

## THE ROLE OF IMAGES IN THE ONLINE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

ȘUBA ANKA-ROXANA\*<sup>1</sup>, PASCARIU LUCIAN<sup>1</sup>, IOSIM IASMINA<sup>1</sup>, ADAMOV TABITA CORNELIA<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism*

\*Corresponding author's e-mail: suba.anka@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** *The contemporary urban / organizational space displays different images, aiming at convincing the population to act in the sense of the objectives communicated by them. The image, as a product of sociocultural and technological transformations, has shaped in time certain human typologies, shaping the values of the current Romanian society. The modernization of the society is the evolution determined by the development of competitive environments, on the one hand, and, on the other hand by the development of the informational and technological system of reproduction and dissemination of messages. The aim of this paper is to present the concern of some tourism companies, for the development of an attractive visual space, in which the interferences of the visual means and of the written communication methods are used, the emphasis being put on images, everything to develop and maintain visibility and notoriety in the competitive space. The research aims to outline a current and real image of the consequences produced by the different images distributed among the population.*

**Key words:** *communication, images, organizations, visual space*

### INTRODUCTION

Organizations have always wanted to communicate with the public, to inform them about certain ideas, news regarding their purpose, products and values. The better they communicate, the faster companies reach the proposed objectives, because the individual, in his human nature, cannot but communicate, due to the fact that in the process of communication has developed over time the ability to reproduce. information in graphical form [1]. Today, the term image is essentially a generic concept that encompasses several attributes of the socio-economic environment, based on the ability of each individual to project different representations [2]. Thus, the "image" represents both symbols, objects, photos, videos, graphics, landscapes, attitudes, opinions, or even prejudices about the elements and actors of everyday life. Clearly, each individual forms in his mind certain representations based on his own principles, the way of thinking, making decisions, acting in certain directions and the power to disseminate information, these images becoming "dominant in the way of perceiving reality" [3]. Clearly, if we talk about the image of an organization, it takes into account both beliefs, attitudes and opinions, as well as the values of the society in which it is promoted [14]. Values are those that are the main feature in shaping the image of an organization, and the way companies arrange and shape the image is directly proportional to the information they want to convey to the public, an audience based on these two cognitive processes, ability to communicate and imagine [9]. In the communication process, the way the image is composed is very important, because the same message can be interpreted differently, depending on the receivers. For this reason, the transmitted image must be accessible to the public to which the organization is addressed in order to be understood in its complexity [6]. It is necessary to observe the behavior of different companies in terms of visual communication, in order to understand the impact that images have on the public [4].

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In order to carry out the research, data accumulation, processing and interpretation of the results that led to the formulation of the final conclusions were used: theoretical documentation, socio-economic analysis and synthesis, comparison method, data processing and graphical representation and historical method.

Theoretical documentation was based on bibliographic resources in the field of communication and related fields such as: advertising, marketing and management. The analysis method was used in order to inform and compile a complex report regarding the use of visual space by two of the most well-known travel agencies in Romania. The field of Romanian tourism was analyzed due to the fact that it is easily noticeable the extent to which more and more companies are opening that focus on tourism. Taking into account the general data protection policy, they will be hereinafter referred to as Agency 1 and Agency 2. The method of comparison has made it possible to establish courses of action to improve the work of the travel agencies under study. The method of processing and graphical representation of the analyzed data was used, with emphasis on the images posted by companies in the online environment, the frequency of posts, the impact of the chosen images that accompany the written communication. The historical method allowed the exact highlighting and presentation of the way of spending the visual information flow of the analyzed companies.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

The development of the visual information flow should concern the Romanian tourism companies, because only due to a favorable image, based on high quality services, they can develop economically [6]. The personality of a company is generally defined by two existential pillars: organizational culture and public image [7]. These two concepts harmonize perfectly, so they cannot be separated. But in almost all cases the image is the one that dominates, becoming more visible than the culture, given the power of online social media tools and channels. At the same time, it is very important that organizations do not only care about the perception of images and forget about their main purpose, namely the provision of quality tourism services [13].

