The Informative Dimension of Product Launch Press Releases

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Abstract: *In the paper "The Informative Dimension of Product Launch Press Releases", I aim at studying linguistic and extralinguistic features that support the informative role of press releases issued in relation to the launch of new products. The paper features a qualitative analysis of a corpus of 20 press releases from the automotive industry, taken from the international websites of a wide variety of car brands. It highlights features related to informative discourse, as well as features related to digital multimodal discourse. Thus, I consider this to be a present-day topic, a paperwork highlighting communication strategies used in product launch press releases, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of these marketing PR tools.*

Keywords: *informative discourse, press release, product launch, digital discourse*

1. Introduction

The rapid development of technology has led to a great number of new forms and concepts related to communication, which warrant research for effective application in professional fields. As such, the purpose of this paper is to highlight and present elements that support the

informative dimension of product launch press releases, which are a tool of marketing PR communication used today. In order to have a theoretical framework for the analysis, I have consulted a number of sources mentioned in the *Expert sources consulted* section.

2. Research method

The research method used consists of a quantitative analysis of elements of product launch press releases that assist in fulfilling their informative role. The quantitative analysis had the goal of featuring specific examples of characteristics mentioned in the consulted expert sources.

The corpus underlying the present research includes 20 press releases retrieved from the English language versions of international websites maintained by various car manufacturers from Europe (Renault, BMW, Open, Ferrari, Alpha Romeo, Dacia, Peugeot, Volvo, Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, Aston Martin, Audi), North America (Lexus, Tesla, Chevrolet), and Asia (Tata Motors, Honda, Toyota), more exactly product launch press releases related to recently released car models.

I have chosen a wide variety of car brands from various regions of the world, but also a variety in terms of the types of cars that are commercialised under these brands. This geographical, cultural, and potentially linguistic variety can showcase current trends in press-release writing.

3. Results

A first element one can identify within the corpus that supports the informative discourse dimension is the high embedment of numerical information:

'5.0-liter V8 engine'
'Powered by a 3.5-liter V6 producing 296 horsepower and 263 lb.-ft. of torque'
'10 airbags
'48-month/50,000 mile basic limited warranty with roadside assistance for 48 months/unlimited miles.'
'72 months/70,000 miles powertrain and restraint system coverage'
'72 months corrosion perforation protection coverage'
'eight-cylinder unit with a displacement of 4.4 litres'
'From 0 to 100 km/h (62.1 mph) in 4.7 seconds. The new Audi S5 Coupé combines dramatic design with the performance of a sports car. Its newly developed, turbocharged V6 engine produces 260 kW (354 hp) and consumes just 7.3 liters of fuel per 100 km (32.2 US mpg). With an unladen weight of 1,615 kilograms (3,560.5 lb), the car is 60 kilograms (132.3 lb) lighter than its predecessor. '
'From its 2,995 cc of displacement, the V6 TFSI produces 260 kW (354 hp), which is 15 kW (21 hp) more than the previous engine. A constant 500 Nm (368.8 lb-ft) (plus 60 Nm/44.3 lb-ft) of torque is available from a low 1,370 all the way to 4,500 rpm. In the NEDC, the new 3.0 TFSI in the S5 Coupé consumes just 7.3 liters per 100 kilometers (32.2 US mpg) – a CO2 equivalent of 166 grams per kilometer (267.2 g/mi).'
'Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 7.4 – 7.3 (31.8 – 32.2 US mpg)
Combined CO2 emissions in g/km: 170 – 166 (273.6 – 267.2 g/mi)'
'At a starting price of INR 3.20 Lakhs, ex-showroom, New Delhi, for the Revotron 1.2L (petrol) variant and INR 3.94 Lakhs, ex-showroom, New Delhi, for the Revotorq 1.05L (diesel) variant, the TIAGO will be available for sale, across the country in over 597 Tata Motors sales outlets, from today.'
'consolidated revenues of INR 2,62,796 crores (USD 42.04 billion) in 2014-15'
'With over 9 million Tata vehicles plying in India'

