advantage of notoriety;

2. **identity:** is set of physical characteristics that are specific for an organization (type of activity, nationality, turnover, number of subsidiaries, geographical location, number of employees, leaders etc.). Each variable can be measured and if it is necessary it can be improved;

3. **attractiveness:** is a set of subjective representations, often affectively grounded – an organization can be appreciated because it invests in social actions and it equips schools in deprived areas with computers, another organization can be appreciated for its environmental actions.

Referring to this topic, in one of his previous books, **Thierry Libaert** (2008, pp. 84 -85) distinguishes several elements which can circumscribe the **image of an organization:**

- the expectations concerning the image of the organization: what is the aim of creating an image which brings into evidence certain characteristics: to increase sales?, to convince investors to make investments?, to enhance community's trust in the organization? etc.;
- the gap between image and the activities of the organization: is it possible for the image to be wrong?;
- the parameters of the image: is the organization known?, is it notorious at least to a small extent in society or community?
- the elements which make up the image: what are the public categories that the image is built for?, what are the characteristics of these types?, which might be the elements of the image that would meet the public's expectations?
- the factors that are fundamental for the image: there are a lot of variables – from the architecture of the organization's premises to the employees' uniforms, from the mass media discourse regarding the organization to the public events in which this is involved – which can be enumerated here.

B. Different facets of the public image

a. Institutional image

It includes all of the following: the quality of the institution's products, its success, the degree to which it is socially involved, as well as the sum of efforts it makes for imposing its own specificity. The institution must create its own independent personality as far as the brand, products and services are concerned. **It must enhance the degree of credibility and notoriety it enjoys** (e.g., the image of a government means more than the services it offers to the public, it also means the way in which the public perceives that government). Institutional image is built upon institutional communication forms and, in general, on the global communication policy or the enterprise project as it is known in special literature.

Consequently, **institutional communication** comprises all communication forms which are meant to turn to good account an organization's personality. The main objective for an institution is to devise, make or distribute a product or a service. Institutional communication has two particular features: it refers to the organization itself and it borrows the mass communication style. This type of communication leads to commercial communication (when an organization has managed to impose its image, it is much easier for this organization to have its products accepted). It is very important to bring into evidence the fact that institutional communication attempts to build and maintain the image of an organization or institution **without having a commercial goal**. It is important for the public to be informed about the way in which the organization contributes to

the general welfare, by creating public interest messages, by adopting a certain position as to the existing problems which are of public interest and by aiming at the public welfare, the organization is perceived as a good community actor. The institutional image is created in time, which is why institutional campaigns last a long period of time. In order to sell an image, it is necessary to define it and then to broadcast and to permanently consolidate and renew it.

Institutional image has to address both to the **internal and the external public**. In an age in which products have been standardized, competition has become stronger – each organization or enterprise has to be different from the others, to impose its image and to impose its legitimacy and personality. Institutional publicity helps an organization create a strong personality, it removes external obstacles, it gives coherence to the activities performed by the institution and it also brings dynamism to its activity. The organization, no matter if it is public or private, has to try to make itself known, to explain or justify its existence and role in society.

Many authors, such as Cristina Coman, Joe Marconi, Sandra Oliver consider that “public relations are a form of institutional communication” (2009, p. 51). This persuasive element is meant to influence the consumer’s opinions, attitudes and beliefs in order to sell the notoriety of the enterprise. Each organization or institution has an individual personality and it is important for its image to be perceived by society in a favourable light. “Public relations try to create a psychologically favourable image for the organization and its activities. They create an atmosphere of congeniality which depends upon knowing, understanding and relying on that organization.” (Cristina Coman, 2009, p. 46) The organization makes use of publicity in order to build the image it intends to present to the public. At the same time, **institutional publicity** aims at selling ideas not products. It tries to influence the perception and the vision of the public. Publicity makes use of two strategies: **self-publicity** (the message explains the public that it refers to the way in which the organization contributes to the public welfare); **public utility publicity**: by means of a social interest message, the organization expresses its position as to certain problems which affect the public welfare (drugs, domestic violence, pollution etc.).

As to the public relations activities and their aim to create an image, Joe Marconi (2007, p. 83) underlines the **importance of the message**, which is a means of bringing into evidence the image of an organization. “The message is the fundamental statement for the subject of a PR plan and the main reason for which the public has to take into consideration the subject – it is a declaration of value since it describes or indicates the value of a subject to the public.”. The **image is** what the public probably regards as the representation of the subject, insisting on what the organization/company/PR adviser could have found out after hearing a series of discussions, comments, commercials, mail, recommendations or direct criticism or from any other source. In consequence, public relations are a fundamental factor which determines the way in which the public image stands out; the emphasis on details, colours or glamour, as well as beauty – all of them are subjective aspects.

