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Communicative strategies of Mark Hamill's personal branding

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The article deals with linguistic aspects of personal branding, exploring communicative strategies and stylistic devices used for the purposes creating, maintaining and promoting celebrity's personal brand. Branding is an indispensable instrument of modern-day marketing and its focus has long since shifted from companies to human brands. Self-branding has become an important component of a successful public career and its linguistic realization gains increasingly more weight. Multiple online platforms and social media grew beyond their initial purposes and became primary mediators of personal branding initiatives. The present research analyses Mark Hamill's Twitter activity in 2021 and identifies main communicative strategies that facilitate self-promotion. The results suggest that the strategy of establishing the rapport with the target audience, the strategy of the display of the social awareness, career promotion strategy and the strategy of creating the sense of exclusivity are the main communicative strategies of Mark Hamill's personal branding. Each one of them establishes or perpetuates one or multiple traits associated with the actor, thus building and strengthening his personal brand. On the other hand, all communicative strategies are realized through certain linguistic and rhetorical means, which facilitate their implementation and help produce the desired effect on the target audience. The present research identified various linguistic and stylistic devices used in Mark Hamill's personal branding, namely quotation, parallelism, irony, parody, creolized text (hashtags, emoji, uppercase letters, expressive punctuation, pictures, gifs, cartoons, videos), hypertext, slogans, rhymes, rhetorical questions and clichés. The research showed that Twitter activity is extremely instrumental in attracting attention, projecting the desired image of oneself and connecting to the target audience, and, thus, effective from the personal branding perspective.

Keywords: communicative strategy, digital marketing, discourse analysis, personal branding, stylistic and rhetorical device.

Давидовська Н. Комунікативні стратегії персонального брендингу Марка Гемілла. У статті розглядаються лінгвістичні аспекти персонального брендингу, досліджуються комунікативні стратегії та стилістичні засоби, які використовуються для створення, підтримки та просування особистого бренда знаменитості. Брендинг є незамінним інструментом сучасного маркетингу, і його фокус давно перемістився з компаній на бренди людей. Самобрендинг став важливим компонентом успішної публічної кар'єри, і його мовна реалізація набуває все більшої ваги. Значна частина онлайн-платформ і соціальних медіа вийшли за межі своїх початкових цілей і стали основними посередниками реалізації зусиль з персонального брендингу. У дослідженні аналізується діяльність Марка Гемілла у мережі Twitter у 2021 році та визначаються основні комунікативні стратегії, спрямовані на просування його особистого бренда. Результати свідчать про те, що стратегія встановлення зв'язку з цільовою аудиторією, стратегія прояву соціальної відповідальності, стратегія кар'єрного просування та стратегія створення відчуття ексклюзивності є основними комунікативними стратегіями персонального брендингу Марка Гемілла. Кожна з них встановлює або закріплює одну чи декілька рис, приписуваних актору, таким чином будуючи та зміцнюючи його особистий бренд. З іншого боку, усі комунікативні стратегії реалізуються через певні мовні та риторичні засоби, які полегшують їх реалізацію та сприяють досягненню бажаного ефекту на цільову аудиторію. У цьому дослідженні виявлено різні мовні та стилістичні засоби, що використовуються в персональному брендингу Марка Гемілла, а саме цитати, паралелізм, іронія, пародія, креолізований текст (хештеги, емодзі, великі літери, експресивна пунктуація, картинки, gif-файли, карикатури, відео), гіпертекст, слогани, віршовані рядки, риторичні запитання та кліше. Дослідження показало, що діяльність у мережі Twitter надзвичайно важлива для привернення уваги, створення бажаного образу та контакту з цільовою аудиторією, а, отже, ефективна з точки зору персонального брендингу.

Ключові слова: дискурс-аналіз, комунікативна стратегія, персональний брендинг, стилістичний та риторичний засіб, цифровий маркетинг.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades marketing has experienced dramatic shift from the promotion of big companies and corporations to focusing on individual human beings. Personal branding has become an effective tool of building a successful professional career and its linguistic form has come into focus of the scholarly research.

