

# Organizational communication and public interest: strategies of (in)visibility in social media

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## Abstract

In this paper, we discuss about organizational communication with the objective of highlight strategies triggered by organizations with a view to reduce and/or direct their (in)visibility in social media and problematize such practices in the perspective of the public interest. To do so, we used data from a survey conducted by Da Silva (2018), which shows a set of seven strategies used by organizations operating in Brazil to manage their (in)visibility on social media. Complementarily, in the public interest perspective, we show that such strategies are also used by organizations for purposes that are not guided by ethics and, even, for illegal actions.

**Keywords:** Organizational communication. public interest. social media. strategies. (in)visibility.

## Introductory discussion

Brazilian studies about strategies<sup>1</sup> of organizational communication in social media<sup>2</sup>, considering the current mediatic context, on one hand tend to assert the importance of organization's visibility and even ensure the impossibility of not being visible in these media, and, on the other hand, tend to disregard the fact that visibility is not necessarily the only purpose of these organizations' presence within these environments. If it is a fact that the increased visibility of subjects and organizations in social media is instituted as

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1 The strategies are seen as social practices (BULGACOV; MARCHIORI, 2010), and they are situated within the scope of interactions among subjects. Therefore, they are not constituted in static and linear structures (PÉREZ, 2012). Thus, even though organizations desire it, they cannot control scenarios; but they can act and interfere in them in a somewhat right way, in different perspectives.

2 We understand that the expression contemporizes not only the social media websites focused on relationships, but also platforms that share videos and images, which enable but do not prioritize establishing relationships. We refer mainly to environments such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, among others.

an imperative nowadays, it is also indisputable that this situation is not always desired by the organizations.

In this sense, for example, in situations in which the circulation of senses about a subject, an aspect and/or fact relates to a given organization under an undesired and unfavorable focus, and/or clash with the projected and triggered senses within the “communicated organization”<sup>3</sup> (BALDISSERA, 2009). Furthermore, it is likely that these organizations operationalize strategic actions in order to reduce their visibility aiming to leave the spotlight. In the cases perceived as more serious, it is possible that the organizations implement more sophisticated strategies (or even drastic strategies), either neutralizing the circulating senses, generating facts that attract public attention to other issues, hampering the access to information, either reducing or omitting their responsibility in the situation. These strategic moves show the organization’s desire for invisibility, and also their aim of blurring some of their practices, in some instances.

When facing an instable context, such as the one now, in which crises of different kinds guide the news and managers and organizations appear frequently in media scandals, one of the possible organizational strategies tends to avoid associations with controversial topics and taboos (except for organizations have these themes as a component of their strategies). This leads them to enter shadow regions of the public media arena, or even withdraw as much as possible to the private sphere. It is important to highlight that this behavior, which is a normal stance to organizations with illicit and / or unethical practices, inappropriate and/or illegal products and services, can also be used by righteous, ethical and law-abiding organizations. Given these conditions for the organizations, the fact that they are not cited or referenced – to be in an opacity area – constitutes a medullary value, since it avoids negative meaning within the public, in a way that the visibility restriction presents itself as a strategic alternative to untying practices, situations and themes considered to be hazardous.

Given this context, the main objective of this paper is to demonstrate strategies used by organizations aiming to reduce and / or direct their (in)visibility on social media, as well as problematize such practices from the perspective of the public interest<sup>4</sup>. We highlight that, since the beginning, it is not a matter of simply condemning such strategic practices, but of problematizing them because the blinding they cause can be opposed to the right that the public, the public Power and the society have to access data about the organizations and their practices. This comes into focus, especially when, in order to meet organizational interests,

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3 According to Baldissera (2009), organizational communication can be understood under three dimensions: the “communicated organization”, the “communicating organization” and the “spoken organization”. The “communicated organization” concerns authorized speech (authorized communication processes) to make oneself known, including actions such as telling the public about yourself, circulating information, managing the organization, etc. It also concerns “[...] what the organization selects from its identity and, through communication processes (strategic or not), gives visibility aiming at concept image turnover, legitimacy, symbolic capital (and recognition, sales, profits, votes etc.)” (BALDISSERA, 2009, p. 118).

