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Strategic Organizational Discourse and Framing in Hypermodal Spaces

Abstract

Purpose: This article explores how organizations can strategically frame their legitimate perspective on a specific issue in order to gain salience and public support in a social media context.

Methodology: By means of framing theory and a critical perspective on strategic discourse in hypermodal spaces, the study examines in detail the discursive strategies and framing processes employed by a non-profit organization that faces local and global contestation of its corporate operations.

Findings: Through a critical discourse analysis of the organization's 385 Facebook posts during two periods of time, the results show how the corporate perspective is strategically framed and legitimized, but also challenged and consequently adapted in this hypermodal issue sub-arena. In addition to legitimizing the organizational perspective by providing evidence-based facts and external expert views as reliable and neutral sources, and echoing supporters' voices and actions as further endorsements, the organization also strategically manages the Facebook dialogue by delegitimizing counterarguments.

Originality: This study contributes to the corporate communication field by revealing how framing can be materialized in specific discursive strategies aimed to legitimize and delegitimize. It shows how such strategies are interrelated in hypermodal clusters in ways that sustain the organizational discourse, and can evolve across time and within the same actor's strategy. Methodologically, this study expands the research toolkit by introducing hypermodality in exploring framing and strategic organizational discourse.

Article classification: Research paper

Keywords: strategic organizational discourse, issue framing, social media sub-arenas, Facebook, hypermodality, critical discourse analysis

Introduction

In the context of the increasing use of social media platforms as issue arenas, this article provides a nuanced understanding of how organizations can strategically frame and communicate their legitimate perspective for gaining public support in a social media context. More specifically, this article explores framing processes and discursive strategies purposely employed on Facebook by the Thirty Meter Telescope Observatory Corporation, an organization that faces local and global contestation of its corporate operations.

The study draws on literature within framing theory and social media communication, and adopts a critical perspective on strategic discourse in hypermodal spaces. Framing, which essentially involves selection and salience (Entman, 1993), is a strategic activity (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014; Snow, Benford, McCammon, Hewitt, and Fitzgerald, 2014) in which relational power dynamics are embedded (Luoma-aho and Vos, 2010). Therefore, framing is relevant to corporate communication, communication management, reputation and legitimacy building (Hallahan, 1999, 2005; Ravazzani and Maier, 2017). It represents a primary tool for developing discursive strategies aimed at constructing a particular version of reality and challenging alternative or opposing perspectives. The role of discursive strategies in framing an organization's legitimate perspective is of increasing interest to communication scholars (Ihlen and Thorbjørnsrud, 2014). Organizational legitimacy is constructed and leveraged through employment of discursive strategies such as legitimations, because the perceptions of the organization by other actors is influenced through such strategies. According to critical discourse researchers, legitimations belong to the range of discursive strategies that can be used to represent and interpret reality in a desired way (van Leeuwen 2007, 2008; Fairclough 2010).

The use of legitimations in organizational discourse is of utmost importance in the interactive and dynamic context of social media where they can be employed “to legitimize, but also to de-legitimize, to critique” by various social actors (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 93). Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen (2014) found that social media platforms represent a new communicative space where interactive dialogue simultaneously enables and constrains strategic discourse. A detailed exploration of this multivocality requires a hypermodal perspective on communication in order to clarify the interplay of multiple semiotic modes and hypertextuality that exists in the messages exchanged in these digital public fora. Lemke (2002) pointed out the implications of this perspective by indicating that “hypermodality is more than multimodality in just the way that hypertext is more than plain text. It is not simply that we juxtapose image, text, and sound; we design multiple interconnections among them, both potential and explicit” (p. 300).

Building on these theoretical foundations, this study examines the case of the Facebook discursive strategies used by the Thirty Meter Telescope Observatory Corporation (mentioned as TMT in the rest of the article). The building of the telescope has become a source of international controversy between the scientific organization and a movement of “protectors” opposing its construction on the top of Mauna Kea, a mountain considered sacred by native Hawaiians. Acknowledging today’s extensive use of social media platforms as transformative organizational communication media (Haigh et al., 2013), this article presents a critical discourse analysis of the publicly available messages on the TMT’s Facebook wall to explain how the hypermodal legitimation strategies employed in this sub-arena contribute to articulating and amplifying the organization’s legitimate perspective, and are deliberately adjusted over time based on the dialectic between frames and events.

Theoretical Background

Organizations, Strategic Framing and Social Media

Since the organizational environment is increasingly complex and dynamic, and often characterized by conflicts of interest (Luoma-aho and Vos, 2010), framing represents a key strategic discursive action in order to construct a legitimate perspective about an organization, its decisions and actions.