Multiple online platforms and social media have converted into an important means of developing and promoting personal brand. Personal branding strategies realized by means of social media lie within the realm of computer-mediated communication [2; 6]. Linguistic research in online communication typically deals with text comments on photo-sharing sites; text, audio, and video responses to YouTube videos; text (and voice) chat during multiplayer online games; and text, video and audio messages from mobile phones posted to interactive TV programs, through messengers as Telegram or Viber, etc. [1]. Online communication is characterised by convergence processes that involve the convergence of text with text, text with multimodality (video or audio) etc. [5].

The present research lies within the realm of media linguistics and communicative linguistics and deals with the analysis of social media content with regard to personal branding practices. Being a powerful interactive means of communication with the society, the social media make it possible for celebrities to carry on a steady dialogue with their target audience, express their opinion on various issues, share news and promote their personal ambitions and qualities in the professional and business sphere [3]. It allows strengthening and promoting their own image and personal brand.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The article aims to investigate the communicative strategies employed by American actor and voice actor Mark Hamill on Twitter in order to build and support his personal brand. The topicality of this research is caused by lack of scientific analysis of the communicative and linguistic aspects of personal branding. The study covers 575 Tweets posted by Mark Hamill from January till November 2021, collected by means of continuous sampling method.

Scientific novelty of the research consists in the analysis of the linguistic aspects of the branding practices. The object of the research is the personal branding efforts realized by means of Twitter activity, whereas the communicative strategies of Mark Hamill's personal branding and their linguistic embodiment constitute the subject of the research.

For the purposes of this paper, we singled out main tenets of Mr. Hamill's personal brand and traced how they are represented and supported through his Twitter activity. Main communicative strategies and the linguistic means of their employment were analyzed.

Mark Hamill is held in high regard by his fans, which is reflected in the traits attributed to him. The main tenets of Mark Hamill's personal brand are the following: 1) honest and brave in his opinions; 2) humorous and ironic, a joker and a prankster; 3) humble and down-to-earth; 4) kind to people and animals; 5) loyal to his fanbase (mostly Star Wars and DC Joker); 6) mediacy – active on social media, digitally literate; 7) socially active.

This article explores how these traits attributed to Mark Hamill are instilled and perpetuated by means of certain communicative strategies. The analysis showed that this purpose is mainly achieved via the strategies of establishing the rapport with the target audience, display of the social awareness, career promotion and creating the sense of exclusivity. Each strategy is in its turn realized through a set of tactics.

The strategy of establishing rapport with the target audience consists in inspiring the target audience with a sense of closeness, bonding, familiarity and community.

The first tactics within this strategy employed in Mark Hamill's personal branding is replying and reacting to fans' Tweets. He gives personal and heartfelt responses, creating an air of understanding and appreciation of each and every fan. For example, replying to a Tweet by a Star Wars lover, whose father passed away, Mark expressed his condolences by Tweeting *"So sorry for your loss. [broken heart emoji]"* [7]. Such individual attention encourages fans to share their personal stories, to Tweet more to Mark Hamill and to feel a deeper respect and admiration towards him.

The second tactics consists in sharing fan art and video reviews. Mark Hamill resorts to tweeting fan-made pictures and videos accompanied by humorous or sentimental commentary. For example, Mark tweeted: *"#NoWords-Seeing fan's reactions to Luke's return is something I will cherish forever. Their anticipation seeing the X-Wing/Ep. 6 Robes/a lightsaber/a GREEN lightsaber/a gloved hand/an ungloved hand/a Force choke/R2-was OVERWHELMING & very moving to me"* [7] along with a link to a video with reactions to Luke Skywalker's (Mark Hamill's character) appearance in The Mandalorian series. By acknowledging the importance of this event for the fans, by noting all the meaningful details and expressing his own warm feelings towards Star Wars fandom, Mark Hamill achieves the deeper rapport with his followers.