4 The assumed notion of “public interest” goes back to the people’s social dimension, to the living in society. It is also related to the understanding created collectively, and, from this viewpoint, they congregate and comprise the majority opinions or the values of democratic ethics and normativity.

among other things, they delegitimize or hide facts of public interest, or even present partial versions of them, seeking to institute them as “truths”.

In this sense, this essay departs from the assumptions of symbolic interactionism (MEAD, 1967, BLUMER, 1980) as an important framework for studying the strategies used by organizations in the interactions they use in social media. This theory considers that these interactions are “[...] a common action, marked by mutual affectation and permeated by significant gestures [...]” (FRANÇA, 2008, p. 90), and it presupposes relations and meaning. Therefore, in a communicational perspective, it is not just about stimulus-response, or about reciprocity (one individual affects and is affected by the other): reflexivity matters, in a sense that:

It is the awareness of the senses inscribed in the gestures that makes us capable of selecting them and anticipating the responses of our interlocutor; it is an equal awareness of the latter that allows them to react selectively to the gesture received, making his response a new gesture that will affect the former retroactively, and so on (FRANÇA, 2008, p. 91).

Based on this understanding, regarding our object, it is possible to assert that the more organizations know their audiences (mastering their cultural codes and gathering information about your political behavior, for example), they will most likely know how to use this information in order to increase their visibility and also to step away from the spotlight areas, comprising great public exposure. However, this does not mean assuming that the interpretations the public will have can be predetermined by the organizations, mainly because of the gestures of experience of these individuals.

In this regard, the three premises of symbolic interactionism follow, according to Blumer (1980, p. 119): “[...] human beings act in relation to the world based on the meanings it offers them”; the meanings of the elements are “[...] derived from or caused by the social interaction that is held with other people”; and “[...] meanings are manipulated by an interpretive process (and modified by it) acted by the person when relating to the elements that come into contact”. As a consequence, this is not a linear process, but something that is always intervening people’s reconstruction of the world. In addition, it is worth mentioning that in communicational relations the objective world also matters, comprising the practical dimension of the communicational phenomenon.

In this sense, whilst paying attention to communication materialized in social media, we bring on the sociotechnical perspective<sup>5</sup>. The meanings built are not separated from context, from intention and from the strategies by the people and organizations that participate on the interactions. Moreover, according to theories from Goffman (2009), it is assumed that the social media environment are presentation environments (where

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<sup>5</sup> We understand as socio-technical the articulation on the social and technical systems, particularly on the perspective of information and communication technologies.

someone shows themselves), and of representation/performance to people and organizations, which may be situations of “which can be situations of “sincere performance” or “cynical performance”. Considering visibility imperative and the strategies for organizations in the context of deep symbolic disputes, in tension with the discourse of transparency, ethics and systemic interdependence, the cynical performance tends to be in the center point, as we can prove from the empirical data presented in this study.

Regarding this data, it is necessary to highlight that they were originally collected for Da Silva’s (2018) research, from semi-structured interviews. He conducted 14 interviews with 17 representatives<sup>6</sup> from 14 advertising agencies of different sizes – small, medium and large agencies. The study involved subjects who work in advising organizations, specifically with regard to presence on social media. We understand that these agencies (and their professionals) are central to the proposed assessment, as they know techniques and paths to reduce the visibility of organizations on social media.

The choice of informants, according to Da Silva (2018), met the following criteria: to be affiliated to the Brazilian Association of Digital Agents (Abradi) during the second semester of 2017, which is the main national entity focused on digital communication; to offer services related to social media; to be accessible to the researchers; and to be available and interested in participating in the interview. The data, analyzed with the content analysis technique (BARDIN, 2011), showed the main strategies implemented by organizations when their wish was the invisibility or the reduction/targeting of visibility in social media.

When carrying out the analyzes, Da Silva (2018) followed the phases proposed by Bardin (2011), which are organized in three poles: the pre-analysis, the material exploration and, finally, the treatment of results (inference and interpretation). After pre-analysis, which involves the preparation of the collected material (transcription of the interviews), Da Silva (2018) went on to exploring the content, which is pointed as the most exhausting part of the process. At this point, codes and categories were created, from the grouping of close and complementary meanings with the purpose of creating categories of analysis<sup>7</sup>.

