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CHAPTER THREE

THE DIGITAL REPRESENTATION OF AN INDUSTRIAL CLUSTER THROUGH ITS CORPORATE WEBSITE IMAGE: ONLINE DISCOURSE AND GENRE ANALYSIS

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In the high-tech world, if you're not on the net, you're not in the know
—*The Economist*

0. Abstract

Genre analysts, especially in the area of academic discourse, have emphasised the idea of change in genres. Genres are dynamic instances that evolve as society changes (Swales, 1990; Devitt, 1993 in Posteguillo, 2003: 31) due to their role as communicative actions for knowledge transmission. As part of society, industrial clusters and their corresponding discourse communities also adapt their communicative practices and their cognition mechanisms (generic conventions) to this evolution. Accordingly, the communicative actions of discourse communities (of which industrial clusters are an example) have evolved to fit and benefit from the advances offered by new technologies. The adaptation of these mechanisms of cognition to the demands imposed by the times has thus necessarily implied the evolution and change of such mechanisms: genres. As a result, the concept of genre has given way to a relatively new concept, that of digital genre or cybergenre.

The increasing use that industrial clusters and their respective discourse communities make of “new” digital genres obeys the potential they present for assembling in a single genre (the website) a series of features impossible to find in more traditional ones, and for containing smaller cybgenres with different degrees of evolution compared with traditional genres. Among the characteristic features of cybergenres we find interactivity, a pre-eminent role of image, audio and video, quick and easy information access, worldwide scope, immediate

spread and effectiveness. Hence, cybergenres connect with the globalising mood of contemporary societies and ground, with the help of an adequate online discourse and awareness of community implications, modern, up-to-date corporate website images characterised by a series of recursive features to be found in each individual company website.

Thus, the corporate (website) image offered by industrial clusters in general and by the Spanish ceramic industrial cluster in particular is enhanced by the use of genres that fit and follow the logic of the times in terms of evolution (cybergenres). These digital genres extend the potential of traditional ones in terms of meeting the expectations and reflecting the communicative practices of discourse communities, allowing the creation of a coherent, effective and easily identifiable corporate website image.

1. Introduction

Genres are organizing structures that shape and represent the communicative actions and practices of discourse communities through their use. The importance of genre as a “shaper” and “communicator” of knowledge is latent in any discourse community interaction. Although genre and industrial clusters may at first sight seem to be two concepts with very little in common, the concepts of communication and discourse community do not seem so far apart. In fact, communication is fundamental in almost every aspect of life and it is the presence of genre in every single communicative situation that makes these concept pair relationships possible and easily understandable. Certain genres tend to occur recursively in certain communities becoming cognitive mechanisms that help to strengthen the net constituted by the community. Therefore, genre and industrial clusters -understood as instances of discourse communities- go hand in hand.

As a general rule, the members of a discourse community necessarily share a series of features in common (see section 1). This is the key issue for the creation of the corporate (website) image of an industrial cluster. In spite of the intrinsically autonomous, competitive nature of the companies forming part of any industrial cluster, all the firms in it share a series of features which allow them to be grouped under a single entity or denomination. For instance, the goals pursued by an industrial cluster -understood again as a discourse community- are common, in general, to all the companies of the cluster, as are the genres used for achieving such purposes. This allows the creation of a corporate (website) image valid for the cluster as a whole since the different companies forming part of it aim at maximising benefits as a major common goal and also share, in general terms, the techniques used for such a purpose. These techniques include a good use of generic conventions and online

discourse. As a matter of fact, one of the most effective ways of fostering industrial activity and positive results is by being widely known (the power of information in general and ICTs¹ in particular is immense nowadays) and new digital genres allow the “here-and-now” effect that more traditional genres cannot so easily achieve.

Following Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 3) “genres are inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to the conditions of use, and [...] genre knowledge is therefore best conceptualised as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities”. Industrial clusters can be considered disciplinary activities in which genre is embedded as a means for cognition and communication. This fact may also contribute to understanding the increasing use that these clusters and their respective discourse communities make of new digital genres in an attempt to adapt to and profit from the possibilities offered by online discourse.

Therefore, since genre is the way in which cognition is given (the means for transmitting and communicating knowledge) and knowledge changes and evolves, genres also necessarily change and adapt to this evolution. Cybergenres are basically the result of the necessary evolution experimented by genres in response to the demands of discourse communities and an increasingly technological world. However, in spite of the multiple advantages this situation represents, achieving the expected results entails a correct understanding of the net culture.