As a matter of fact, framing can be a powerful tool in the hands of message creators because it shapes a message's meaning and possible interpretations by other social actors through inclusion, exclusion, emphasis, and contextualization (Entman, 1993; Hallahan, 1999, 2005). It is important that both organizations and stakeholders, in particular, social movements and activists engaging in organization-related debates, can be conceived of as message creators that develop their own discursive strategies aimed at undermining the symbolic resources of their opponents and persuading the public of the superiority of their claims and worldview.

Framing is, therefore, “forged in the interaction between challengers and powerholders” (Steinberg, 1998, p. 846) who compete for their favored definition of a problem or situation in order to gain salience and public support (Hallahan, 1999, 2005). This dialectical struggle of power becomes particularly apparent when organizational decisions and actions develop into publicly visible issues around which public opinion is formed (Hallahan, 2001). Such issues give birth to a tension between “cocreation of social reality” and “manipulation through propaganda” (Heath, 2006, p. 101). Luoma-aho and Vos (2010, p. 316) defined “issue arena” as a place of interaction where an issue is discussed by stakeholders and organizations within traditional and/or online media, and where the organization is only one player amongst others with their own agendas and framing strategies.

The extensive research on framing carried out by Snow and associates in the context of social movements (e.g., Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Benford, 1988; Snow et al., 2014) stressed how framing can be used in discourse to articulate particular visions and amplify certain aspects over others, revealing its nature of “an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction” (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614). In particular, Benford and Snow (2000) pointed out the meaning-making framing processes of articulation and amplification, defined as follows: “Frame articulation involves the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion (...). The frame amplification process involves accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others” (p. 623). These processes are facilitated and constrained by the specific discursive context in which they are embedded.

The digital environment and social media platforms, in particular, make up a new communicative space (Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen, 2014) for issue framing and contention. New media present a unique opportunity for legitimating an organization’s perspective (Ravazzani and Maier, 2017); at the same time, this democratization of the virtual environment also empowers other social actors to raise their voices (Ruehl and Ingenhoff, 2015) and promote their own issue framing (Etter and Vestergaard, 2015). Multivocality or polyphony (Castelló, Morsing, and Schultz, 2013) facilitate “discursive diversity” (Trittin and Schoenborn, 2015) and open up for alternative constructions of an organization’s perspective with the juxtaposition of multiple voices in the same artifact (Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen, 2014).

Coombs and Holladay (2014) considered social media platforms as distinct sub-arenas, defining a sub-arena as “a limited space where a message is ‘heard’ and potentially responded to by a restricted set of actors” (p. 43). Among social media sub-arenas,

Facebook is widely used as a corporate platform for promoting strategic discourse. More than 4,000 organizations created corporate Facebook sites in 2008 when first allowed, and stakeholders increasingly shift from visiting corporate websites to visiting their Facebook walls (Haigh, Brubaker, and Whiteside, 2013). “Facebook is an arena for interaction” (Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen, 2014, p. 6), and organizations increasingly rely on its dynamic and interactive functions in an effort to enhance their communication strategies (Ruehl and Ingenhoff, 2015) and participate in debates from which they were previously excluded (Castelló et al., 2013). Etter and Vestergaard (2015) showed the relevance of examining Facebook for issue framing because here, publics frame issues distinctly in comparison to other established public and corporate sources, and “previously silent stakeholders are able to express their opinions publicly and frame an organization in an unfortunate way” (p. 172).

Organizations, Discourse Strategies, and Hypermodality

As mentioned, organizational strategic discourse involves the development of discursive strategies aimed at fostering a particular version of reality and challenging alternative or opposing perspectives. In Fairhurst and Putnam’s words (2014), “discourse accomplishes communication” (p. 271). From a critical perspective, discourses can be understood as resources for representing some aspects of reality which can be drawn upon when those aspects have to be strategically recontextualized in communication (van Leeuwen, 2005, 2009b). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) highlighted the strategic aspect of this process of reality representation when defining discourses as “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality (...) developed in specific contexts and in ways which are appropriate to the interests of social actors in these contexts” (p. 4). Van Leeuwen (2008) drew particular attention to the fact that discourses “not only represent what is going on, they also evaluate, ascribe purposes to it, justify it, and so on, and in many texts these aspects of

representation become far more important than the representation of the social practice itself” (p. 6). Hence, the essential feature of this critical perspective on discourse is its focus on what is selected from reality to be recontextualized in discourse, and how that selection is based, in particular, on legitimations which are “reasons that either the whole of a social practice or some part of it must take place, or must take place in the way that it does” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 20).