**Table 1.**

**The stages of building an image**

<b>To attract attention, to create a positive perception:</b>	<b>To ensure fidelity, trust:</b>	<b>Increase benefits:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Organizational communication brings to the public a positive image of an institution / company;</li> <li>➤ The public trust given to an institution / company starts from their perception, positive or negative, strong or weak, precise or general;</li> <li>➤ Brand image plays an important role in achieving performance, because the organization's reputation is synonymous with the institutional image.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The institutional image allows organizations to stand out and make the consumer stay true to the brand;</li> <li>➤ Through images, the brand is capitalized on, and uncertainty and anxiety among consumers are reduced;</li> <li>➤ The public must have a positive perception of the organization / company / institution.</li> </ul>	<p>Building a positive image in the eyes of the public brings certain benefits to the organization / company / institution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ the company collects profit;</li> <li>➤ the organization gains prestige and credibility;</li> <li>➤ the institution attracts the sympathy and support of the public.</li> </ul>

Source: Schlegelmilch, B., 1998 [10].

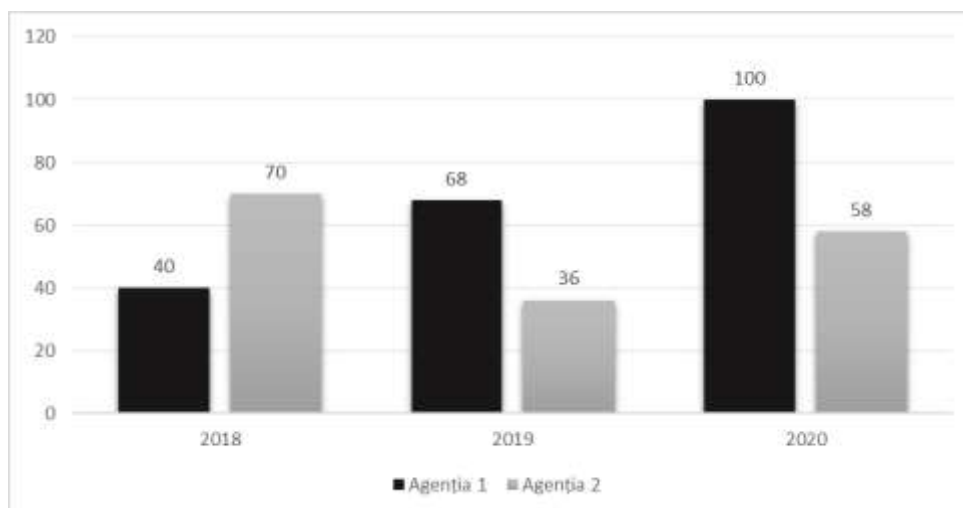
In the following, a comparison will be made, regarding the visual and informational flow of the two travel companies: Agency 1 and Agency 2. The images used in the posts on Facebook pages will be analyzed, the frequency of posts in September, in 3 years (2018,

2019, 2020), respectively, the content of the posts, the number of appreciations and distributions. The analyzed tourism companies are some of the biggest players in the economy, ranking in the first 5 places in Romania, in terms of profit, turnover and employees.

Agency 1 ranks 21st in the top made by Romanian brands on Facebook [15]. In the Travel & Holidays section, and Agency 2 is ranked 22nd in the same classification. Agency 1 has 221,051 fans, starting to be active on the Facebook page, starting with 2009, unlike Agency 2 which has 219,395 followers, initiating the Facebook account, only since 2011. Both Agencies (currently), on the official page of Facebook, presents a profile picture with the logo of the organization, and the cover being a suggestive one for the discount period. In addition to the images suggestively presented, in order to highlight their visual identity, there are two buttons: book and contact us. If the reservation button is accessed, people are redirected directly to the websites of the agencies where they can purchase services online.

The continuation of the analysis is based on the frequency with which these agencies communicate, through images posted, with the public, in September, in three years 2018, 2019 and 2020. The number of posts is, on average, 3 in the case of Agency 1, and 2 posts in the case of the Agency 2. The public, which follows the pages of the analyzed agencies, is presented with different information, transposed suggestively through images. Making an analysis of the three years within Agency 1, it was observed the tendency to distribute information at certain key hours, in which the public is more active on social media, namely in the morning 08:00, evening at 20:00 and -the third charge appears at noon: 12:00. The repetition of the hours in which the images are distributed, within Agency 2, are 09:00 and 17:00.

Agency 1 saw an increase in the number of posts, through images, made on the Facebook page, starting from a number of 40 posts in September, 2019, about 2 posts per day, increasing by more than half, in 2020, the number of posts. On the other hand, within Agency 2, there was a major decrease in posts, through images, over the three years, reaching from 70 posts, on average, in September 2018, to 58 posts in 2020 (Figure 1.).