The third tactics was found to be the publication of the entertaining content, including memes, jokes, funny videos and photos with Mark's comments. This helps to keep the audience interested and encourage them to follow the page closely. The present tactics also helps in branding Mark Hamill as a humorous and outgoing person, it creates a sense of community and relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

The fourth tactics within the framework of the strategy of establishing the rapport is pulling pranks and conducting experiments. For example, a fan tweeted: *"@HamillHimself you could just tweet "Mark Hamill" and you'd*

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get thousands of likes." [7]. And Mark Hamill did exactly as suggested, tweeting his name and indeed receiving over 614k likes. On different occasions Mark also tweeted *"#hashtag"*, *"tweet"* and *"!"* [7], which got thousands of likes and elicited a positive response from the audience who thought it to be witty, iconic and within Mark Hamill's character.

The second communicative strategy used in Mark Hamill's personal branding is the **display of social awareness**. This strategy consists in manifesting strong will and firm opinions on social and political matters, in taking action for the good of the society.

In terms of politics, Mark Hamill openly demonstrates his views. His civic stand is immediately obvious from the excessive tweeting during the US elections, Trump impeachment and the attack on the Capitol. He actively supports the Democratic party, retweets Barack Obama's publications and speaks strongly against Donald Trump and his politics, exposing his shortcomings. For example, Mark Hamill tweeted: *"YET ANOTHER "PERFECT" PHONE CALL-"Trump alternately berated Raffensperger, tried to flatter him, begged him to act and threatened him with vague criminal consequences if the secretary of state refused to pursue his false claims." #DonTheCon"* [7] exposing Donald Trump's dishonest attempts of winning the 2020 presidential elections.

Mark Hamill's charity initiative encompasses helping creating dolls based on children with Down syndrome, supporting military families and children in the LA hospital. For instance, in the Tweet *"I never get tired of reminding folks just how short I am for a Stormtrooper. I also never get tired of visiting with the wonderful kids at @ChildrensLA Get well soon, Richard! All the best from your pal, Mar [emoji of a camel] // @MakeMarchMatter"* [7] we see how Mark Hamill drew a parallel between a Star Wars quote and his charity work. Notably, he treats children in a personal and friendly way, bridging the age and status gap between them. This contributes to the image of being a humble and kind person and boosts his personal brand.

The third communicative strategy revealed by the present research is the **career promotion strategy**. It consists in informing and reminding the audience about highlights of the celebrity's career, increasing recognizability, drawing attention to their personal brand and maintaining interest to their personality.

One of the key tactics within this strategy is making references to Star Wars franchise. Luke Skywalker is a world-renowned character who became a hero and a symbol of hope for several generations, so associating himself with his most prominent role is extremely advantageous for Mark Hamill's personal branding. Even in order to express his political views, Mark draws parallels between the presidencies of Barack Obama,

Donald Trump and Joe Biden on one hand and the three original episodes of Star Wars on the other.

This way he integrates the franchise he is most famous for with the real life.

Another tactics within the career promotion strategy is the fanservice. Mark Hamill indulges his fans carrying out their requests, participating in the life of the fandom. For example, one user tweeted *"Now I wanna see Luke Skywalker dressed as The Joker..."* and Mark Hamill responded: *"I couldn't find Luke Skywalker dressed as The Joker anywhere, so how about The Joker dressed as Luke Skywalker instead? // (#JediJoker by @RickCelis)"* [7]. Joker and Luke Skywalker are Mark Hamill's two most famous roles. By granting fans' wishes and sharing their love for his characters, Mark becomes even more popular and loved by his followers.

