

Mediated Strategic Communication

Meaning Disputes and Social
Practice

<https://doi.org/10.21814/uminho.ed.46.7>

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Abstract

To problematise the reference models of communication and strategy adopted by organisations, especially in mediated society, requires outlining a new approach to strategic communication. A conceptual reflection is used for this purpose, beginning with a literature review of the scientific production of Brazilian authors in this field and Foucauldian ideas of discursive practices, to understand the enunciative function of the utterances present in organisational discourses. Considering the implications of mediatisation in organisational communication, the goal is to achieve strategy as a social practice, articulated to the socio-political-cultural context. In order to delimit its empirical scope and to highlight the strength of interactions in the mediatised space and symbolic confrontation, the chapter fosters comparison between the different conceptual notions developed in the face of empirical observations about the positioning of organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. The analysis shows that organisations need to understand, in an interactional and complex manner, communication processes in mediatisation and their relations with individual and collective subjects, which shape the meanings, discursive practices, and organisational strategies. If, in this scenario, the organisational discourses lie beyond the control of organisations, they should not be neglected, either as products of a context that shapes them, nor as modulating agents of patterns that disturb or strengthen the contemporary social structure.

Keywords

organisational communication, mediatisation, strategy, discursive practices, production of meanings

Introduction

This chapter aims to highlight the need to problematise the reference models of communication and strategy adopted by organisations, especially given the new configurations of mediated society. This context requires organisations to review existing communicative dynamics, to contemplate different actors which, in everyday life, claim new logics, formats, languages, and technologies in their relationships. At a theoretical level, it also requires a review of conceptual notions, in order to understand the strategic dimension of the communication. In this perspective, we should consider the interaction complexity in mediated society, the importance of the other

as a subject acting in communication processes and the need to establish a more profound articulation between the interactive processes of/in organisations and strategy as a social practice.

In mediated society, organisations, as complex collective subjects and part of a social structure that at the same time constitute and renew them, achieve various interferences on forms of life and coexistence in the space that they occupy and have been confronted by uncertainties and paradoxes. In this scenario, interactive and communicational processes acquire greater complexity, with more intense dispute of meanings. Through discourses, their repercussion and visibility, the actors, including organisations, seek to legitimise their performance in this naturally tensional environment, assuming increasing importance in the dialogue.

Hence, organisations need to recognise that they are increasingly charged and that interactive dynamics involve several different groups, with different demands and expectations. They must also assume that their relations with society involve discursive and non-discursive practices that reverberate far beyond their intentions. In this aspect, it is urgent to position themselves, on the basis of interactive processes, actions, and attitudes, in order to contribute to social, economic, and cultural development, especially with the actors with whom they interact more closely.

Such demands have been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced public, private, and civil society organisations to review their interactional strategies, considering the exceptionality and novelty of the entire worldwide public health situation, whose effects, duration, and depth are uncertain. Containing the pandemic has required governments to determine social distancing measures, placing restrictions on people's movements, thereby undermining the possibility of face-to-face interaction and conventional forms of communication between individuals and between individuals and organisations.

As a result, organisations have had to demonstrate their social relevance and overriding concern for the public interest, which often contrasts with their marketing and/or private objectives. They have therefore adopted policies and practices considered and recognised to be appropriate, in view of the new economic, political, and social situation, in order to give visibility to their initiatives, values, and brands. It is important to emphasise that this regime of visibility depends not only on what is seen, but also in making possible

that which is seen (Bruno et al., 2010), thus corroborating the complexity of communication, increasingly qualified as uncertain and uncontrolled, and the strategies adopted by different social actors, enhanced by the media.

There is a movement in which meanings are not assumed to exist (Pinto, 2008) and communication is increasingly perceived beyond the simple production, transmission, and reception of messages. From this perspective, the sharing of initiatives with a view to their visibility should place emphasis on the otherness and scope of circulation, since the interlocutors, the actors in the process, interfere and are affected by the organisation's policies and strategies. To the imposed reality, we add the cultural, political, and historical differences that intertwine, create, and substantiate tensions.