'The new Transporter BlueMotion has a gross vehicle weight of 2.7 tonnes, and a payload of 839 kg, which is up to 121 kg more than that of the short wheelbase T26 2.0-litre TDI 102 PS five-speed manual.'
'40-year heritage'
'The hatchback is 30 mm wider and 130 mm longer than the previous-generation five-door Civic. The car is 20 mm lower than its forebear'
'16 kg lighter than that of the previous generation Civic, while exhibiting 52 percent greater torsional stiffness.'

All of this numerical information supports the informative discourse dimension by satisfying the expectation of completeness of information.

For reasons of accuracy and precision, certain press releases display numerical or other types of information in tables, which also contributes to the informative characteristic of the text by offering complete information. One initial example is the press release from the Volkswagen vans division:

Basic price exc VAT	VAT	RRP inc VAT	OTR package	OTR exc VAT	OTR inc VAT
£19,670.00	£3,934.00	£23,604.00	£987.00	£20,540.00	£24,591.00

	Fuel economy		CO_2 emissions
Urban mpg	Extra-urban mpg	Combined mpg	145g/km
40.9	58.9	51.4	

	Performance	
Power (PS@rpm)	Torque (Nm@rpm)	Top speed (mph)
102PS @ 3000-3750	250 @ 1,500-2750	62

The press releases also contain a great amount of technical terms referencing specific technologies in the automotive industry or related technical concepts:

'electronic limited-slip differential'
'horsepower'
'Pre-Collision Assist with pedestrian detection, distance alert, lane-departure warning, lane-keeping assist and Driver Alert System'
'transient overboost technology'
'manual transmission'
'low-speed tip-in response'
'real-time adaptive shift scheduling'
'Steering wheel-mounted shift paddles'
'quad-tip exhaust'

With regard to factuality and surprise value, these characteristics of informative discourse are self-evident in the press releases that comprise corpus because of the communication situation and relevant subject.

All the technical information presented in the press releases can be verified (e.g. through measurements using the products) and the subject matter is a real-world object, namely a car model. The communication situation is that of an organisation issuing information related to the launch of a new car model, and it can be easily induced that this action would only be done in a time frame around the launch of the new product. It is also possible to verify the surprise value characteristic for most of the corpus since the grand majority of the press releases mention the date.
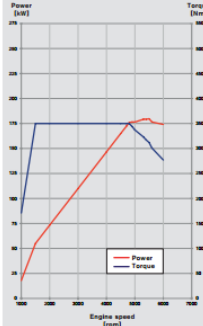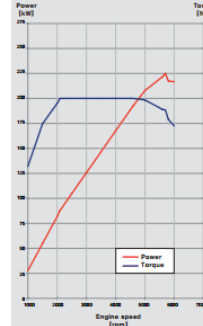
As instances of digital discourse, the press releases that make up the corpus use hyperlinks to give the reader access to more information.

The press releases as they appear on the websites demonstrate a level of interactivity and give the reader several options to see more information beyond the actual text.

The Volvo press release of the corpus is a good example of this. 'More details around the powertrain offer can be found in the Technical Specifications.' Clicking on 'Technical Specifications' downloads the Technical Specifications document for the car model, shown in the screenshot below. Naturally, this linking to the technical specifications of the product supports the completeness of information of the press release.