At the same time, the above mentioned author emphasises the dangers which can emerge if we separate the concept of image from the one of reputation and responsibility. **The image which is similar to perception** (from this point of view, the image can have a more superficial connotation, being associated with **illusion**). PR practitioners are often described as “creators of image”; their clients and employers hire them because the former are interested in how their image looks and they want it to look as well as possible. Image is similar to perception, though, according to other people’s opinion, there is a significant difference between perception and reality. Anyway, if we consider that perception does not coincide with reality, this means that the image envisaged by the subject is a lie. Obviously, this is not always the case (or one wants this to happen as rarely as possible). One of the PR specialist’s main priorities should be not only the task to create a positive image, but also the task to validate this image so that the created image would

not appear as a fake, and it should not rely upon any tricky cliché. Thus, **”the image should be similar with reputation**, a term which implies a certain level of truth; when separated from reputation, the image has superficial connotation and it is even associated with illusion.” (Corina Rădulescu, *Lex et scientia*, 2009, p.35).

Joe Marconi reminds the fact that PR national agencies have created ”reputation management” practices and he underlined the seriousness with which this problem is tackled, but no one has ever created an ”image management” practice, hoping to be seriously taken into consideration.

As to an organization’s or person’s reputation actions speak better than words, but, however, words really matter in creating and maintaining reputation. In the next lines, we are going to present a few aspects which help us define image in relation to reputation.

- The importance of being consistent when creating reputation.

A single event or one single presence in a certain place, at a certain time may build an image, but, however, reputation is built in time, usually implying a history, consistency and a certain degree of predictability regarding one’s performance or behaviour (for example, a leader acquires enormous force simply thanks to his consistency, to the continuity he proves in everything he makes and anywhere he is present: in the public, in books, in personal conversations, press releases or in other circumstances; on the other hand, persons who have an unpredictable behaviour fail to build a reputation).

- Overcoming a negative image.

Once created, these perceptions can be modified, but any modification requires time and it is expensive, implying large sums of money which could be allotted for new marketing programmes and not for correcting past mistakes. In such a situation, the company’s image is affected on short term, while reputation is affected on long term. Unfortunately, sometimes such problems cannot be controlled by anyone. For example, when negative reviews are published in the press and on the Internet, they can be consulted any time someone accesses the name of the company or of the organization by using an Internet browser.

b. The image of an enterprise:

First of all, an enterprise reflects the charisma, management philosophy, culture, leadership, creativity, boldness and clear-sightedness of those who set it up or run it, as well as their aspirations, attitudes, accomplishments, satisfaction degree and their employees’ cohesion. The enterprise is ranked according to its performance, quality and cost of products and services, its integrity and, finally, according to its social and community involvement.

c. Brand image/Institutional image

Brand mark refers to any sign that helps us distinguish the products belonging to an enterprise or to another one. **Brand image is complementary with institutional image**. Brand image can rely on a characteristic of the product or on the good reputation of the enterprise which produces it, e.g. Adidas, Mercedes etc. **Institutional image in its pure form** aims at creating sufficiently clear and precise organizational image in the consumer’s mind so that this image distinguishes itself from other brand mark images. We refer to the **identity of the enterprise**. The dictionary of psychology defines identity as a social fabric which is created through ”names, roles and social functions, as well as by recognizing legal rights and duties, adherence to history, tradition and involvement in social actions.” (Ursula Şchiopu, coord., 1997).

The brand image of a product depends upon the type of personality which is imposed on it by the producer organization. For example, the brand image which Pierre Cardin created is a

luxury image and this perception applies to a series of products belonging to this brand. For the brand image to be strong, the product behind the brand mark has to be original as far as its quality, design and content are concerned. The brand is a verbal means, a figurative or abstract sign which allows a physical or moral person to differentiate its products or services. A brand image is more penetrating than the organization image because buyers have more information about the brand itself than about the company that has created it. **Brand image is often mistaken for institutional image**, in fact there are two different perceptions which overlap in the public's consciousness. In reality, the public does not know whether the enterprise makes use of the so-called institutional communication or brand communication, it is enough to have a positive perception of the enterprise, reinforced by these two methods. **Brand image is always subjective and emotional: it defines the product's personality**. It tends to create an emotional image in a positive way, while trying to make the target public love the enterprise and buy. Today the brand has come to make a product notorious.