## **Organizational communication and desires of (in)visibility on social media**

Visibility is a presupposition of public existence. In the “Self-promotion society” (THOMPSON, 2008), on one hand we experience the enhancement of possibilities of expressions in public, because we are in a visibility arena, and, on the other, we tend to become very dependent on it. According to Trivinho (2011, p. 113 – emphasis added), it is about “[...] an existence (personal, in group, government, corporate, etc.) completely conditioned to the presence in media visibility”, because the ethos of the current civilization claims the presence of subjects for otherness “[...] regardless of whether or not it gives the

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<sup>6</sup> In total, 14 interviews were conducted. However, in three agencies, the interviews were conducted with two professionals.

<sup>7</sup> In this study, based on the established objectives, the display of categories is the priority, but the documentation of all stages of content analysis (BARDIN, 2011) can be consulted in Da Silva (2018).

required attention”; and, in this way, it consists of “(super) exposing or *becoming visible*” in order to “[...] exist somehow (as a simulacrum) before the set of perceptions of otherness”.

Furthermore, Trivinho (2011, p. 115-116) mentions that it is not merely the desire to become visible, since there is also the “desire of unique”, “[...] desire to dominate [...] the spotlight of a media scene [...]”; and there is in this desire “[...] the ordinary drive of staging solo and socially reputed in a given context of belonging (concrete or imaginary)”. Therefore, in this process, simultaneously, two displacements are updated: The desiring aiming to occupy the spotlight of the scene, and, consequently, the one from who (person, organization, public, etc.) is forced to step back from this spotlight, may it be to share the light or to move to the peripheral regions or even to leave the scene. It is presented, then, an environment of tensions, disputes, associations, dissociation and strategic movements. This happens because, confirming Sodr  (2015, p. 19), currently, “[...] the image of an individual adds economic value to the extent of his technical development: broader mirroring and public attention”.

Using mainly the information and communication technologies, the disputes in order to occupy a good space in the public sphere in order to achieve visibility, as Thompson (2008) discussed, have assumed a great importance assumed for being held in an environment with a greater flow of information (more intense), with exponential growth in the number of people who take part in the communicational networks (which is more extensive). Moreover, they are directly directed to these characteristics, and because it is less controllable, as in digital environments, among other things, it is more difficult to cover up actions, foresee the unfolding and repercussions and regulate the circulation of senses and information. So, besides the fact that technologies have amplified the possibilities of expression and the circulation of information, they have also ambience so that anything (goods, action, idea, behavior, organization, etc.) is subject to receiving visibility and so that this visibility, which is very imponderable, gets away from the desire of individuals and organizations to retain their control (BALDISSERA, 2017).

As we reflect on this configuration in conjunction with the purposes and conveniences of performing well as a conscious action in the public arena, we have to, differently from what is propagated, assert that individuals and organizations do not always want visibility. On the contrary, it is possible to say that in many situations the desires are to reduce the visibility or even to become invisible in the media. For various reasons, not everything can be presented in public. Among different causes are those of a private, strategic and/or security nature, and lawful, but also illicit of different types. Therefore, under the imperative of visibility, the social order, which defines itself as “transparent”, as discusses Sodr  (2015), is in conflict with secrecy, with what is not shown, with what is hidden.

If in the scope of the public administration of democratic states advertising is a fundamental right – the secret is the exception (official secret). According to Bobbio (2015), because accessing information is a fundamental right of citizens, the same is not true for private matters (for example, a trade secret). Regardless of the type, says the author, the secret grows in invisible power, updated in different ways and relationships with visible power, in a prudent perspective in political relations.

In terms of organizational communication, seen as a “process of construction and dispute of meanings within the scope of organizational relations” (BALDISSERA, 2008, p. 33), particularly under the prism of “communicated organization”, the rule of prudence has its strategic use for “saying and not saying, not saying everything, but only a part of it, silencing, omitting, reticence” (BOBBIO, 2015, p. 54). In this way, considering the different possible degrees of opacity between the visible and the invisible, the decisions on what should be visible, when, by what public and in which levels, end up assuming exercises of power. However, this is only valid for authorized organizational communication (“communicated organization”), and it does not apply to the communication materialized in the “spoken organization”<sup>8</sup> dimension (BALDISSERA, 2009), which takes place outside the organization’s domain environments and escapes its control desires.

