"Territories and Communities, new Communication barriers"
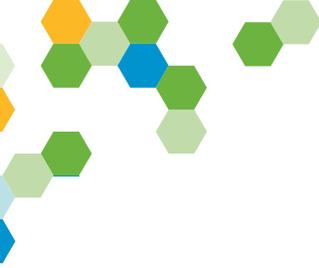
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1. INTRODUCTION

They say this is the year of "digital transformation". Communication, reputation, public affairs and marketing experts know that this phenomenon is far from new. This process of change has been referred to by various names over the last decade, with more or less success and to a greater or lesser extent. So, what has changed now? Why does it seem more important?

This is probably –as this is a mere hypothesis– due to the evidence showing that the aforementioned **change is not only technological and involves means, tools and channels**; but is also becoming part of the culture of our society, modifying its patterns of behavior and shared values. It is precisely because of this that it may be now when its real, disruptive and transformative impact on various fields of our daily lives, businesses and social and political lives is being enhanced.

The contents of this paper mainly cover the cultural essence of the change that the objective of communication is undergoing in all organizations due to the aforementioned "digital transformation". In fact, **it is an urgent call to substitute certain mental frameworks[1]** with others which enable us to be relevant in our operations given this new context.

In recent years, we have overcome the challenge of managing the new channels to engage stakeholders within the media and social networks. Through tests and experience, we have managed to adapt ourselves to a much more demanding communication operative framework as regards processes and resources.

But, in most cases, we have merely applied the concepts provided by mass communication. An ineffective mental framework for network communication, based on large-scale, real-time and global-reach personal interaction. A model promoted by Internet for our century, replacing the previous model enhanced by TV and Radio in the last century.

Concepts such as **"audience", "public" or "target" show an understanding of communication which no longer meets our reality**. The ideas behind these terms require us to use communication as a one-way process, which starts at the company and ends in the "public" without any further return beyond questionable impact figures.

1 Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, highlighted the importance of "mental frameworks" in the field of management in her book: *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Random House Publishing Group, 28 Feb. 2006

"The "publics" are not anonymous people anymore"

These words threaten us culturally, with their values and associated practices, preventing us from moving beyond hitting the "target" in a mass of demographic profiles ("public"), which is assumed to be waiting for our messages in a passive manner ("audience").

This is no longer an accurate representation of reality. These "publics" are not anonymous people anymore. They have public profiles on social networks and show their faces and names. They are not passive "audiences" anymore, but active participants. And if we exclusively focus on hitting these "targets" we will only be able to attract their attention. A necessary first goal, but not enough to receive feedback

and be recommended by the people who expect answers in a context of hyper-transparency.

We need **new concepts which help us adapt the culture of corporate communication** to the current culture of social communication. These "territories" and "communities" shall help us get closer to this goal.