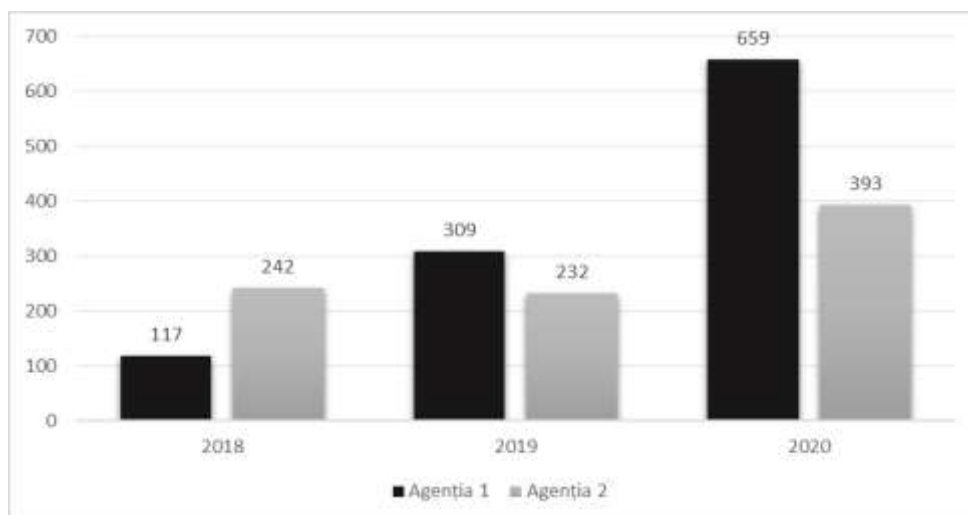


**Figure 1. Frequency of posts** (*number of posts / month*)

How much did the agencies interact with the public? The answer to this question is given by Figure 2., through the comments left by customers to the image posted by travel companies. Within both agencies, there was a fluctuating evolution of the number of public

interventions, the lowest value being recorded in 2018, 117 comments within Agency 1; and 232 public interactions in 2019, recorded by Agency 2.

This increase can be attributed, especially to this year's pandemic scenario, due to the fact that all communication (providing information, offers, requests, accommodation requests, etc.) has moved to the online environment, especially to social media, which are also the most commonly used by today's society. The posts that sum up the most discussions with the public are, within both economic agents, those with images of tourists who have purchased certain services. It was observed that when agencies post photos with clients, they show a positive attitude, and therefore perform the action of reacting through certain comments (opinions, impressions, opinions).



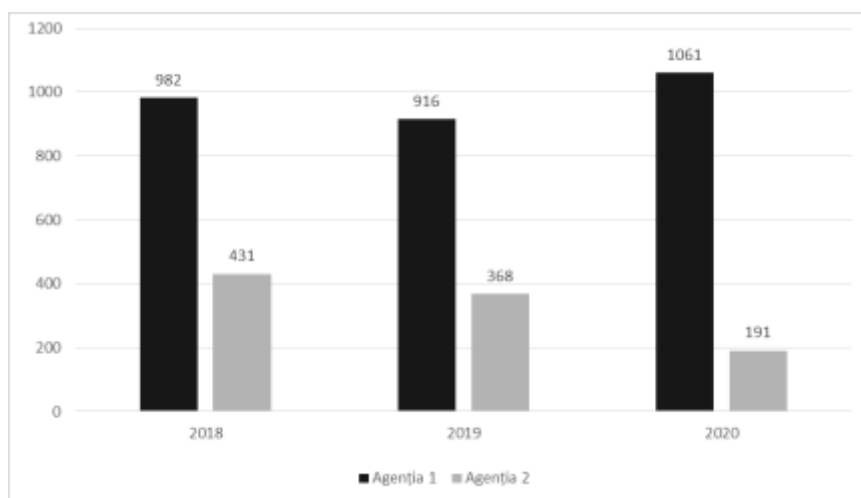
**Figure 2. Interaction with the public** (number of comments / month)

Also the number of distributions is a good indicator to identify the possible reactions (negative / positive) of the receptors. Not to be neglected is the hedonistic imprint felt at the level of the images in which the sensation of ecstasy offered by the products / services of a certain company to the detriment of the other is transposed, making specifications for them only in the superlative. There is a study that presents the world created with the help of the media regarding the need to have as many products for a happy and fulfilled life, and Christian moral values have been replaced by the multitude of promotional messages, which offer the illusion of a hedonistic world. updating the individual with the new trends in tourism [5]. This hedonistic perspective can be seen in the number of distributions of each post.