And, finally, the last tactics within the present strategy is the interaction with other celebrities. The nature of this interaction varies from receiving Tweets of admiration from other celebrities (*"You (& Luke) have been immensely inspirational & impactful to my childhood & as an adult. To have shared a scene with you in @themandalorian is truly one of the biggest highlight, not just in my career, but in my life..."* [7] by Ming-Na Wen) to expressing his own appreciation (*"Tom Kane is enormously gifted actor & a genuinely nice person..."* [7]) and responding to prominent celebrities (*"...Thank you for having a servant's heart, Arnold. [folded hands emoji] // This is my favorite @Schwarzenegger film... EVER. [red heart emoji]"* [7]). Notably, Mark stays very humble and respectful through every interaction.

The fourth and final strategy identified by this research is the **strategy of creating the sense of exclusivity**. It consists in sharing rare, unknown or new content, so that the target audience feels compelled to follow the celebrity closely.

The first tactics lies in sharing old photos from set or from personal archives, provoking nostalgia and

reigniting the interest to the past relevant to actor's career. Within the scope of the present research, we came across Mark Hamill's childhood photos and old photos with former co-stars. All of the photos are accompanied by Mark's comments and captions.

The second tactics is sharing unknown stories from set. A follower tweeted a couple of old photos from shooting of the 5ᵗʰ episode of the Star Wars where Mark is hanging upside down and two people are holding him up. The actor replied to that Tweet with an explanation of how the scene was filmed: *"The longer you hang upside-down, the redder your face becomes. This was a way to counteract that between takes, so we could shoot longer without getting me out of the harness. #TimeIsMoney [money bag emoji]"* [7]. These details are of great value to ardent fans.

Finally, the third tactics is sharing new interviews and insights. Twitter is one of the quickest sources of news where you can learn about events almost as soon as they happen. This makes Mark Hamill's followers privy to all the latest news and updates.

The conducted analysis thus shows that communicative strategies are effective tools of personal branding, as they help to attract attention, revitalize and maintain interest to the celebrity, promote their career and perpetuate the desired image of themselves in the eyes of the public. Certain **linguistic means and stylistic devices** were also found extremely instrumental in Mark Hamill's self-marketing and constitute a part of his personal brand.

The research showed that Mark Hamill uses many references (mostly in the form of quotes) and parallelisms. For example, he tweeted: *"Inspirational Presidential Quotes: // When you do a thing, act as if the whole world were watching."- Thomas Jefferson // "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more & become more, you are a leader."- John Quincy Adams // "I love the poorly educated."- DJT"* [7], where he quoted the US presidents and drew parallel between their utterances in order to drive home his own political stance during the attack on the Capitol. Mark Hamill also frequently uses parallelisms between events in the outside world and his work as an actor (e.g., Senate elections in Georgia vs Mark's work on *Masters of the Universe* animated series).

One of the key instruments and traits of Mark Hamill's personal branding is the use of irony and parody. The majority of his Tweets are ironic or humorous, but the most prominent examples are found among the Tweets related to Donald Trump and his politics. For example, Mark tweeted: *"With 8 days left in this administration, it's not too late to get Mexico pay for his wall. [flag of Mexico emoji] [money bag emoji]"* [7], mocking Trump's broken promise. We also found multiple examples of Mark Hamill parodying the style of Donald Trump's Tweets and carrying them to the point of absurdity.

One of the main characteristics of Twitter-mediated personal branding in general and Mark Hamill's personal

branding in particular is creolized text. Creolized text means a text characterized with two constituents, verbal one and non-verbal one [4]. The specific nature of creolized text consists in one component of the text being unable to keep its initial interpretation without the other, i.e., all components of the text should be perceived simultaneously [4].

In his personal branding strategies, Mark Hamill uses such constituents of the creolized text as hashtags, emoji, uppercase letters, expressive punctuation, pictures, gifs, cartoons and videos. The research showed that Mark Hamill uses hashtags that are both creative and informative. Most of them are peculiar from linguistic point of view, for example: *#DonTheCon* – pun, *#DesperateDelusionalDeeplyDementedDon* – alliteration, *#BringItHomeGeorgia*, *#FreeRealityWinner* – slogans, *#ThankingYouInAdvance*, *#EnoughIsEnough*, *#WellWorthIt_GoodRiddance* – fixed phrases [7].