However, when we assess specifically the scope of “communicated organization”, the focus of this study, the application of the prudence rule is updated in the management of information that the organization wants to circulate - primarily to whom, where and when. In terms of strategic sophistication, this focus is turned to a sense management, that is, for the selection and circulation of meanings, for example: offers of “images of the self” – discursive ethos, according to Maingueneau (2008), as well as to the orientation, disputes and/or monitoring of the interpretations of said meanings, and still, for assessing the appropriations that different audiences carry out. A good example is the strategy of “impressions management” (WOOD JR., 2001, p. 153), which consists of carrying out a set of analyzes and filters (opportune for the organization, and ‘appropriate’ to the moral requirements, norms, social codes and sensitive judgments of the audiences), before the circulation of a content, in order to increase the power of producing good impressions, even if it is not possible to determine such results.

Thus, among the poles of visibility and invisibility, we have a wide range of possible degrees of transparency and opacity. Therefore, on one hand, the current social order of transparency tends to be effective as individuals and organizations aim for and dispute visibility, which is complemented by the willingness of individuals and publics of “seeing” and for technologies that make it possible. On the other hand, there is the fact that organizations and individuals may also desire secrecy and invisibility for themselves and/or for their ideas and actions, may this visibility be constant, or appears just in certain situations and/or for some issues.

At this point, to continue, it is important to highlight that social media has assumed an increasingly important role in organizational communication strategies. And, considering the management of (in)visibility levels, in a simple way, it is possible to assert that the invisibility in these environments consists of not being visible to the public, of being hidden

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<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Baldissera (2009) considers communication processes that materialize outside the organizational environment (physical space of the organization, its social networks, its website etc.), therefore outside the organization’s domains, but which are still related to it. Examples of this communication are interactions about a given organization that take place on the social networks of different individuals, unions, NGOs.



and in secrecy. However, in addition to the simple non-presence, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that, among other things, the public pressure organizations to make themselves present, and organizations need to be present to mention their existence and carry out their transactions (in different ways). orders), and / or, yet, the legislation may require them to expose information and make certain pronouncements. Therefore, the invisibility in these environments considers situations in which something or someone is not visible or cannot be made visible by someone (psychic), by an audience and even by internet search engines, or that is relegated to the background because it has no socio-technical relevance. That is, being in a region of non-visibility, having no socio-technical<sup>9</sup> significance, acting to leave the regions of visibility and casting shadows on what you do not want to make visible are some of the perspectives and actions to achieve invisibility. In turn, with the notions of reducing / targeting visibility, we emphasize the organizations' desire to reduce the degrees of visibility of something and also to indicate what should become relevant and visible.

As it will be discussed further, there are many strategies, actions and techniques acting in order to reduce/target the visibility and to the intentions of invisibility. And, based on Bobbio (2015), we can assert that the secrecy and the reduction of visibility characterize issues and actions of private sphere and business strategies; which does not mean that they are necessarily illicit. These issues become problematic when this invisible power flirts with illegality when establishing relations with the visible power, such as when decisions of public interest are made in invisibility, when something is masked for a public presentation (data from a social report, for instance), and when language is used to exclude the public for vested interests.

This problem seems to become more serious as people uncover organizational practices such as the “[...] attempt to plant fallacious news, the creation of false events, the act of spreading rumors and rumors, the simulation of audiences or situations that can influence audiences, the creation of front organizations are evident to disseminate information” (HENRIQUES; SILVA, 2014, p. 4). They pose the potential risk to audiences who hardly have the information and techniques to enable them to unveil such movements and their intentions. In parallel, Silva (2013) reflected on the fact that many posts on debate forums and chatrooms, especially during electoral periods, have associated to these practices. It is not by chance, according to Henriques and Silva (2014, p. 7) that “in the last two decades, the main public relations agencies in the world have been the target of complaints about the usage” of *astroturfing*<sup>10</sup> techniques in various organizations.

It is worth noticing that subjects and organizations have met vigorous means to carry out and enhance these practices in the internet environment. Moreover, it is not rare to see that these practices are advertised as transparent, which holds an important value in the

9 Among other aspects, we consider the strategies of intentional application of good practices of public visibility in an opposite view so that something does not have or lose sociotechnical relevance and, therefore, it does not get or lose public visibility.