In the organisational framework, the context begins to be analysed not only based on the perspective of management, but according to parameters of the entire mediated society and interactional processes. It is important to observe that the context is not understood as an objective category, but as a subjective and intersubjective construct, that is updated through interaction (Oliveira & Paula, 2014). This means that the relations between the different social actors are publicised and enhanced in the media sphere, with leading organisations pursuing a mediatisation logic, expanding their communicative strategies. As Lima (2015) points out, "by mediating themselves, organisations transform the social context, reconfigure the cognitive stock of the subjects, their discourses and interactions" (p. 136).

This chapter offers a conceptual reflection based on the scientific literature review of various works by Brazilian authors, considering the implications of mediatisation in organisational communication and Foucauldian views of discursive practices to establish strategy as a social practice, articulating it to the contemporary context. Throughout this chapter we seek to outline a new approach to strategic communication, in order to delimit its empirical scope and highlight the strength of interactions in the mediated and symbolic confrontation space. This includes empirical observations of the behaviour of organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil.

Communication Within Organisations and the Phenomenon of Mediatisation

The concept of organisational communication is assumed beyond a utilitarian and technical perspective, based on contemporary studies produced

by Brazilian theorists, in particular Baldissera (2008, 2009), Oliveira (2008, 2009), Oliveira and Paula (2012, 2014) and Oliveira et al. (2006). Analysing the work of these authors, we consider the complexity of the communicative processes that are caused by the inherent dispute of meanings (Baldissera, 2009), providing symbolic exchanges between the different actors (Oliveira, 2009). This is understood “as a process of interaction and complex social practice, carried out through symbolic systems, in a mediated way, in a given context where the circulation of information occurs” (Mourão, 2018, p. 11) which provides the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of meanings (Baldissera, 2009). It is configured as an interactional process, consisting of individual and/or collective practices, discursive and non-discursive, with a view to achieving a collective structure of meanings (Oliveira, 2009). From this perspective,

interaction with the other is a fundamental point: there is no social practice without reference to a social context that at the same time produces it and legitimizes it. This “social context”, however, does not exist as an abstract entity, but materializes in the set of everyday relationships. Social practice implies, in this meaning, a communication relationship. (Martino, 2019, p. 26)

In mediated society, common aspects of social practices and communicative processes gain other contours, developments, and possibilities (Martino, 2019) and constitute privileged instances to found new interactional regimes. Hence, the articulation of a “double displacement occurs: (...) of the moment of intertwining of media with social practices. In addition, it is a moment of tension between actions, uses and meanings between social practices and media environment” (Martino, 2019, p. 27). From this perspective, Braga (2006) declares that the previous interaction logics and the logics of each social stage coexist in the mediatisation process. It is important to emphasise that the demarcation of space is not due to the mode of transmitting information and producing meanings, but, above all, by the way that the relationship is established at each moment in time and how interpretation occurs in circulation.

This concerns the logic that directs the gaze, the way of doing and the forms of social articulation. It is decisive to understand the interactions established between organisations and different actors, as well as the communicative strategies adopted. It expands the possibilities of production and renders the circulation of contents and meanings more complex. It is

emphasised that “one of the characteristics of mediatisation is the fact that its dynamics do not contemplate linear processes of cause and effect, in the relationships of its components” (Fausto Neto, 2018, p. 12). According to Fausto Neto (2018) the phenomenon of mediatisation must be understood in a complex perspective, beyond functionalist and transmissive models. A misaligned response to the instance of production does not mean a dysfunction or mismatch, but instead a dissociation that is inherent to the communication process, from the perspective of complexity and which becomes even more evident in the media logic. “Instead of ratifying the point of view of the actor (producer), the hypothesis of a complex point of view proposes that the communication process works openly, according to an asymmetric and non-deterministic interchangeability” (Fausto Neto, 2018, p. 14).

This leads to disarticulation in the context of information circulation and meanings, highlighting the exchanges between the different actors. In addition, “the production/reception dynamics would also be fuelled by collateral factors, which could emerge beyond the boundaries of this very dynamic” (Fausto Neto, 2018, p. 17). These factors include different beliefs, values, and experiences of the lived experiences, interests, and objectives of the subjects and the emergence of digital media that intensify the conflict between emotion and knowledge and interfere in the construction of meanings.