Mark Hamill is also a keen user of emoji and in his Twitter activity they acquire special meanings. Some of them are used instead of words: *"much ♥"* [red heart] [7] meaning "love" or *"Mar [emoji of a camel]"* [7] meaning "Mark Hamill" (phonetically "Mark Hamill" sounds like "Mar Camel" when spoken quickly). Some of the emoji carry symbolic meaning, for instance, the flags of different countries, emoji expressing emotions, hand emoji, jack-o'-lantern emoji, rainbow emoji etc.

Uppercase letters (caps lock) are used by Mark Hamill to express emotions, to draw attention to important information or to emphasize, for example: *"Oh PLEASE!"*, *"EVERYTHING this administration stands for"*, *"YOU MUST READ"* [7] etc. Similar functions are attributed to expressive punctuation. The research demonstrates multiple instances where punctuation is used for expressive purposes rather that grammatical: *"Appropriate?!"*, *"READ. EVERY. WORD."*, *"...wish her the happiest of birthdays!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!..."* [7] etc.

Mark Hamill's personal branding is extremely multimodal, as he uses pictures, gifs, cartoons and videos profusely, combining various media of conveying information. We, thus, receive information through visual, audial, spatial, linguistic and textual modi. Complex multimodal approach is indispensable for modern marketing and branding.

Mark Hamill's personal branding practices include the use of hypertext which manifests itself in the form of links to various outside sources. This is a way to both overcome the limitations of Twitter publications and to put Tweets into the larger context.

Slogans also form part of Mark Hamill's branding strategies. The most prominent examples include political hashtags like *#CountryOverTrump* and *#BanTrumpSaveDemocracy* [7].

One of the particular traits of Mark Hamill's personal branding on Twitter is the use of rhymes. For example, the rhyme *"When one impeachment won't suffice, // Damn his new crimes – impeach him twice!"* [7] makes the intended message more memorable and increases the desired

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effect. Another kind of rhymes identified by this research is a parody rhyme: *"To tweet, or not to tweet... that is the question: // Whether it's better online to suffer..."* [7], which clearly alludes Shakespearean "Hamlet".

Rhetorical questions are among the stylistic figures that are used extensively in Mark Hamill's personal branding. Most of them are of ironic and mocking nature, for example: *"And how is YOUR day going?"* and *"Did he wear his horns in court?"* [7].

Finally, clichés are fully represented in actor's Twitter activity. Expressions like *"better safe than sorry"* or *"it's just what the doctor ordered"* [7] make the speech sound more natural and sit better with the target audience.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The research followed Mark Hamill's Twitter activity in 2021 and analyzed the main communicative strategies employed by the actor for the purposes of the personal branding. The total amount of 575 Tweets singled out by means of continuous sampling method was analyzed.

The results suggest that all the tenets of Mark Hamill's personal brand are represented, supported and promoted through his Twitter activity, creating a solid image attractive to the target audience. This effect is achieved through various communicative strategies, namely the strategy of establishing the rapport with the target audience, the strategy of the display of the social awareness, career promotion strategy and the strategy of creating the sense of exclusivity. Each strategy is carried out by means of respective tactics.

Thorough analysis identified various linguistic and stylistic devices used in Mark Hamill's personal branding, viz quotation, parallelism, irony, parody, creolized text (hashtags, emoji, uppercase letters, expressive punctuation, pictures, gifs, cartoons, videos), hypertext, slogans, rhymes, rhetorical questions and clichés. The research showed that all of the abovementioned devices contribute to the formation, development and promotion of Mark Hamill's personal brand. The results corroborate that curated Twitter activity is a powerful tool of effective personal branding.

The p r o s p e c t s for further research include the analysis of personal brands of prominent figures in other fields and exploring alternative social media as personal branding platforms.

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ВІДОМОСТІ ПРО АВТОРА

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