2. CONCEPT OF "TERRITORY"

As communication experts we seek that the brand we work for (whether corporate, commercial or personal) finds its place in a "conversational territory" where the communities of participants are active. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Basic Concepts: Territories
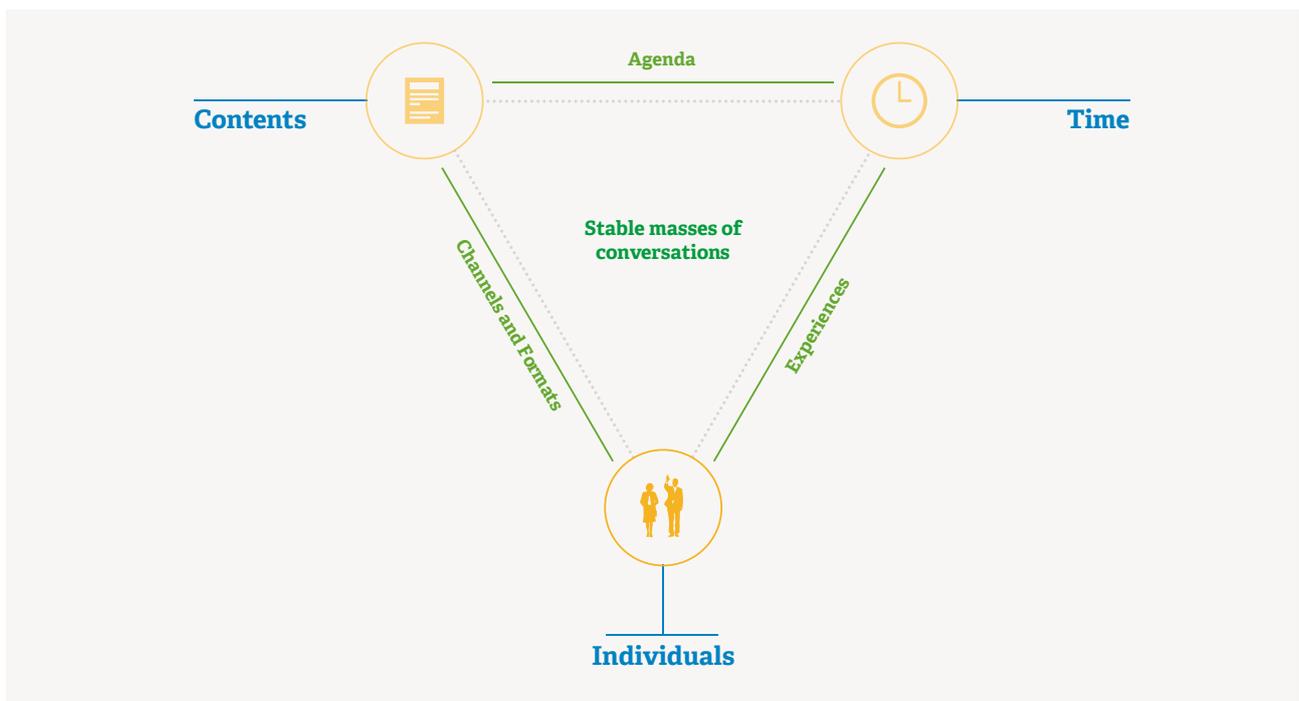
Source: own elaboration

This territory, understood as **"masses of conversations"**, is defined by certain **"contents"** exchanged between **"individuals"** in in a stable manner over **"time"**.

In order to become a manageable reality, this exchange of contents between individuals is structured around certain **"channels and formats"** both digital and analogue.

As regards time, there will be an **"agenda"** of opportunities to attract the attention of individuals, which shall be mainly promoted by third parties, but also led by our brand.

On the other hand, the relations with individuals over time will translate into **"experiences"** which will result in emotional connections, which we will seek to somehow link to our organization, its members, products or services.

This concept of "territory" helps us **develop communication from a social basis**, promoting coexistence and adaptation to an environment that does not belong to us. A place in which every space has its value, as long as we act as decent neighbors, favoring quality over quantity. A place to establish relations and promote conversations by sharing valuable contents for its inhabitants. An environment in which we seek to co-create remarkable experiences for the people that we care for.

3. CONCEPT OF "COMMUNITY"

As communication experts we seek that the brand we work for (whether corporate, commercial or personal) achieves a certain degree of influence among the "communities of participants" of one or more territories. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Basic concepts: Communities

Source: own elaboration

"When communication is carried out from a "community" point of view we humanize every single thing and optimize our surveillance and intelligence systems"

This community is defined by the **"sense of belonging"** shared by the people it who make it up, linked to common **"values and objectives"**, which become particularly important when they take place in a shared **"cause"**.

The effectiveness of our communication is directly related to our ability to identify the communities with which we share values, objectives or causes in a legitimate manner.

In order to be accepted and recognized by these communities, we will need to do it through real people who shall act as **"connectors"** between the organization and the **"participants"** which co-lead the community.

Our influence potential in the community will depend on our capacity to adapt ourselves to their **"culture" of symbols and customs**, ensuring that our **"storytelling"** matches theirs.

But it will also depend on the resources we allocate to establish a constant **"interrelation"** between our organization and the members of the community in question, using as many **"channels"** as possible to develop these connections.