10 *Astroturfing* is “complex strategies designed to create the impression that there is a public manifesting itself as a way to influence public opinion” (SILVA, 2013, p. 15). In the perspective of verisimilitude, at the same time, this practice masks the real sponsors of the action and makes it seem and believe that it is a spontaneous movement by some public. Thus, as a manipulative and fallacious practice, it aims to generate a sense of legitimacy and genuine movements.

current context, and has a strong positive symbolic power. In fact, they consist in making it appear transparent through conformation, manipulating and / or withholding information. And through the circulation of versions about something that, in view of the likelihood effects, constructs meanings of transparency (and its consequences), while concealing the strategies and intentions of those who carry them out. Below, the study presents some of the strategies that have been used in different ways by organizations and digital communication agencies in Brazil.

### Strategies to reduce and target the visibility and invisibility in social media

According to Da Silva (2018), there are seven main strategies<sup>11</sup> (Chart 1) that have been used by organizations in Brazil, mainly through their digital communication agencies, aiming to manage their levels of visibility within the social media environment. Among them, some have a preventive character, like avoiding critical situations and crisis, and others are effectively practical, even though they are always attempts, to mitigate impacts of a negative fact to the organization. Sometimes they even use very sophisticated techniques, with a high degree of expertise. These strategies can be gathered under three main purposes: diagnosing levels of (in) visibility, reducing and/or directing visibility and becoming invisible (DA SILVA, 2018).

These strategies are activated in different orders, connections and times, and they can conform to different arrangements in perspective to meet the needs and/or the desires of organizations within different contexts. Thus, it is likely that, in more complex situations, particularly when they are detached from themes and facts more sensitive to audiences, they adopt more than one strategy, in an articulated way, aiming to increase the effectiveness of their actions and the probability of achieving the desired results.

**Chart 1** – Strategies for managing the (in)visibility in digital media

Intention	Strategies	Emphasis	Scope
Diagnosing levels of (in) visibility	<b>Monitoring problematic situations</b>	Identifying risks	Preventing possible crises or the visibility of 'negative' guidelines; anticipate the planning of possible interventions.
		Following up on crises and their unfolding	Systematization of mechanisms of attention to problematic situations; paying attention to the 'crisis agents', and monitoring and understanding the protagonists.

11 The usage of "main" considers that, on one hand, these were the main strategies identified in the qualitative study, and on the other, we acknowledge that the participants may have omitted information about some strategies. Besides, considering this dynamic field, other strategies can already be in use.