In the context of social media, the discursive reality construction is influenced by two characteristics of contemporary digital communication: multimodality and hypermodality. Critical discourse researchers highlighted the meaning-making affordances of modes other than language in inducing social construction (Machin and Mayr, 2012). In particular, Lemke (2009) showed that “multimodal media make meaning by intersecting the semiotic resources of language, visual display, sound and music, cinematic movement, material artifacts, and abstract animation” (p. 283). This fluid intersection of several semiotic modes affects the overall framing and interpretation of any discourse as the distribution of meaning occurs across several modes and in different ways. Jewitt (2009) highlighted the fact that “the meaning realized by two modes can be aligned, at other times they may be complementary and at other times each mode may be used to refer to distinct aspects of meaning and be contradictory, or in tension” (p. 25). Van Leeuwen (2008) also acknowledged the impact of multimodality upon the discursive construction of legitimations: “Though language plays the central role in legitimation, some forms of legitimation can also be expressed visually, or even musically (...). And moral evaluations can be connoted visually or represented by visual symbols” (p. 120). This interplay of several semiotic modes is meant to draw attention to certain aspects of the recontextualized reality because “all modes, in different ways, offer means for the expression of discourses” (Jewitt, 2014, p. 28).

Organizational discourses appearing in social media sub-arenas are also embedded in specific contexts of hypermodality, which conditions the intended and perceived discourses. If multimodality is concerned with the inextricable interplay of several semiotic modes that shape communication and meaning, hypermodality highlights that “as meaning-makers, we live across institutions and media and we make meanings that no single medium or institution can control” (Lemke, 2009, p. 283). Hypermodality can simultaneously constrain and empower both the corporate communicators and their challengers, because “the medium in which both confrontation and partnership, both subversion and empowerment, is most fully afforded today is that of hypertext” (Lemke, 2002, p. 323). Consequently, a hypermodal perspective upon strategic organizational discourse draws attention to the fact that the distribution and interpretation of meaning in hypertexts are affected not only by the interplay of several semiotic modes but also by the presence of multilinear reading paths.

Taken together, the combination of framing theory with a critical perspective on strategic discourse can help scrutinize in more depth the discursive strategies of legitimation and evaluation and the framing processes of articulation and amplification that can be employed by organizations in order to strategically communicate and legitimize their corporate perspective on a certain issue. These strategies and processes can also be deliberately adapted over time when such a perspective is challenged and contested. Other researchers have also pointed out the close connection between issue framing and discourse (e.g. Bardhan, 2013; Johansson, 2007) in that discourse choices generate frames that convey particular reality constructions. In addition, in the context of the increasing use of social media platforms as multivocal issue sub-arenas, a hypermodal perspective on framing and discourse can help clarify the interplay of several semiotic modes and use of hypertextuality in the purposeful recontextualization of reality. Based on this framework, this article aims to explore in detail how an organization strategically employs hypermodal discursive strategies

that contribute to articulating, amplifying and adjusting over time its legitimate perspective in the Facebook sub-arena.

Method

Case and data

The Thirty Meter Telescope is a proposed astronomical observatory with an extremely large telescope to be completed by 2024. The project belongs to the nonprofit TMT Observatory Corporation, founded in June 2003 by the Association of Canadian Universities for Research in Astronomy (ACURA), the University of California (UC), and the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) (TMT, n.d.). The telescope became the source of local and international controversy when, in July 2009, the TMT Board of Governors selected Mauna Kea, in the state of Hawaii, as the preferred construction location. Local resistance to the project began shortly after this formal announcement, since Mauna Kea is considered by native Hawaiians as the most sacred mountain of the local culture and religion. Conservationists and environmentalists also oppose the project, pointing out the ecological damage it would cause to Mauna Kea, which is conservation land held in trust by the US State of Hawaii.

After October 7, 2014, the construction of the telescope on Hawaiian land started to attract considerable international coverage and attention (Johnson, 2014; Schweitzer, 2015; Sinco Kelleher, 2014) when protesters interrupted the groundbreaking ceremony and succeeded in postponing the construction work. At the beginning of April 2015, the arrest of 31 people who had blocked the roadway to impede the construction crews again from reaching the summit of Mauna Kea (*Big Island Video News*, 2015) caused the protest to grow virally across social media at a global level, thanks in part to the support of several celebrities using the hashtag #WeAreMaunaKea (Fox, 2015). The construction was impeded again by new demonstrations in June, with protestors camping on the access road and rolling large

boulders onto it. In addition to such energetic offline and online objections, on December 2, 2015, the State Supreme Court of Hawaii revoked the permit required for the telescope construction issued by the Hawaii Board of Land and Natural Resources, stating that the permitting process was flawed and should include another round of hearings and talks with appellants. In spring 2016, while engaging in a new permitting process and exploring alternative locations, the TMT Board's Chair, Henry Yang (2016), renewed the organization's interest in Mauna Kea by stating "At this time, Hawaii remains our first choice for the location of TMT."

In order to study the strategic framing of the organization's legitimate perspective, the hypermodal data have been collected from the official Facebook wall of the TMT (<https://www.facebook.com/TMTHawaii/>), which is linked to the main corporation website (<http://www.tmt.org/>). In addition, in order to explore how such strategies can be deliberately adjusted over time based on the dialectic between frames and events, data were collected during two periods of time: 10 days in 2015 (from the 11th to the 20th of April) and 10 days in 2016 (from the 11th to the 20th of April). The first period has been chosen because the 11th of April 2015 was the first date that posts had appeared on the organization's Facebook wall after the aforementioned arrest of 31 protesters. The second period, one year later, has been chosen in order to verify whether any changes have taken place as far as the choice of discursive strategies is concerned.