Articulating the phenomenon of the mediatisation of society to organisational communication, it can be said that interlinked organisations and actors are crossed by a dynamic of interfaces and reciprocal interactions and, at the same time, complex processes. New configurations of interaction are materialised and organisations face discursive realities that demand new conceptual constructs to support the strategic dimension of communication (Oliveira & Paula, 2014). As the authors point out, “it is no longer enough to deal with the idea of the strategic dimension of communication restricted to the perspective, interests and intentions of the organisation, which are often limited to ideas of planning and management” (Oliveira & Paula, 2014, p. 14). Paraphrasing Castells (2009/2019), it can be said that social actors, in the process of circulation, elaborate interpretations and meanings that can reflect their beliefs and values, not necessarily those of organisations, because they act on the basis of their feelings and convictions in relation to the situations experienced, seizing, deconstructing, and reconstructing the messages and meanings in circulation, in an unequal manner.

Hence, as a social practice, organisational communication comprises interactions with actors who represent the organisations, or with which they relate.

It is not limited to conceptual intentions as strategies, objectives, and goals, but is also comprised by the materiality present in strategic plans, communication products, and advertising texts, forming processes that place inter-linked subjects in a specific contextual reality, in which all these instances mutually affect each other. It is, therefore, the globality of the process that affects and is affected by the interlocutors in relations.

For Baldissera (2009), organisational communication extends far beyond the processes developed and led by organisations and can be understood from three interdependent dimensions: the “communicated organisation”, “communicating organisation”, and “spoken organisation”. The first refers to authorised discourses, that the “organisation selects from its identity and, through communication processes (strategic or not), gives visibility aiming at returns of concept image, legitimacy, symbolic capital” (Baldissera, 2009, p. 118). In this dimension, the discourse is materialised in texts that deal with the mission, vision, and values of organisations, in addition to what is produced in the institutional channels and from the communication area. The dimension of the “communicating organisation” extends beyond authorised discourse and includes the direct relationships between organisations and other social actors, whether formal or informal. The “spoken organisation” includes all communication processes about the organisation and indirectly, without its participation and outside the organisational environments.

Organisational communication can therefore be understood as being non-linear and uncertain. These characteristics are highlighted by the mediatisation phenomenon, especially when internet access is articulated with the functioning of society, through different channels and digital communication platforms. It is not a mere transposition of a certain type of relationship that is appropriate to another environment, the virtual one, but a logic that imbricates human and non-human subjects in new forms of sociability – or a new structuring interactional process (Braga, 2006; França, 2008). This logic “would be worth as much to describe the nature of interpersonal interaction as that mediated by technologies” (Fausto Neto, 2018, p. 14). The presence and interference of otherness in communicative processes were enhanced and gained more space by mediatisation, “involving intentions in constant construction and evidencing that communication strategies of organisations are constructed with strategies of the other actors” (Oliveira & Paula, 2014, pp. 3-4).

From this viewpoint, the meanings of strategy and strategic communication transcend management models that emphasise the need to control communication processes aiming at their effectiveness and efficiency and value communication actions/activities, therefore as management instruments/tools that present results (Mourão, 2018). Such constructs are created by discursive and non-discursive utterances in relations of strength and power, enhanced by mediatisation, which support the construction of truths and, consequently, shape the discursive practices of organisations and society.

Discursive Practices, Production, and Circulation of Meanings

Foucault's notion of discourse is assumed as a discursive practice that encompasses the relations between power, knowledge, and truth, constituted by rules that define a certain enunciative function and its conditions of exercise, agreed through specific relations between utterances. According to Foucault (1969/2012a), the utterance is not restricted to the phrase, proposition, or acts of speech, even though those can be configured as utterances, provided that in relationships and in articulations with other phrases and/or propositions. An utterance is configured as an enunciative function, that is, in relation with other discursive and/or non-discursive utterances, offering the possibility of existence for sentences, propositions, and acts of speech. As a result, an utterance also operates as an element that is capable of questioning the rules of a discourse that is composed on the basis of its bundle of relationships and articulations.