Finally, it is here where we connect with the concept of **"territory"**, we need to share certain **"common interests"**, around which the community will structure the conversation on specific **"topics"** linked

to their shared values and objectives.

When communication is carried out from a "community" point of view two phenomena take place which align us with the cultural change that the digital transformation is entailing.

The first and foremost makes us **humanize every single thing we do, empowering the people** who make up the identity of our organization.

The second and equally important forces us to **optimize our surveillance and intelligence systems** to be able to initiate our communication not corporately, but based on the values, objectives and interests of the individuals with which we are related. This will be the only way to achieve effective results.

4. BREAKING DOWN TERRITORIES: ART AND INNOVATION

Now, let us put the theory into practice with two highly different territories and check how they work in a real test. Let us analyze **"Art"** and **"Innovation"**. Both cases, spaces for stable conversations.

As previously noted, there are **three main points which define a territory** ("contents", "time" and "individuals"), which are translated into **three types of dynamics** ("agenda", "experiences" and "channels/ formats"). Let us see how all these concepts work in the daily life of territories.

" The "time" is related to the most critical element of any territory, "individuals", and the way in which they organize themselves in stakeholder's communities"

CONTENTS

In the domain of "Art", the category of "contents" would include documentaries such as **"Exit through the Gift Shop"**, analyzing Banksy, or **"The artist is present"**, which studies Marina Abramovic, or others focused on the daily rhythms of life at museums, like the brilliant work **"National Gallery"** by Frederick Wiseman. Beyond the interest that the territory might arouse among audiovisual artists (meta-creation), it is the museums that have recently developed contents to enhance this category, with cases such as the series of MET (Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York) audio commentaries known as **"The Artist project"**.

If we take a close look at our second territory, "Innovation", in the field of "contents", we can find audiovisual storytelling works such as Intel's web series **"Look inside"**, which tells short innovative stories in which several entrepreneurs and initiatives use the brand's technology to change the world but we can also find reference books such as **"Creative intelligence"[2]** by Bruce Nussbaum.

CHANNELS AND FORMATS

If we combine "contents" with "individuals" we find the channels and formats level, discovering a basic element of the structure of the territory.

From the point of view of "Art" this would range from magazines such as **"Aesthetica", "Dazed and Confused"** or **"Matador"** in Spain, to creation portals like **Nowness** or even the use of increasingly important social networks as regards artistic exchange –**Instagram** or **Snapchat**–.

Regarding the "Innovation" territory, the "channels and formats" level involves platforms such as **Big Think**, reputed magazines like F**ast Company** or **Wire** and portals such as **Mashable**, but also phenomena like the **TED Talks** or contents-creating companies which are really close to us like **BBVA Innovation Center**.

AGENDA

Contents and time combined create a new level: the "agenda". In the territory of Art, this leads us to great fairs like **ARCO** in Spain, **ART BASEL** in Switzerland and **FIAC** in Paris, but also to specific dates throughout the year which can become important events over time, such as the opening of art galleries, which in Madrid became the **Madrid Gallery Weekend**.

At the same time, the agenda of innovation takes us to annual celebrations like the **World Creativity & Innovation Day** which takes place on April 21, or events carried out by

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[2] Bruce Nussbaum. *Harnessing the power to Create, Connect and Inspire, Harper Business.* Creative intelligence. 2013

"An intelligent strategy would seek to build a storytelling in smaller territories"

brands that were mentioned on the channels and formats level, like the very Ted Talks or the contents developed by a company like the BBVA Innovation Center.

EXPERIENCES

Lastly, "time" is related to the most critical element of any territory, the one that takes into account "individuals" and the way in which they organize themselves in stakeholder's communities. In this relation we can find the "experiences" level, where concepts such as emotion, memory and learning are developed. In the case of our two test territories, this would lead us to talk about communities such as Urban Art, creators, critics and lovers of video art on one hand and technologist, geeks or creative individuals on the other.