The Facebook hypermodal messages under scrutiny in these two periods are: all of the TMT organization's posts and answers to followers' comments; all of the supporters' and opponents' comments that have appeared on the organization's Facebook wall in response to its original messages. Given the depth of the qualitative exploration and the focus on the organization's strategic discourse through issue framing, and not on how the dialogue is developed between supporters and opponents, the data collection has not included the chain

of further comments by supporters and opponents. More specifically, the detailed analysis of the organization's Facebook wall has been carried out on 22 posts and 333 comments for the first period, and 20 posts and 10 comments for the second period, including a total of 59 images and two videos.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected hypermodal data were explored by employing van Leeuwen's concepts of discursive representations of social practices (2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). Van Leeuwen (2008) designed a typological framework which comprises several categories of legitimations that can occur both separately or in combination (pp. 105-106). For example: *authorization* (i.e., "legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested"), *moral evaluation* (i.e., "legitimation by (often very oblique) reference to value systems"), and *rationalization* (i.e., "legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action"). Besides, *evaluation* was considered as having a more important status than being just a subcategory of legitimation, adopting Hunston and Thompson's (2005) definition: "Evaluation is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (p. 5). Van Leeuwen's typological framework has been employed by other researchers in their exploration of discursive legitimation strategies; for example, by Vaara and Tienari (2008), realizing that "the discursive aspects of legitimation have remained underexplored" (p. 990).

It should be noted that the choice of a critical discourse analysis in this study - instead of, for example, a content analysis - is also motivated by the fact that it facilitates the identification and interpretation of fluid meaning-making patterns in framing. In their extensive review of the management and organizational literature, Cornelissen and Werner

(2014) highlighted the need for “expanding the methodological tool kit in frame analysis” (p. 219), and suggested going beyond content analysis focused on the occurrence and co-occurrence of keywords and/or expressions in actors’ discourses. In a similar way, Hardy also suggested that discourse analysts are “interested in interpreting multiple meanings, there is no shortcut way of applying systematized content analysis” (2001, in Grandien & Johansson, 2016, p. 338). From a similar perspective, Machin and van Leeuwen (2007) clarified that discourse analysis “is not an analysis of the form of the text, but the analysis of the form of knowledge that underlies the text” (p. 62).

Whereas discursive legitimations and evaluations are the focus of the present discourse analysis, the framing processes of articulation and amplification as defined by Benford and Snow (2000) are also considered. Framing processes are identified, described, evaluated, and compared in terms of how the frames are articulated and amplified through the aforementioned discursive strategies, namely legitimations and evaluations. Besides, attention is given to how framing processes change dynamically over time, instead of simply isolating frames as products of such an ideational work (Ryan, 2005; Snow et al., 2014).

The approach to the exploration of legitimations and evaluations employed by the TMT is first of all multimodal because Facebook is a multimodal medium. This feature has a clear influence on the discursive construction of a specific perspective based on written texts, images, and videos, and this approach has been proven to be central to contemporary communication practice (Maier and Andersen, 2014). In this light, even if “multimodal analysis is an intensive research process both in relation to time and labour” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 27), this analytical method was chosen in order to reveal how legitimacy is constructed in different ways at the level of multimodal ensembles in hypermodal spaces.

In the process of coding the posts and comments collected from the organization’s Facebook wall, the a priori codes have been van Leeuwen’s types of legitimations in their

multimodal manifestations. Other codes, taking the shape of a primary frame and several secondary frames, emerged from the collected data when meaning-making patterns started to appear in and across the selected hypermodal data. The secondary frames emerged through recurrent discursive strategies. The primary frame was then identified at a higher level of abstraction by looking at secondary frames' interrelations.

The transcription procedure was based upon using two Microsoft Word tables, one for each period considered, with vertical columns related to hypermodal discursive strategies found in each Facebook category of posts or comments used to express specific types of legitimations and evaluations. Then, as the research work moved to a more analytical type of coding work, one new column was added for secondary and then primary frames. The accuracy of data coding and transcription procedure, and the consistency of the interpretation were ensured by having two researchers who performed these activities in parallel.

Results

Articulation and Amplification of the Organization's Legitimate Perspective

According to the empirical evidence from the first period of time considered, the discursive strategies of legitimation and evaluation contribute to the hypermodal articulation and amplification of a primary frame that reflects a specific strategic position: TMT as provider of knowledge and community benefits.