This means that a discursive practice only gains existence in discursive formations that are the result of confrontations, governed by principles of exclusion and choice, which culminate in meanings appropriated as truths. And such appropriation is related to cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values, and relationships between different social actors in a specific situation or context. Otherwise, from Castells (2009/2019), messages generated in the communication process are processed by the mind and are thereby selected and interpreted, above all, according to the individuals' emotional mechanisms, situations, and daily experiences.

According to Orlandi (2012), the place of discursive practices in the communicative dynamics of organisations is emphasised since they serve to both communicate and not communicate. "Language relationships are relations of actors and meanings and their effects are multiple and varied. Hence the

definition of discourse: discourse is an effect of meanings among announcers” (Orlandi, 2012, p. 21). Furthermore, based on Foucauldian ideas, signs, in any situation of interaction, only acquire meaning when they exercise an enunciative function, that is, when “language and thought, empirical experience and categories, the lived and ideal needs, the contingency of events and the game of formal coercions are at stake” (Foucault, 1969/2012a, p. 90).

In other words, when in relations of strength and power, signs structure discursive formations that are assumed as truths about something, thereby causing discursive practices to emerge. This perspective reveals the circularity of communication and the interdependence between those who initiate a process, what is shared and the circulation of meanings that takes place in contexts of interaction. It is important to emphasise the idea of circulation beyond the “place of passage and signs of another place” (Fausto Neto, 2018):

as an instance that would try to give conformity so that social discursivity appeared (...) between two poles [the sender and the receiver]. It is within this complexity that the work of making senses would be done so far from balance and not having as horizon the functioning of the two poles according to perspectives of symmetries. (p. 20)

Circulation operates as a dimension that articulates the relations of forces and power between production and reception and ensures that utterances and enunciative functions, in combination with the historical and cultural context, are both complex and shaped by the nature of discursive practices, thus triggering interpretative processes based on ideas and feelings stored in the lived, shaping the discourses. There is a mutuality and interdependence between discourses and postures, as well as communicative strategies, which shows that organisations are spaces for construction and dispute of meanings (Baldissera, 2009). It can therefore be inferred that meaning does not exist in its own right. On the contrary, meaning is constructed in interactions marked by power relations and by the actors’ positions in a given context. Its production takes place in a historically situated communicative dynamics and, thus, it is also a social practice, in that it assumes not only the use of language, but also endows new meanings to organisational and social practices (Oliveira et al., 2011).

Given that meaning is of the order of the symbolic and subjectivity, and communication is a joint construction, the difficulty or impossibility of its

control and its regulation is evident. In other words, meanings in the communicative process are constructed independently of the will and interest of the organisation, thereby questioning the idea that organisational intentions and strategies will occur as foreseen in the planning and management systems. The clash of forces, opinions, and meanings is part of the process. The organisational discourse therefore extrapolates the official positions and is constructed by all actors, in the processes of organisation interlocution, in a space marked by disputes, dispersion, and fluidity, considering the aforementioned three dimensions of organisational communication, proposed by Baldissera (2009).

From this perspective, thinking about discursive practices and the production of meanings as instituting communicative processes leads us to rethink the strategic dimension of organisational communication, recognising the sharing of different strategies adopted by the actors in relation to and interconnected by an event. In this articulation, the actors begin to be seen not only as receivers, but as subjects of communication and agents of interpretation, signification, and resignification of utterances that configure discursive practices. Whereas the possibility of controlling the meanings of organisational discourse from communication strategies was previously considered, organisations currently bear in mind the need to consider the unforeseen, tensions and ruptures in their strategies, both due to the context of mediatization and that of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is intent in the producing instances of the messages, but there is also intent in the receiving bodies of those same messages, to the extent that we are victims of our own discourse, since my signs are part of a repertoire that I acquire throughout my life. (Pinto, 2008, p. 87)

This reality is even more evident in mediated society and, as an alternative of maintaining control, founded on the management model, organisations seek to understand and interpret the discourses and meanings related to them that circulate in the dimension of “spoken organisation” through the monitoring of discursive tracks, especially in the digital environment. On the basis of this monitoring, they aim to find subsidies so that the dimension of the “communicated organisation” is strategically elaborated, also influencing the dimension of the “communicating organisation” and the “spoken organisation”, in a circular process. This leads to the expression “not enough to be, it must be, it must be reversed” because it becomes “necessary to think of some radicality for practices” (Schwaab, 2013, p. 109). In

this attempt to monitor situations, organisations generally assume a linear logic of cause and effect of the communicative process and do not always consider the utterances in their enunciative function, nor the strategy as a social practice developed by the different actors, which is discussed in the sequence.