The brand is first of all a signature/a name by which the organization acquires personality. The signature which an organization chooses to represent and individualise itself can have **different forms: the logo, the corporatist signature, the symbol**.

The brand is represented by a series of symbols. These can be **intentional symbols** (they describe the object of the sale), **interpretative symbols** (they invite the consumer to link the brand to his/her personality) and **connotative symbols** (they describe the attributes of the object, for example: the name of the perfumes).

The brand has **more functions**:

- it identifies the product;
- it individualizes the product from other products with which it competes;
- it offers warranty for the product, it indicates the origine of the product, it helps the product adapt to the psychological needs of the public;
- it can serve as a channel of communication when the brand image is well received by the public.

There are **several types of brands**:

- the producer's brand (it guarantees the origine of the product, e.g.: Mercedes)
- the distributor's brand;
- the brand mark (it confirms the line and the quality of the product);
- the country brand.

The power of images and marks

The buyer's option to buy a famous brand product to the detriment of another cheaper one reflects the power that marketing has and the way in which the customer answers to the brand image. People buy image as they buy clothes, cars and other products (they obtain a style – e.g., the Calvin Klein's style).

A well-known example of the power of the brand is the one in which **the name** – the element which helps us define the brand – has little or nothing to do with the design, the manufacturing, development, marketing or delivery process of that very brand (as it happens with secondary products in the fashion industry, in which designers use their own names for perfume, jewellery, colours, furniture brand). For example, Calvin Klein has launched not only products, but also brands, and their power is visible in the clothes he creates, because the labels which have been sewn on clothes for years and years have become the key to success, whereas design has become less important. As brand images are becoming the engine of selling and "the original style" of a designer – Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, Burberry, Ralph Lauren etc. – is no longer enough (this is so also because of the low price copies of their original products which are on sale), famous designers, as the ones we have just mentioned, and traders have started not only to apply their

logos on clothes and secondary products or accessories, but also to display them wherever they are visible.

Market research must be an important part in the PR plan. For several decades studies have confirmed that many people decide to buy a product (from houses to cars) – relying upon image and reputation. Price, quality, guarantee, value and other aspects are shared by the most important competitors (Coca Cola and Pepsi, Ford and Chevrolet, United Airlines and American Airlines etc.), but, finally, the image of the product, brand or company is the one which is visible to the consumer. Taking into consideration this important aspect, leaders of different organizations and companies should pay particular attention to market research. Many executives do not wish to invest in research, considering it does not offer them any new information and thus regarding it as a waste of money. On the other hand, there are persons who consider that research might point out things which they did not know or they did not plan but which they should have been informed about. No matter what the situation may be, an organization or company must know the market, the preferences of the public and whether its customers are loyal to the company or whether customers expect to find better products.

d. Product image (the image a product builds thanks to its inner qualities)

Brand image/product image:

The brand of a product can create a certain image of that product; on the other hand, products themselves can build an image thanks to their inner qualities. Brand image and product image sometimes overlap. Products can build an image which overlaps other types of image. **Fame or prestige** are given by the image that one organization has created.

In the public sector, the use of the brand creates a positive image and it generates fame and a good reputation – which are all acquired thanks to the superior quality of services or products manufactured in a particular domain of activity and whose superior quality guarantees the success of these products. For example, a hospital can have an international reputation. In extenso, one can use brand image to refer to an institution's image. The brand is a guarantee for quality. Public institutions names are often written in an abbreviated form. The enumeration of the words which stands for an institutions (e.g., MDRT = Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Turismului = *MRDT = The Ministry for Regional Development and Tourism*) can also stand for their reputation.

Not only the private sector should try to create a positive image for its institutions thanks to its products, services and organizations, but also the public sector should put to good value its services and programs which the lawmaker, the political party or the administrator tries to impose.

Sometimes this continuous attempt to build a favourable image can determine both sectors to even forget about their products, services or programmes and rather to insist upon the way their image is perceived. Citizens or consumers are often misled by appearances and they encourage in this way the enterprise, organization or institution to seduce the customers.