Reducing and/ or targeting the visibility	<b>Publicly expressing the institutional stance</b>	Presenting official positioning	In cases of high relevance and incidence or with this potential, countering the versions presented by the interlocutors.
		Answering to requests	Answering to all requests from the public. There is a presupposed relation between the lack of answers and increased reach of crises and ‘negative’ issues
		Being agile and “transparent” in meeting requests	Monitoring social media and qualifying teams for answering in a fast and transparent way. There is a presupposed relation between the lack of answers and increased reach of crises and ‘negative’ issues.
		Being resolute in the face of requests	Solving problematic situations in the shortest amount of time. There is a presupposed relation between the lack of answers and increased reach of crises and ‘negative’ issues.
	<b>Shuffling facts and emphases to generate misunderstanding about a situation or fact</b>	Shifting the focus to positive issues	Offering senses that can conduct perceptions about the organization.
		Creating facts	Creating events or situations capable of drawing attention, direct visibility and generate positive associations.
		Promoting other focuses with financial investment	Making use of the possibilities of advertising spaces to display content, in the available formats and compositions, in order to conduct the focus.
		Infiltrating organizational actors in discussions	Infiltrating agents to influence or change the course of discussions, without being perceived as ‘representatives’ of the organization.
		‘Buying’ the audience	Hire interactants that conduct the circulation of meanings desired by organizations and oppose other perspectives.
		Generating incidence or hiring influencers	Persuading and / or hire influencers to advocate on and make visible concepts that corroborate the organization’s speeches and actions.
		Unbalancing competitor (s)	Deviating from unwanted visibility by employing techniques to (re)direct it to negative aspects or situations of competitors.
		Optimizing the desired visibility in search engines	Using techniques of <i>Search Engine Optimization</i> (SEO) in order to enhance the organization’s versions of facts and themes.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC INTEREST:  
STRATEGIES OF (IN)VISIBILITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Becoming invisible	<b>Disregarding “negative” associations or mentions</b>	Dodging an announcement or not speaking	Silencing towards an issue at hand and / or to leave the scene ‘entirely’ to avoid visibility, focus and attention.
		Deleting or hiding comments and posts	Employing techniques to remove, from publicly visible regions, comments and posts that may jeopardize the organization.
		Conducting the conversation for private environments	Carrying out conversations in environments not visible to the other parties.
	<b>Restricting visibility to desired interlocutor</b>	Making contacts using anonymous techniques	Accessing data from interlocutors that are relevant for the organization to implement targeted visibility strategies.
		Selecting audience segments based on their movement and behavior	Establishing groups of interlocutors that are relevant according to specific objectives, needs or challenges.
	<b>Reducing the reach of content offered by organizations</b>	Getting ahead of changes in algorithms and formats	Getting a hold of new rules, parameters and logic of social media algorithms from the relationship with the organizations that control them.
		Exploring content formats and times of the day that do not ‘perform’ well	Using content formats that, due to the logic of algorithms, tend to be unsuccessful in terms of reach and engagement.
		Not applying ‘tagging’ <sup>12</sup> techniques	Restricting the visibility of content by not using ‘tagging’ techniques.
		Restricting the visibility to one or a few channels	Reducing the reach of content by not using multimedia.
	<b>Establishing “comfort”<sup>13</sup> policies</b>	Regulating the presence of employees on social media	Establishing and implementing guidelines on brand associations that employees can make on their social media.
Previous definition of themes that should not be addressed		Deciding in advance on which topics the organization will not engage or manifest.	

Source: created by the authors based on research conducted by Da Silva (2018).

12 Tagging consists on defining keywords (descriptors) that summarize the scope of content. This possibility contributes to a better ranking of a page in search engines, for example. In some social media websites, such as Instagram and Twitter, the visibility of a publication is strongly conditioned by “tags”.

13 Metaphorically, the idea of comfort stands for initiatives and guidelines that have the potential of getting organizations in more comfortable situations.

As presented in Chart 1, the perspective of “diagnosing levels of (in)visibility” comprehends a main strategy, which consists in monitoring situations presented as problems or pose a threat to the organization. It is important to act to identify and understand the scenarios, contexts and meanings that make up such happenings and events. This concerns the strategic assumption that it is necessary to know the situation well for decision making. Thus, monitoring in order to diagnose risks and crises involving the organization is key to decision-making with a view to managing its visibility levels, within the scope of the “communicated organization”. That is, in order to define, among other things, what should be publicized, such as, when, for how long, in which media, as well as to establish, reinforce or avoid associations with unwanted themes and facts. Therefore, this strategy is pivotal for the moves companies make, may it be aiming for more visibility, or to go further into more opaque areas, reducing levels of visibility, and, at the limit, entering spaces of invisibility in social media (at least under some aspects, facts and specific themes).

From a strategic perspective, a more complex level of managing the visibility of organizations in social media reinforces the intention to “reduce / direct visibility” (DA SILVA, 2018). In this sense, organizations use the knowledge obtained from monitoring and analysis of different situations in which they take part in social media, in order to define what must become relevant and visible, in a socio-technical perspective. This, of course, does not mean that it is only a matter of paying attention to what circulates in these media; one should always be consider movements within the perspective of systemic interdependence. Hence, the organizations take on the responsibility for defining what ‘is worthy of light’ and what should stay in the shadows, based on their desires and interests (it is important to consider that this is the intention of organizations, which does not mean that is always effective).

As it was shown in Chart 1, in order to achieve this purpose, two main strategies are used. The first of them, “expressing publicly the institutional stance”, comprises a set of deliberations and actions so that public approaches to a theme / episode emerge from the organization’s biases and conceptions, overlapping other perspectives. Along these lines, it is assumed that when giving visibility to the version of the organization about a certain problematic situation, the focus is on its resonance, which tends to reduce the repercussion and, even, to influence the versions and meanings that circulate in the social media. The absence of participation of the organization in agendas that involve it and or the lack of public manifestations tends to be perceived by the public as conformism, disrespect, possibly an indicative of culpable responsibility and, at the limit, as an illegal act. Thus, silence – refusing to say something – can increase clashes and repercussions on the problematic situation.