However, we cannot say the same about Agency 2, which during the 3 months of September registered a significant decrease in the number of distributions (Figure 3.). This decrease can be based on the content of the posts, which changed in 2020, focusing on certain information that is tangentially related to the portfolio of products and services it offers, namely: images with certain books to read, photos that they are based on a famous quote about tourism, unlike previous years when they received posts with holiday offers in certain countries, the promotion of exotic tourist destinations etc.

In terms of the number of assessments, there is a clear upward trend in Agency 1, from 7020 assessments in 2018 to 10183 in 2020. A high degree of attractiveness is visible in the post from September 2, 2020, in which tourist destinations from different European countries are promoted. This post gathered 1127 likes, 88 distributions and 260 comments from the public. The posted images have all the favorable elements to attract the public's attention and to make them purchase the exposed offer. It can be mentioned that

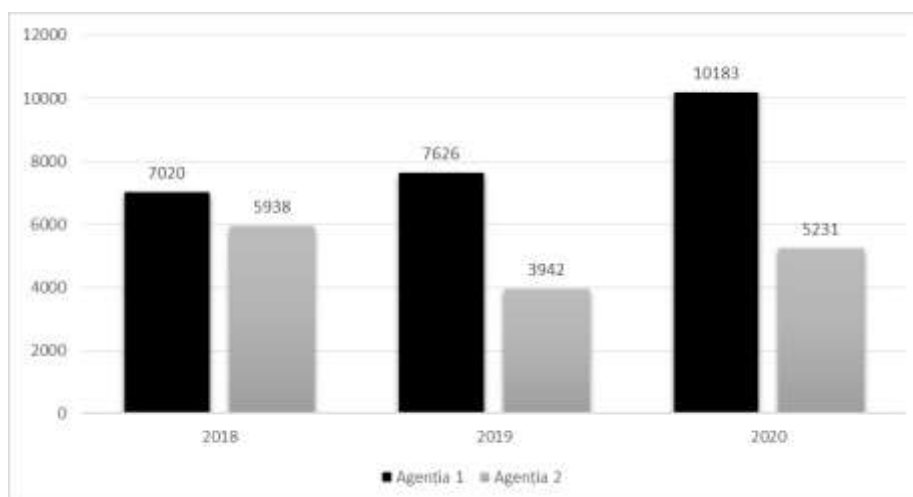
motivation is one of the factors that help people to fulfill their needs or desires, and satisfaction is the result of all the decisions and efforts made to fulfill them.



**Figure 3. Number of distributions**

Given that Europeans are not only obliged to meet their basic needs, it is important the contribution that the products / services bring in satisfying the self-esteem and the confidence that the buyer gains [5]. Thus, the impressive number of assessments can be attributed to the Covid epidemic, the reasons being very well known, respectively most people did not have the opportunity and permission to travel to other countries, given the restrictions in force. In September 2020, Agency 1 took advantage of the new travel regulations in the various countries of the European Union and developed and posted images with travel offers in Poland, Greece and Portugal, destinations where you could really travel without too much obligations, offers aimed at customers who had not yet purchased a holiday.

Agency 2, however, also experienced a decrease in the case of assessments, reaching from 5938 assessments per month in 2018 to 5231 in 2020. Very clearly, this downward trend can be correlated with the number of posts of the agency on page, being directly proportional to it. If the frequency of posts is decreasing, automatically and in the case of assessments there will be a significant decrease (Figure 4.).



**Figure 4. Number of appreciations**

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research undertaken, it was concluded that images are the most emphasized elements in online communication, most individuals emphasizing the graphic aspect, to the detriment of the background, the images being those that are required in the communication process. Also, the company's framing in this constantly evolving framework of the online environment, makes the image become a mediator between companies and individuals, it manages to channel in a certain direction the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, but especially the behavior and actions of the public. The Internet is a tool that enjoys a real interest from society, and the favorite channel in terms of subscription is Facebook.

Following the application of research methods, a more "aggressive" promotion was identified (through images), in the case of Agency 1, by the number of distributions on the Facebook channel, by the appreciations expressed by the public, so all their online communication is strictly based on visual elements. Agency 2 is specific to a promotion (through images) "less aggressive", this aspect being noticeable both from the design of the posts, which is not so attractive, compared to the appearance and color of the images of Agency 1, and from the fact that the subjects pays little attention to other aspects found in Agency 2 posts (recommendation of famous books or quotes) to the detriment of tourism products / services.

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