Strategy as a Social and Communication Practice and Its Observation in the Empiricism

In organisational studies, the line to an interactional and complex conception of communication is the theoretical matrix of strategy as practice (Whittington, 1996), which contemplates the social practices of the actors involved, directing the gaze to the process of construction of the strategy. Whittington (2004) – one of the founding authors of this conceptual notion – shifts the understanding of organisational strategy as a practice of experts and instead positions practitioners to make strategies as those that constitute them. From this perspective, strategy is neither an abstraction nor an objective materiality that organisations have. On the contrary, it is established by the processes themselves, including communication, understood as a basic social process that places subjects in interaction. It is therefore advocated that strategy is achieved via communicative practices, according to a communicational approach (Lima, 2015). Thus,

treating strategy as a social practice requires a sociological view on the theme, in the sense of seeking the social in the individual, of perceiving the imbrication between discourse, context and subjects that interact, of seeing the communicative act as a globality constituted of spheres that affect each other (and constitute each other). (Lima, 2015, p. 137)

From this perspective, organisational strategies are not watertight, permanent, and closed, but instead are constantly lived, created, and modified in the daily interactions of the subjects. At the same time that they impact society, they are conformed by political, cultural, and social issues and actions of the subjects who carry them out. In this sense, the organisational strategy is constructed and coordinates with the strategies of other actors. Moreover, the centrality of organisations and the power conferred on management processes as a presupposition for the postulates of the strategy studies, have become even more weakened in the perspective of the visibility regimes that the logic of mediatisation engenders.

The practices of strategic management are validated in the day-to-day work of practitioners or, understanding otherwise, it is in the daily practice of organisational actors that their actions are recognized, sustained, and validated as strategic. The idea of strategy, in this perspective, is a process that happens. To the extent that actors construct their symbolic frameworks and guide their practices for them, strategy is established as such, existing so and only by acts of communication, in the action of the subjects. (Lima, 2015, p. 141).

As Oliveira and Paula (2014) point out, the strength of social media and digital platforms associated with citizens' interests and the formation of groups with ideological, religious, cultural, and social nuances as a dynamic of the functioning of the public network sphere, imposes on organisations the challenge of creating new forms of interaction and dialogue. This has been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, because the organisations had to resignify themselves, as well as their communicative processes. In the context of mediated society and in the midst of a global pandemic, the dispute of forces and senses has emerged more clearly, explaining the interferences of the different actors in the communication strategies of organisations, which can be considered to be collateral factors (Fausto Neto, 2018).

This movement of organisations towards resignification of their positions and their regime of visibility can be observed, in Brazil, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, especially in two distinct initiatives: one introduced by Rede Globo de Televisão, Brazil's biggest television network and the fourth largest in the world, that has broad political force and social influence; and the other by Vale, a Brazilian mining company that is active in 30 countries and is considered to be the world's largest producer of iron ore, pellets, and nickel.

Empirical observation begins on the basis of the special section, "Solidariedade S.A.", inserted within the television news bulletin, created by Rede Globo's communication sector, which developed the strategy of establishing scheduling links with the editors of the *Jornal Nacional* (JN), the most popular primetime television news programme¹. Due to the situation caused by the pandemic, the channel offered large companies a space to showcase the humanitarian actions that they were developing in favour of the groups

¹ According to research data from Kantar Ibope, the audience of *Jornal Nacional* is always close to, or slightly above, 30 points, in prime time, reaching almost 40 points at the beginning of the pandemic, between the months of March and April, when Rede Globo de Televisão created "Solidariedade S.A.", a special section of the television news bulletin.

most affected by COVID-19. This constituted “an editorial initiative, without any link with the commercial area, and which was created by the importance of showing the mobilisation of people and companies to face this period” (Sacchitiello, 2020, para. 5). For this purpose, it changed its journalistic rules and began to disseminate the initiatives of companies, identifying them by name. This can be interpreted as an enunciative function towards a new discursive formation in Rede Globo’s discourse².