A company that wants to build a storytelling in a specific territory needs to be able to add value legitimately taking all the analyzed elements into account and through each of the levels that make it up. In this sense, the leading companies have understood that, contrary to the attempts to become part of large overcrowded territories (as illustrated by our previous examples), an **intelligent strategy would seek to build a storytelling in smaller territories**,

whether it is by **penetrating into the original territory** (urban art in relation to Art, digital transformation versus innovation) or, especially, thanks to **territories' intersections**. This is what happens with strategies of territory appropriation as the one carried out in the U.S. by Intel in collaboration with Vice through its award-winning **"The Creators Project"**, which links the two abovementioned examples (Art and Innovation) in order to find a more specific and manageable territory to dominate the conversation.

5. BUILDING A COMMUNITY

As previously mentioned, the "individuals" group links territories with the element that gives them their true meaning: the communities within them. Using the aforementioned examples for the territories of Art and Innovation, let us see how a feature inherent in both is built: the **creative** community. People who belong to this community find their "sense of belonging" in a "common objective", which is understanding the fact that searching for new mental associations and ideas will improve their lives and that of others. Based on this goal, which implies the activation of a series of "values", revolve four concepts:

"Understanding how the communities in these territories work and how the latter are built is the first step"

LEADERS AND CONNECTORS

Well-known individuals with the capacity to set trends: artists like **Banksy** or **Murakami**, technological celebrities such as **Mark Zuckerberg** or **Steve Jobs**, but currently also chefs like the **Roca**[3] brothers or **David Muñoz** and young entrepreneurs with a lower public profile as the ones included every year on the **MIT Technology Review**.

INTERRELATIONS

The relations established among the members of the community through specific channels lead us to traditional creativity processes such as briefing and muse and artist approaches or new relations like **Scrum**.

COMMON INTERESTS

The emergence of topics which set new trends depending on the exact moment when they take place is what makes a community no longer associate the creative concept to an individual work and now links the aforementioned field with co-creation processes and cultural recycling in postmodern art.

SHARED CULTURE

the set of symbols and customs of the creative community ranges from icons such as the light bulb to concepts like advertisings for festivals within the marketing domain or phenomena such as **brainstorming**.

Beyond this huge community structure, it is necessary to identify the thrust force behind it. **This cause is not a static element, but dynamic and external factors may impact the activation of a community** and mobilize it. In our example, the creative community of Spain found a cause to fight for in the rise of cultural VAT and the whole creative community rose up to fight against cases of lack of freedom of expression such as the cases of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei or the Iranian director Jafar Panahi.

Understanding how the communities in these territories work and how the latter are built –the space where conversations take place– is the first step in order to create a specific storytelling for the brand that we work for (whether corporate, commercial or personal). This storytelling should connect with the communities which are already part of the aforementioned conversational ecosystems. In the end, it is a matter of listening in order to talk, always adding value, but under a new framework.

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[3] If you wish to find additional information about the Roca Brothers, please follow the link: *Deconstruyendo el Territorio de Marca de un Banco Global: Narrativa, Protagonistas y Valor Compartido*, Article published in Desarrollando Ideas, November 2015

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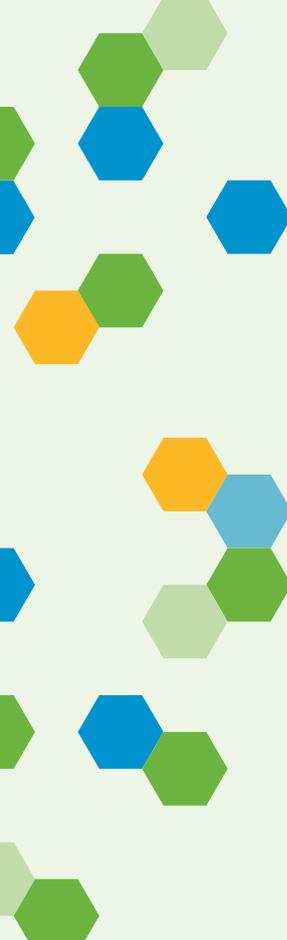
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