In turn, the strategy of “shuffling facts and emphases to generate misunderstanding about a situation or fact” meets the desire of organizations and agencies to hinder the public’s understanding of a certain situation and / or fact. In this way, they show and move other facts and perspectives that have the potential to generate confusion, distraction, doubt, deviations.

The aim is to blur the flow of meanings in order to disturb the understanding of audiences. It is important to highlight that this strategy has the wide potential to create unethical and evasive practices in a way to blind the public's understanding.

Aiming to “Becoming invisible” on social media, there are four main strategies adopted by organizations and agencies. Under certain circumstances, after analyzing the context and the probable consequences of what is presented, one of the strategies is to “disregard ‘negative’ associations or mentions”. This concerns the non-manifestation (not expressing the institutional position) or acting ignoring such problematic situations on social media, seeking to reduce their relevance. In other situations, or in a complementary way, they seek to limit visibility to a segment (or segments) of audiences, in order to make something invisible to other interlocutors, using the strategy of “restricting visibility to desired interlocutors”. In turn, the strategy of “reducing the reach of content offered by organizations” can be synthesized as an “apparent” visibility, produced by the use of socio-technical resources in the perspective of “making it invisible” – for example, by not using ‘tagging’ techniques. The fourth strategy, “establishing ‘comfort’ policies”, aims to avoid – or reduce the probabilities of – public exposure concerning internal issues of the organization in an unwanted way. It is necessary to define the topics on which the organization does not manifest or gets involved, as well as institute rules and guide employees on how to position themselves on social media whenever they associate themselves with the organization.

### **Strategies for invisibility, reduction/targeting of visibility and public interest**

At this point, considering the presented strategies, it seems evident that, if, on the one hand, some of them tend to only be used in order to qualify the management of the senses about the organization that circulate on social media, as ethical and responsible practices. On the other hand, in some of them there is strong evidence that they are used to cover conceptions and actions that clash with the organization's responsibility, as well as with their ethics and the public's right to access information when it is a matter of public interest. Ultimately, strategies to generate invisibility can cover up illicit or even criminal practices. Therefore, if in the private dimension it is assumed the usage of strategies and secrecy (about formulas, tactics, technologies, projects, concepts, products and services, among others), as we have highlighted, this does not mean admitting that everything is permitted and legitimate.

In this sense, it is possible to say that the usage of invisibility strategies and of reducing or targeting of visibility can lead organizations to different levels of ‘Omission in relation to’ or ‘concealment’ of subjects and facts – from moral aspects to legal issues – relevant to the public, that is, of public interest. It is also worth mentioning that this problem is heightened by the fact that surveillance of these abusive practices is still very incipient, says Henriques and Silva (2014). Within this context, information of public interest is hidden or distorted,

and lying narratives are configured similarly to truth to take on centrality in the public arena. Thus, socio-technical strategies are triggered to serve private interests in opposition to the public interest.

It is worthy noticing that the notion of public interest comprises the perspective of approximation and congruence of individual interests, which then assume a public dimension and turn to the “greater good”, to the collective, to society as an organism that transcends the simple sum of its parts (ARENDR, 2010). Therefore, access to information and public communication processes are fundamental, since in communicational interactions subjects can question practices and conceptions, expose arguments, spark discussions and criticize. It is through communication that themes and events get visibility, and can be qualified as of public interest (BALDISSERA; SARTOR, 2016). It is also through communication processes that these themes are instituted and assume different levels of stabilization in societies.

Based on this, it is possible to assert that strategic practices to reduce visibility and to invisible not only reveal ambiguities and ethical distortions, but, in more serious cases, they can also create a fertile environment for the materialization of corporate crimes. In this sense, they can also reveal high levels of dissimulation and lies, motivating and inducing certain behaviors from the public from fallacies or “made-up” (manipulated) information. This information is often only partially revealed under the most interesting approach to organizations, among other things, disregarding moral and ethical rules and even the legislation that holds and secures society. Hence, the public interest is particularly threatened by the withholders of power, and it becomes an object of manipulation and maneuvers (BORGES, 1996).