In³ 2-minute slots, different companies from different sectors presented their actions and initiatives which were considered to constitute humanitarian support, as commented by their spokespersons, reinforcing the meanings of those actions and the values and principles of solidarity assumed by the company with the different social groups. It should be emphasised that Rede Globo de Televisão’s strategy can be perceived to have multiple meanings. At the same time that it gives visibility to itself, it also makes room for other large companies to circulate their institutions, values, and brands, demarcating their interferences on the forms of life and coexistence in the public space, seeking to enhance the social recognition, both of the broadcaster that offers its space, and of the company that disseminates its actions. In this process of circulation there is an intertwining of media with practices (Martino, 2019), causing repercussions across different platforms, generating increasingly stronger visibility, and highlighting the discourses and therefore, also propitiating a dispute of meanings.

One of the companies that participated in this special section of the television news bulletin, was JBS food⁴, which, on May 21, 2020, presented its initiatives, that consisted of the donation of R\$400,000,000 to build hospitals⁵, expand beds, and buy medical equipment, in addition to the donation of another 200 tons of food, hygiene items, and protection.

² Both *Jornal Nacional* and the other news programmes of Rede Globo de Televisão, as a rule did not mention of names of companies and brands in their news bulletins, under the argument of ethical and journalistic impartiality.

³ It is important to mention that the “Solidariedade S.A.”, the special section of the television news bulletin, until the date when this article was concluded, in September 2020, only presented private sector initiatives. It should also be noted that the cost for the delivery of a 30-second commercial, in the JN’s commercial break is approximately €133,000, according to the broadcaster’s price list.

⁴ JBS is a multinational of Brazilian origin operating in the food industry, with its registered office in the city of São Paulo, and operating in 15 countries with about 230,000 employees.

⁵ The equivalent of about \$75,000,000.

However, almost a month later, on June 17, a story published on the website of Brasil de Fato⁶ (Merlino, 2020), made direct reference to this special section of the television news bulletin, “Solidariedade SA”, and suggested that the information disclosed by JBS was hypocritical since it argued that the donation of R\$400,000,000 announced by the company was not representative, given its net income of R\$6,060,000,000,000 in 2019. In other words, the donation represented only 6.5% of JBS’s profit. This circulation of contradictory information portrays the dissociation of the complex and open communicative process (Fausto Neto, 2018). In line with the idea of this open and uncontrolled process, the publication also mentioned labour problems faced by the company, emphasising that creation of this special section of the television news bulletin merely offered praise for the actions of the participating companies, without any critical and journalistic perspective in relation to their attitudes and actions (Merlino, 2020).

The same article on the Brasil de Fato website (Merlino, 2020) criticised the positions of other organisations, in particular in the financial sector, such as Brazil’s biggest bank, Itaú, which has given R\$1,000,000,000,000 to combat the pandemic in Brazil, which represents 3.5% of the bank’s profit of R\$28,400,000,000,000 in 2019; and Santander Bank, which planned to lay off 20% of its employees in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic. The information, published on digital platforms, highlights what Fausto Neto (2018) called collateral factors, which did not necessarily reveal what became visible from the picture, but also what can be seen from it, even if this stands contrary to the strategies planned by the organisations.

On the basis of this brief exploratory analysis, we can perceive the mediated movement of meanings beyond production, transmission, the reception of the message of organisations that sought to be seen and recognised by society. This does not mean, therefore, that this movement only became possible with mediatisation, but it is indisputable that it was enhanced by it, demonstrating the complexity, uncertainty, and lack of control of communication strategies and the construction of organisational discourses.

In addition to this situation, the multiple interests and strategies adopted by different interlinked actors and materialised in the set of daily relationships, resignified meanings in the context of circulation in an asymmetric and

⁶ The news site Brasil de Fato was created by popular movements in Brazil in 2003, calling itself an independent vehicle that aims to contribute to the discussion of ideas and the analysis of facts from the point of view of the need for social change in Brazil.

nondeterministic manner, reinforcing what Fausto Neto (2018) has called a “mismatch” in the relationship between production and reception of the message, in a dissociated and complex manner. It is important to say that those articulations of forces and meanings and those mismatches help define the positions that the individual and collective subjects can occupy in a specific utterance and in a discursive practice, causing something to be said and assumed as truth (Foucault, 1969/2012a, 1994/2012b, 1978/2012c).