This primary frame is articulated through a cluster of discursive strategies at the level of three overlapping secondary frames: TMT as Hawaiian culture and tradition expert; TMT as provider of knowledge; and TMT as community benefactor. The main legitimizing strategy employed by the organization to amplify the primary frame at the level of the secondary frames is that of invoking *impersonal authority*: The organization provides knowledge by hyperlinking to reliable sources, and simultaneously communicates the

position from which they speak as both provider of knowledge and community benefactor.

“We encourage you to read the FEIS and the Comprehensive Management Plan, linked below” (TMT, April 14, 2015).

The impersonal authority legitimations are usually combined with other categories of legitimations that also exploit the hypertext’s affordances by sending the readers to more sources of multimodal information. For example, with *evaluations*: “We highly encourage you to visit our website where this issue is addressed and review the FEIS, which includes over 500 comments and responses” (TMT, April 14, 2015). Alternatively, with *effect-oriented rationalizations*: “Please visit our website to learn more about our involvement in the community” (TMT, April 14, 2015). The repetition of the word “please” in several posts is not only an attempt to encourage the readers to take the indicated reading path, but also a means of maintaining the polite tone of the Facebook dialogue and of deflecting the anticipated negative comments of the opponents.

In the clusters of legitimations employed for framing the TMT as an expert in culture and tradition, the organization is positioned through their supporters’ comments. For example, *the role model authority legitimation* invoked by a supporter is combined with both *tradition authority* and *expert authority* in order to nuance and strengthen the legitimating effect: “The telescopes of that day were less sophisticated than they are today, but that doesn’t diminish the fact that King Kalākaua was an ardent supporter of astronomy, whose belief in Hawaii’s potential role in the field has been well documented. In fact, it was after the king’s visit to California’s Lick Observatory that he expressed his interest in having an observatory in Hawaii” (TMT, 14 April 2015). Implicitly, the status of the organization is strengthened when various types of authorities are supporting the organization’s position as far as the telescope’s building is concerned.

The amplification of the primary frame at the level of the secondary frames is also ensured by a series of *means-oriented* and *goal-oriented rationalizations* which provide precise and evaluative information about donated sums of money and the organization's commitment to the Hawaiian community: "We believe in STEM education, which is why we launched The Hawaii Island New Knowledge (THINK) Fund in 2014 to better prepare Hawaii Island students to master STEM and to become the workforce for higher paying science and technology jobs in Hawaii's 21st century economy. We will make an annual contribution of \$1 million to the Fund, which is administered by the Hawaii Community Foundation and Pauahi Foundation" (TMT, 14 April 2015). The reference to other respected parties is also discursively strengthening the organization's position as provider of knowledge and reliable community benefactor. The identity of supporting organizations is visually revealed through the images of their logos. The strong connection between the organization and such powerful parties is highlighted hypermodally as the organization addresses them directly, with the text providing hyperlinks to their Facebook walls. In a multimodal post expressing the organization's gratitude toward The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii for its support, the whole message of the president appears accompanied by her smiling, close-up photo. The images of those providing testimony and support frequently appear either in close-up or long shots inserted into the posts related to the organization's connections with high-profile parties. In another post, the gratitude statement is followed by a link to a supporting article from the Foundation's website: "Thank you to the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation for your continued support!" (TMT, April 17, 2015). The link also visualizes the telescope's image that accompanies the respective article, complementing the statement multimodally. In fact, various images of the telescope appear recurrently on the TMT's Facebook wall. These are not directly posted by the TMT, but hyperlinked to other

multimodal sources of information, such as journals and websites that include the telescope's image on the front page.

The grateful attitude is also manifested toward various individuals who support the organization and its main project. For example, toward a supporting student who appeared on Hawaiian television: "Thank you, Mailani, for showing your support!" (TMT, April 19, 2015). A link to the TV program about the student's pro-TMT stance is also provided by the organization and thus multimodally enhances the impact of the student's testimonial on the organization's Facebook wall, too. Although these are only individual testimonials, their effect as *role model authority* legitimations is not diminished because these individuals are well-known in their respective communities. As hyperlinks are provided in such examples, all of these legitimation strategies reinforce multimodally and hypermodally the framing of the organization as provider of knowledge.

The discursive effect of all the aforementioned legitimations is also enhanced by the fact that these statements are direct or indirect answers to angry rhetorical questions posed by those who are against the telescope's construction. For example: "So we should destroy Hawaiian lands just to satisfy your guys thirst for knowledge?" (TMT Opponent, April 17, 2015); "How can one claim to be Hawaiian yet feel the need to upset culturally sacred ground?" (TMT Opponent, April 14, 2015). The intended delegitimizing force of these questions is weakened by the fact that the direct or indirect answers provided by the organization are strategically based upon facts-loaded argumentation. The answers can also be rather laconic when the organization intends to make the ignorance of the opponents obvious. For example, when one of the opponents asks angrily "When has anything man made been water tight?" (TMT Opponent, April 14, 2015), the answer is short and condescending: "We can assure you that there are lots of things man made that are water tight" (TMT, April 14, 2015).