Within the social media environment, which is the focus of this study, holding power is not reduced to the idea of economic power, but also refers to the access to the logic and grammars of these media (for example, the operation of algorithms) and to the domain in their use. Under the social order of “transparency” (SODRÉ, 2015), of the imperative of visibility, this knowledge conforms to power, among other things, because it is a prerequisite to expand the possibilities of strategic action with a view to regulating the levels of visibility and circulation of meanings about the organization, its practices and conceptions. And this same power can be employed to generate areas of low public exposition, and even of invisibility in a way that it tends to feel free to act only on the name of its interests, even if this may translate to despising the public interest.

So, the problem is not in the strategies (it is normal that they are used by organizations), but in the way they are activated and with what intentions. There are lots of levels of opacity between total transparency and what is hidden (invisible). Therefore, whenever private interests enter the realm of issues of public interest it is essential that they be stopped, (something along the lines of suspending privateness) so that public deliberation is possible. Regardless of the theme or fact, if it is in the public interest (and at each time society institutes its themes or facts of public interest), by itself, it requires transparency and commitment to public communication, therefore, discussing the issues in the public sphere.

Systematic disputes are behind the strategies to make facts or themes of public interest, so that nothing or little overrides the organizations' wishes and business strategies. On the one hand, socio-technical resources make such initiatives feasible and, on the other, they tend to be enhanced due to the incipience of procedures that curb them. Using the theater metaphor, based on Goffman's (2009) views, we can attest that, often, the movements that the strategies represent are acts translated into very deliberate and rehearsed performances (sequentially designed scenes). They bring us the center stage to the visibility areas, the representations that aim to hide what happens in the backstage. Under the prism of "manipulating impressions" (WOOD JR., 2001), social media are the stage (or many stages) on which organizations act from the idealized associations and attributes and the expectations of the audience and public.

## **Final words**

Among the organizational transparency created by visibility processes in social media and different levels of opacity – even the secrecy of opacity – there are different strategic "games" concerning information and senses management about the organization. This assumes making decisions about what it offers to the public, when, why and how, as well as what should be shuffled, overshadowed, hidden. Even though the processes of meaningfulness are not linear (LITTLEJOHN, 1982, FRANÇA, 2008), the socio-technical domains (among other aspects, such as knowing and acknowledging how to use the sociocultural codes of audiences, access to algorithmic grammars – even more if in advance –, stopping technologies and being able to count on specialists to use them), within the social media environment, they permit the organizations to implement strategies (DA SILVA, 2018) with power to exert on the circulation, disputes and construction of meanings over them, their conceptions and practices.

However, as noted, this same power can be used to override topics and facts of public interest, especially by manipulating or hiding information, by silencing or shuffling data and information, by using astroturfing techniques, and by diverting public attention to other issues (making visibility fall on other events or organizations). In this sense, how much information concerning the public interest must have been hidden only last week? How many narratives that are not related to facts, but serve private interests, circulated as truths? Why is a relevant topic that we read on a social media site not receiving enough attention, although it is extremely serious?

This issue requires more attention, as, as revealed by the study by Da Silva (2018), the context shows a high level of professionalization of the processes and appropriation of socio-technical resources by organizations and communication agencies. They aim to implement strategies to reduce visibility and generate invisibility in social media, attenuating the levels of transparency to society while apparently being transparent. Ethics and compliance with legislation do not always guide such practices, particularly when



they obstruct private objectives. It is not by chance, nowadays, that fake news takes center stage in the public debate, and it impacts different systems – such as the economy, politics, society, culture and environment.

Therefore, we emphasize the importance of society and its institutions to adopt mechanisms to, on the one hand, foster transparency, through the necessary publicity for what concerns the public interest and, on the other hand, to discourage and constrain practices to reduce visibility or to generate public invisibility that oppose this logic. More than just advertising, it is about inter-systemic commitment to the greater social good. Thus, to the public debate must move forward with discussions on the topic, as well as in terms of regulating these issues. Among other things, this could also encourage society's attention to the use of social media and what circulates through them, whether in relation to their security, reliability and / or consistency of content.

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