Volvo XC60

ENGINES	T5 & T5 AWD (B4204T11)	T6 & T6 AWD (B4204T9)
Type	In-line 4-cyl. turbocharged	In-line 4-cyl. supercharged and turbocharged
Configuration	Transverse, front & all wheel drive	Transverse, front & all wheel drive
Displacement, cm³	1969	1969
Bore (mm)	82.0	82.0
Stroke (mm)	93.2	93.2
Engine cylinder block material	Aluminium	Aluminium
Cylinderhead material	Aluminium	Aluminium
Compression ratio	10.8:1	10.3:1
Valves, no/cylinder	4	4
Camshafts	2	2
Engine management system	Gasoline direct injection	Gasoline direct injection
Ignition sequence	1 - 3 - 4 - 2	1 - 3 - 4 - 2
Engine idling speed, rpm	850±100	850±100
Fuel, rec. octane	95–98 RON	95–98 RON
Max output, kW (hp)/rpm	180 (245)/5500	225 (306)/5700
Max torque, Nm/rpm	350/1500–4800	400/2100–4800
POWER AND TORQUE →		
Manual gearbox/final drive	-	-
Automatic gearbox/final drive	AW TG-81SC 3.329 / 3.329	AW TG-81SC 3.329 / 3.329
PERFORMANCE		
Gearbox	Automatic (FWD) Automatic (AWD)	Automatic (FWD) Automatic (AWD)
Acceleration, 0–100 km/h (sec)	7.2 7.2	6.9 6.9
Top speed, km/h	210 210	210 210
Fuel consumption l/100 km (Combined)	6.7 7.5	7.0 7.7
CO_2 g/km	157 175	163 179

94

4. Expert sources consulted

In order to create this work, I have consulted a number of resources in order to gain insight into aspects related to informative discourse and possible features of press releases that could be related to the informative dimension.

In Preformulating the News: An Analysis of the Metapragmatics of Press Releases (Jacobs, 1999) there is the mentioning of a feature that is specific to press releases: preformulation, which refers to how press releases are created in order to anticipate the formulation of news articles. However, Jacob's book predominantly touches upon political press releases instead of those pertaining to the launching of new products.

According to Kinneavy (1971: 129), there are three basic features of informative discourse, namely factuality, comprehensiveness and surprise value.

Factuality refers to the property of a discourse of being based on facts.

Comprehensiveness covers three dimensions: completeness of information, readability and use of familiar frames, schemata and situation models based on spatial and temporal proximity.

Surprise value refers to the novelty of the information in a piece of discourse, to new rather than outdated information.

According to Kinneavy (1971: 35), the simultaneous presence of all three characteristics is a sine qua non of informative discourse and the absence of any of these major characteristics would generate a different discourse type.

A. Mucchielli explains hypertext in relation to digital text: 'This principle of the hypertext is well-known to those that use a computer or browse the Internet. In a text, a word (or a figure) sends to another text (or another multimedia element), that brings an additional comment. When we click that word (or figure), its explanation appears on the screen. This comment is in itself composed of multimedia elements that can send to other explanations and comments… and so on. Thus, to each text there is the attachment of an assembly of

explanations that enrich it and clarify its meaning. The final meaning of the text is thus composed of itself and of this assembly of annotations attached to its internal elements' (my translation, Mucchielli *in* Cabin Ph., Dortier J.-Fr., 2010: 177-178).

5. Conclusions

Based on the theoretical framework provided by the consulted resources, we have performed a qualitative analysis of the corpus of product launch press releases.

The informative dimension is supported by features such as the high embedment of numerical information, the use of formatting such as bullet points and tables to directly present information to the reader, the use of technical terms describing specific technologies in the automotive industry.

Rather than being preformulated in anticipation of the formulation of news articles, many of the press releases that make up the corpus present comprehensive and direct information to the reader.

The abundance of numerical information and detailed information about the products are features of the majority of the press releases in the corpus; however, there are distinctions in the focus and exceptions that do not present these features, such as the press release from Ferrari, where the only information that is communicated is in relation to the actual product launch event. This press release contrasts with the Mercedes-Benz press release, which is very lengthy and presents the product thoroughly, even with charts highlighting numerical differences between the car model and its previous versions.

Virtually, all the press releases featured extralinguistic elements in order to promote the products. Images were present in all press releases and hyperlinks leading to additional information were common.

In conclusion, product launch press releases are highly informative communication tools for the purpose of promoting products directly to potential consumers.

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