When the TMT is acting as a strategic manager of its Facebook dialogue, the organization is also framed as a provider of knowledge about how one should behave in this sub-arena. The authoritative directive messages are meant to show the fact that those who are rebuked are people who have not mastered the Facebook online behavior, and that their lack of expertise in this field might be implicitly extended to their lack of expertise related to the issue being discussed. The tone is also informal in some of the posts, but the authoritative stand is still maintained in an evaluative way: “Hi everyone, please keep the comments free of attacks against any individuals, groups or entities. We’d like to keep the conversation open and respectful to all parties involved. Violators will be banned. Thank you.” (TMT, April 18, 2015). In one of the comments, the organization is blatantly criticized for its actions when managing the community discourse. The organization’s answer legitimizes their course of action in an evaluative way: “Our policy is to delete only comments that display vulgar or hate language - from either side of this issue. Whereas we don’t know what happened to your wife’s comments, we assume they did not display that tone, and so can only ask that she repost them” (TMT, April 14, 2015). In such cases, the organization has a definite advantage over those engaged in the hypermodal dialogue. They use this advantage strategically in order to legitimize the organization’s status and expertise explicitly in this virtual space, and implicitly in the outside world. Simultaneously, the organization encourages a positive dialogue, a favorable attitude, and a championing spirit by directly addressing its prospective supporters from all over the world and providing them with promotional material: “Want to show your support? Send us a private message on Facebook with your mailing address and we’ll send you a bumper sticker and button!” (TMT, April 17, 2015).

The primary frame is also sustained through the recurrent usage of the imperative mode (e.g., “learn more”, “get the facts”) when the TMT is framed as provider of knowledge.

By using these verbal forms, the organization attempts to guide Facebook users hypermodally and lead their access to specific types of knowledge. This strategic choice of what is shown or shared through hyperlinks shapes the processes of framing the organization as provider of knowledge.

The effect of the *verbal legitimations* is recurrently enhanced by *visual evaluations*. Images of people in various supporting meetings, of promotional material, of journal articles, of supporting organizations' logos, and of supporters, in general, accompany both the posts and comments of the organization. The TMT takes full advantage of Facebook-specific sub-arena affordances in that very seldom does one of its posts consist solely of either words or images. Thus, text, images, and hyperlinks form meaning-making hypermodal clusters sustaining the framing processes.

Finally, these legitimizing strategies reveal hidden aspects of the organization's relationship with its opponents. In its posts and comments, the organization has to be careful not to stir up the opponents' anger by directly claiming an expert status as far as Hawaiian culture and tradition are concerned. However, TMT also has to portray itself as having such a status in order to win the debate about whether or not building another telescope on Mauna Kea is beneficial for all parties involved. Therefore, in order to defend the legitimacy of the organizational perspective, the most frequently employed legitimations are those of authorization that invoke the expertise of other parties that may or may not be involved in the debate. By employing such legitimation strategies, the TMT is also shielded from directly entering the uncontrollable arena of Facebook comments. Moreover, the organization's legitimation strategies are also imbued by thanks addressed both to supporters and opponents in order to reinforce the image of an impersonal entity.

The Dialectic Between Frames and Events: Framing Variation After One Year's Time

In the second period of time examined, the positioning of the organization on its Facebook wall was realized differently due to the events that had taken place since April 2015, especially the legal developments of December 2015. First, during the same number of days, there were fewer posts and fewer comments. Contrary to the first examined period, the hypermodal dialogue in this period only includes the organization and its supporters because there are no comments from opponents. Second, the controversy related to the telescope's building was no longer explicitly the main focus of the organization's posts. Although the primary frame remains the same, its articulation and amplification through discursive strategies at the level of the secondary frames underwent several changes.

The TMT's expertise in Hawaiian culture and tradition is weakly represented. Only one post is indirectly related to this secondary frame when multimodally legitimizing the organization's perspective by providing proof of Hawaii's long history with the space program: an archive image of the Hawaii customs' document signed by the Apollo 11 crew after their historic trip to the moon. There is only one comment that bluntly explicates the hidden link between the post, and the respective historical fact and future building of the telescope: "I am for TMT" (TMT Supporter, April 12, 2016).

The organization's framing as provider of knowledge is still amplified through a series of *expert authority legitimations*, but in this period of time, these multimodal legitimations are first of all meant to strengthen the organization's status among other prestigious providers of scientific knowledge, from organizations (e.g., NASA, Carnegie Observatories, W.M. Keck Observatory) to individuals (e.g., Stephen Hawking). By sharing posts accompanied by images from their Facebook walls or websites communicating knowledge that is not directly related to the telescope, the organization legitimizes its status as an equal among these, and implicitly, the significance of the telescope. For example, in a

post shared by the TMT, Stephen Hawking praises the work done using another famous observatory (One World Observatory in New York): “It is exciting to be involved in such an ambitious project, pushing the boundaries of ingenuity and engineering” (TMT, April 12, 2016). When sharing one of the NASA’s articles, the organization displays that observatory’s image and addresses the other observatory, directly suggesting its importance and implying its kinship with the future TMT: “Happy 25th anniversary of Compton Gamma Ray Observatory” (TMT, April 11, 2016).