C. Steps in building the public image:

1. To draw attention, to create a positive perception, to communicate a feeling of congeniality. The organization/institution aims at making its characteristics, style, activities known so that it would no longer be anonymous; by means of a good institutional communication strategy the organization/institution manages to build a coherent institutional image. Research proves that the positive or negative, precise or general etc. perception that we have about an institution influences our trust in that institution and makes us speak in a favourable or unfavourable way to other persons about it. The institutional or brand image (if we discuss about the business environment) plays a key role in achieving performance and the **reputation of an organization is similar with institutional image.**

2. To consolidate loyalty, trust. Institutional image allows an organization to impose itself as a distinct presence and to determine the consumer to remain loyal to the brand mark launched by that organization. Maintaining on the market means investing a lot in advertising. By granting value to a mark, institutional publicity reduces the consumer's uncertainty and anxiety. The institution or organization has to make the public think of it and do this in a positive way (we could give the following example from the public sector: a government may no longer remain at power at a certain moment in time, but the political party that represented this government must try not to lose its people).

3. To increase benefits. Priority of a positive image in the eyes of the public brings benefits to an institution / organization / enterprise, according to the following "formula":

- a. The institution is liked and supported by the public;
- b. The organization acquires prestige and profit;
- c. The enterprise makes profit.

4. Capacity to overcome crises. In case of a crisis, the credibility of an organization is affected. The image that one organization builds in a period of stability is a background for receiving messages in case of a crisis; if the organization has a positive image, it will face negative pressure from the environment. As long as a period of crisis exists, a good institutional image is impossible to be created; in such a case, the following problems must be taken into account:

- Do we have to communicate or not? The general rule is to communicate in order to avoid rumour and disinformation. Not to communicate means to allow different uncontrolled senders to issue different unwanted messages. At the same time, silence can also be perceived as a lack of responsibility.
 - When do we have to communicate? As quickly as possible.
 - Who has to communicate? It depends upon how deep the crisis is; the deeper the crisis, the higher in rank the communicator.
 - What do we have to communicate? The truth.
 - What techniques do we have to use? Direct dialogue, contact with the press, public relations.
- Do we have to be ready for a situation of crisis? Yes, we do; each organization must have a crisis communication cell.

Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to prove that building the image of an organization/institution (both by the manager and also by the consumer/citizen) is a complex and long lasting process, and it cannot be confined to external communication or to other forms of communication that have a high degree of visibility (e.g., visual identity); on the contrary, the image of an institution is built in time and it comprises a set of phenomena that reflect – without dissimulation – institutional reality. We can give the following example: a tree has beautiful fruit if the root, stem and leaves are healthy and if they function well both individually and together as parts of the entire plant; in the same way, the organizational "tree" starts with the "root" – organizational culture, being followed by all forms of communication (internal and external), including visual identity; the quality of products and services offered to the consumer / citizen, the contribution brought to the community by the organization – all of them determine the representation that the receiver envisages as to that public/private institution and, in consequence, this image is "coined" as reputation (etymologically, reputation means examination, appreciation – Lat. *reputatio, -nis*).

Consequently, we firstly defined public image (its characteristics and structure), then we pointed out its different "facets" (which often overlap and are mistaken for each other) in order to reveal the specific difference of institutional image (which is basically built upon institutional communication, benefiting from the fundamental support offered by PR activities) which in its pure form aims at creating in the consumer's / citizen's mind an accurate image of the enterprise's / institution's identity; this image is different from the commercial brand. In the final part of our paper, we have briefly indicated the "steps" one has to take for building this identity.

In the present article we have brought into evidence the risk of confusion which might appear – not only between the different hypostases of the public image (for example, between institutional and brand image), but also as to the excessive insistence upon the appearance of the institutional image (e.g., external communication, relation with the press), to the detriment of the inner - sometimes "invisible" - significance of an institution (e.g., behaviour patterns, different aspects concerning organizational culture), but, however, to the benefit of the image creation process. That is why, before presenting the characteristics of each "facet" that public image can have, we have enumerated an important number of its components, considering that all of them are fundamental and contribute to creating a specific profile for the institution.

Sometimes one can see that, in this continuous search for building a favourable image, both sectors – the public and the private ones – happen to forget about their products/services/programmes in order to emphasise the way their institution's image is perceived. In turn, citizens/consumers are misled, thus, encouraging the organization / institution / enterprise to seduce (manipulate) them. In fact, in this paper we underline how important it is not to transform the image building process into a goal in itself, but into a complex, long lasting process, which should mobilize the entire institution and all its levels; at the top of the "pyramid" of actions, one should find the services/products of an institution, as well as its contribution to the society and community it is a part of.

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