In April 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mining company, Vale, launched a public consultation with the aim of seeking the participation of society in the process of reviewing its sustainability policy. It should be noted that the action occurred just over 1 year after the rupture of one of its tailings dams, in the municipality of Brumadinho, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, which resulted in almost 300 deaths and serious environmental and social consequences along the route impacted by the tailings mud in two Brazilian states – Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo. According to a statement released by the mining company to the press, this was “the first time that the report brings this type of external evaluation, which reflects the company’s commitment to expand the channels of listening and open dialogue with its different stakeholders” interest groups (Vale, 2020, para. 15). The initiative can be configured as an utterance that signals the adoption of strategy as a social practice, since it seeks the participation of different actors in the construction of its policy, in addition to an attempt to resignify the company, that exercised a strong position in economic and social development, as a partner of Brazilian society.

However, using the ideas propounded by Foucault (1969/2012a), the construction of a new utterance and its enunciative function takes place on the basis of discursive and non-discursive practices and their appropriation by different actors. The search for a joint construction of its sustainability policy, and, therefore, its visibility regime, is a way of thinking about strategy as a social practice. It is still necessary to understand the radicality of this practice in the light of Schwaab (2013), beyond what the initiative can make visible, because more than seeming to build a new utterance, the organisation must think about the enunciative function of this utterance. In other words, it is necessary to understand whether the relations between discursive and non-discursive statements can encompass construction of a discursive practice based on greater transparency and plurality in the processes of construction of this policy, as mentioned by the organisation, especially with its recent history (Vale, 2020).

Final Considerations

This chapter outlines an approach towards strategic communication as a social practice by promoting a reflection that shifts the emphasis towards the management and control processes of organisational communication and aims to shed light on the uncertainty of those processes that occur in interactions. In this context, it can be inferred that both the special section of the television news bulletin, “Solidariedade S.A.,” created by Rede Globo de Televisão, as well as the public consultation carried out by the mining company, Vale, about its sustainability policy, in the midst of a scenario of global paralysis, highlighted the need for solidarity actions and the search for participation of different actors and empathy between individuals in the construction of communication and discursive strategies, thus reinforcing the notion of strategy as a social practice. Such initiatives can be configured as such, since they consider the interactions between different actors, and are not limited to the organisations’ intentions. They also indicate that organisations began to incorporate certain roles in this event, in order to assume an objective sense of visibility and resignification of their positions and discursive practices.

However, in allusion to Berger and Luckmann (1985/2012), such actions seem to have been carried out in such a way that their meaning could be “apprehended apart from the individual performances of it [in this case, the actions of the organisations] and the variable subjective processes that associate them” to the senses (p. 98), in order to create an identification of the actors and society with the organisation. The organisations’ initiatives emerge as communication strategies with a view to reaffirming their place in society.

It is emphasised that understanding strategy as a social practice means considering that the meanings of organisational actions are constructed from the organisation’s interactions, as perceived by empirical observation, even if it is in accordance with the organisation’s objectives. The communicative process, especially in mediated society, places individual and collective subjects in relation, thereby affecting each other. In this scenario, if it is not possible to speak about control of the organisational discourse, because the different actors participate in this discursive construction on the basis of their beliefs and their experience. It should not be forgotten that, in day-to-day life, organisations actively participate in the affirmation or denial of values through their institutional and discursive power. They thereby

contribute to perpetuating and deconstructing patterns that, as a whole, form the contemporary social structure. Still in mediated society what is perceived is a movement in which organisations construct discourses from a socially-shared symbolic framework, legitimising themselves as subjects in their discursively legitimised strategies. On the other hand, the appropriation of discourses in the circulation process, especially with mediatisation, provides greater participation and, therefore, a greater possibility of coping in the construction of utterances and discursive practices in a given context.

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