The strategic framing of the TMT as a provider of knowledge is also discursively realized through *role model authority legitimations* manifested in hypermodal posts celebrating events of the past that represent milestones in the history of astronomy. For example, the post celebrating the 55th anniversary of Gagarin’s journey into space, which is accompanied by archive photos of Gagarin and the launching of the spaceship.

Apart from such multimodal legitimations that implicitly make the link between the past and the future of astronomy with the prospective TMT, the organization’s framing as a provider of knowledge is manifested through posts related to significant events of the present, such as the open house of the UH Institute for Astronomy. Several multimodal posts are related to this event, both before and after it has taken place. The organization directly addresses its Facebook supporters by inviting them and thanking them for their participation: “Free on Sunday and on Oahu? Come to the UH Institute for Astronomy open house” (TMT, April 13, 2016); “Come find us at the UH Institute for Astronomy open house today” (TMT, April 17, 2016); “Thank you to everyone who stopped by” (TMT, April 19, 2016), etc. Each of the posts is also hypermodal including both links and clusters of photos showing adults and children interacting; one of the invitation posts is also accompanied by an image of the organization’s stand on which promotional materials in support of building of the telescope are displayed. It can be assumed that the rather implicit *goal-oriented legitimations* of the

other posts related to this event are strategically linked to the telescope through this single

Primary frame	Secondary frames	Hypermodal	Typical examples
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image.

The other secondary frame, namely the TMT as a provider of community benefits, is manifested in a hypermodal post which also shares a video with 659 views but no comments: “With the THINK Fund and the Akamai internship program, we’re helping to create a future where the next generation need not leave Hawaii to pursue their passions and dreams #ImuaTMT #WeSupportTMT” (TMT, April 20, 2016). The *effect-oriented legitimation* of the text is accompanied by clusters of legitimations employed in the video by those who are expressing their support for the telescope’s construction. The second video posted during this period is, in fact, an older one from June 2015 with 4171 views. In this post, the supporters are encouraged to act upon the knowledge provided by the organization: “Here’s a #ThrowBackThursday video for you. We’ve had a lot of new likes since we posted this, and it might be a good time to reshare it” (TMT, April 14, 2016). Both videos are supposed to multimodally bring the supporters closer to the Facebook viewers through an enhanced sense of immediacy created by the combination of moving images and voices.

Table 1 presents selected examples of hypermodal discursive strategies that articulate and amplify the framing of TMT in the two periods of time considered.

		discursive strategies	First period	Second period
TMT Observatory Corporation as provider of knowledge and community benefits	TMT Observatory Corporation as Hawaiian culture and history expert	Tradition authority legitimations Expert authority legitimations Role-model authority legitimations Evaluations	Tradition authorization: “King Kalākaua was an ardent supporter” + hyperlink (TMT, 14 April 2015)	Tradition authorization: “Hawaii has had a long history with the space program” + still image (TMT, 12 April 2016)
	TMT Observatory Corporation as provider of knowledge	Impersonal authority legitimations Expert authority legitimations Role-model authority legitimations Evaluations	Expert authorization: “We will have cultural, archeological, and construction monitors on site at all times” (TMT, 14 April 2015)	Role model authorization: “Mahalo to the Yes! TMT supporters at the Rotary Club of Kona Sunrise and Rotary Club of North Hawaii presentations today. Gordon Squires spoke of the inspiring science” (supporter) + hyperlink + still images (TMT, 17 April 2016)
	TMT Observatory Corporation as community benefactor	Goal-oriented rationalizations Means-oriented rationalizations Effect-oriented rationalizations Evaluations	Effect-oriented instrumental rationalization: “Please visit the Hawaii Community Foundation’s website for details on how the THINK Fund has been benefiting the community” + hyperlink (TMT, 14 April 2015)	Effect-oriented instrumental rationalization: “We’re helping to create a future where the next generation need not leave Hawaii to pursue their passions and dreams” + hyperlink + video with testimonials (TMT, 20 April 2016)

Discussion and Conclusion

The main purpose of this study has been to reveal how the hypermodal legitimation strategies employed by an organization in the Facebook sub-arena contribute to articulating and amplifying its legitimate perspective, and how these can be purposefully adapted over time based on the dialectic between frames and events.

First, the discourse analysis of the 385 hypermodal Facebook posts (including 59 images and two videos) allowed a thorough understanding of how the organization

strategically built and leveraged its legitimate position in support of the telescope's construction in this issue sub-arena. The strategic organizational discourse was accomplished by putting the expertise of the organization and the significance of the project for both the scientific and human communities at the center; moreover, by balancing a commitment to Hawaiian culture and community with the responsibility toward scientific knowledge and advancement. Thus, the strategic organizational discourse revolved around the possibility for co-existence of science and cultural-religious aspects, which can serve local and global community interests, well-being, and development. In addition to legitimizing its perspective by providing evidence-based facts and external expert views as reliable and neutral sources, and echoing supporters' voices and actions as further endorsements, the organization strategically managed the Facebook dialogue in order to delegitimize counterarguments. Here, the organization appeared to proactively anticipate disapproval, respond more or less directly to overt criticism, and point out its opponents' lack of appropriate online behavior and thus, implicitly, of expertise on the issue.

Second, when comparing the two periods of time, the analysis revealed the evolving nature of social constructions in the virtual and interactive issue sub-arena of Facebook. The analysis of the discursive construction of legitimation and evaluation in the second period disclosed a change in framing in accordance with event developments. Here, the strategic organizational discourse showed to be prevalently built around the organization's status as provider of knowledge and expertise, and not around the telescope issue as such. Thus a more implicit, indirect legitimacy was strategically constructed by accentuating the TMT's qualities and concretely realized through hypermodal posts focused on astronomy and prestigious actors and events in the scientific sphere. With the strategy adopted in the first period, the organization consistently drew on the explicit reference to supporters and their online and offline endorsements. This proves that stakeholders who are willing to sustain and

cooperate with an organization on a specific issue can add to the organizational social capital (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010).

Based on these results, it is possible to maintain that the overall strategic organizational discourse was built on some degrees of coherence over time, as the primary frame remained the same. However, the organization's discursive strategy was adapted by shifting the relative prominence and scope of the secondary frames, and the frequency of posts. Thus, these results show that variation in framing a legitimate perspective may occur over time without disrupting the main discursive foundation. Moreover, variation and frequency of communication are to be explained in connection with the level of activity of the organization's Facebook opponents, where the organization reduced the number of posts and the focus of its discursive strategy when no counter-strategy was needed. The rather limited number of both organizational posts and followers' comments in the second period analyzed might also signal that the discussion had temporarily moved to other arenas. This shows how priorities can change in an online discussion environment, and how organizations strategically target the best-suited arenas and/or sub-arenas in which to express their perspective at a specific point in time (Luoma-Aho and Vos, 2010).

The analysis also dissected the complexity of the discursive strategies and framing processes realized by the organization through multimodality and hypermodality. The TMT strategically exploited Facebook affordances, in which a combination of text, images, videos, and hyperlinks in nearly all of the analyzed posts contributed to shaping and strengthening the strategic organizational discourse. In particular, such a combination was used to leverage its legitimacy by directing readers to powerful influencers of the organization's framing, such as external expert authorities and supporters.

Taken all together, this study contributes to enhancing the understanding of how an organization can strategically frame and leverage its legitimate perspective in the hypermodal

sub-arena of Facebook. The theoretical and analytical frameworks helped uncover the specific discursive strategies aimed to legitimize and delegitimize, and to explore their concrete realization in multimodal and hypermodal ways. This is a timely and highly relevant matter, given the proliferation of social media platforms as issue sub-arenas that come to transcend nation-state borders (Hewitt, 2011; Snow et al., 2014). In these virtual, interactive and hypermodal contexts, strategic organizational discourse aimed at legitimization is empowered but also challenged, because “instead of maintaining legitimacy in traditional corporate-centric ways (...), corporations need to acknowledge the polyphony of social media and work in other forms of participating in the legitimation process” (Castelló et al., 2013, p. 690). While exploring these aspects, this study also shed light on how such discursive strategies contributed to the dynamic framing of the organization’s legitimate perspective, by showing that variation can occur dynamically (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Hewitt, 2011; Snow & Byrd, 2007; Snow et al., 2014) not only across different actors, but also across time and within the same actor’s strategy.

Finally, the study expands the methodological toolkit (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014) in exploring framing and strategic organizational discourse. This also responds to Steinberg (1998) who underscored that “the framing perspective is deficient because it lacks a critical perspective on the stuff of framing itself – discourse” (p. 682). Besides addressing these methodological challenges, this research work has complemented the critical discourse analysis by including a hypermodal perspective that broadens the usual focus on written and/or oral texts and acknowledges the new affordances of digital media.

This study presents some limitations that could guide future research. Despite the explanatory work done for the systematic understanding and replicability of the selected approach, the present study represents a first step of extensive future work. A future study could include more cases in order to expand the range of discursive strategies aimed to

legitimize and delegitimize beyond the specific issue and events under scrutiny here.

Another relevant research work could include the investigation and comparison of different virtual sub-arenas in which issue framing might present peculiar dynamics and contribute to the transnational influence of discursive practices.

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