In connection with technological advances, Ferrara et al. (1991) contend that technology alters genres, generating what they defined as *blurred genres*. This situation, which may be found mainly on the Net, is defined by Posteguillo (2003: 31) as the existence of “a substantial number of different blurred genres that overlap and which are in permanent change”. In Yates and Orlikowski’s (1992) views communications in a new medium, such as the World-Wide Web, will show both reproduction or adaptation of existing communicative genres and the emergence of new genres. Following these authors, many genres are being or have already been adapted to take advantage of the linking and interactivity features of the new medium, and industrial clusters are no exception. The dynamic nature of genres is confirmed by our daily routine in which cybergenres have successfully become part of most discourse communities and individuals’ lives.

Nowadays, it is increasingly common and advisable for companies to present themselves on the Net. By means of websites companies introduce themselves, advertise their products and services, show their catalogues, establish and maintain contact (interact) and have the possibility of becoming

known worldwide. These possibilities, combined with the aforementioned notions of discourse community, (cyber)genre and online discourse analysis, constitute the key factors for the creation of an adequate digital representation of an industrial cluster through its corporate website image. Industrial clusters, whatever they are, study and analyse these aspects when designing their corporate website images, which must be easily identifiable, representative of the whole and faithful to the “politics” of the cluster.

In this chapter, the different aspects mentioned in this introductory section will be progressively introduced and dealt with to complete the diagrammatic (flow) representation indicated in figure 1. The Spanish ceramic industrial cluster has been the one chosen to illustrate this topic.

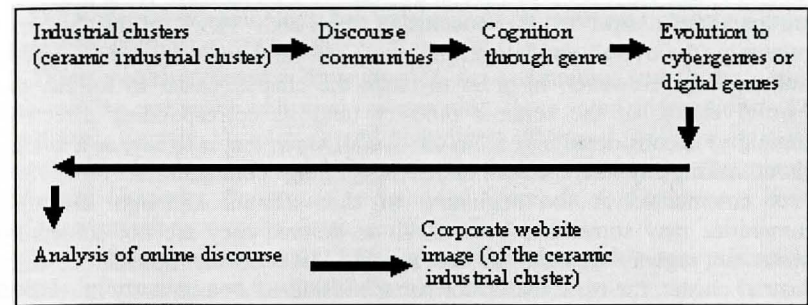


Fig. 3-1: Structure of the chapter.

2. Industrial clusters and discourse communities

The different industrial clusters existing nowadays in the business world can be said to constitute discourse communities. However, discourse communities may sometimes seem blurred, overlapping and even indefinite. This is so because what for many people may constitute a single, well-defined, unique community in itself (overall view), for other people may be a group of smaller integrating communities (integrating view) forming all together a much bigger one comprehending the rest. For instance, in the specific case of the ceramic industrial community, if the integrating view is considered, the community could be understood to be the bigger, general “entity” resulting from the association of smaller communities. In this case, these smaller communities could be those made up of chemists, white-collar workers, blue-collar workers, designers, members of the board, distributors and salespeople, and their grouping together would result in the ceramic industrial community. This integrating view of the cluster could also be tackled from a more business-

¹ Information and Communication Technologies.

oriented but equally valid and coherent perspective. This perspective would be to consider the ceramic cluster as made up of smaller communities which would correspond to the different firms specialised in the different stages involved in the ceramic production process (some of them are adjacent industries but necessary in the process). These smaller communities would be the firms in charge of extracting and supplying raw materials, the firms of frits, glazes and colours, those of machinery production and premises maintenance, those in charge of tile production (tiles as a finished product) and the institutions or organisms related to the cluster. In order to shed some light on this issue, a series of features whose accomplishment defines, according to Swales (1990), a discourse community, are presented in the following paragraphs. Most probably, these paragraphs lead to the conclusion that both views of a discourse community (the overall and integrating ones) are valid and may even be given simultaneously. However, in order to make the chapter easier to follow, the industrial cluster of the ceramic industry (and its corresponding discourse community) is considered here from the overall view, that is to say, as a whole, without making any reference to smaller "integrating" communities.

As commented at the beginning of this section, although discourse communities may sometimes be difficult to delimit, they are not something abstract or vaguely defined. In the specific case of the Spanish ceramic industrial cluster, the main reason for being considered a community in spite of the different firms forming part of it is, basically, that all these firms share common objectives. In order to enhance the accomplishment of these objectives, the cluster/community possesses a series of participatory mechanisms articulated by the concept genre. Discourse communities are thus networks characterised by redundant and frequent relationships given through genre and by common values and norms resulting in competition leveraging, high quality information and tacit knowledge transmission. At the same time, this is translated into a "competitive advantage" for firms based on solidarity and common values but also characterised, in the specific case of the ceramic industrial community, by an intrinsic rivalry between firms imposed by the very nature of any business-oriented community.

Any discourse community we may think of presents a series of features that characterise it as such. In Swales' (1990) views, the conceptualization of discourse communities can be summarised in the identification of six defining characteristics, which are necessary and sufficient to identify a group of individuals as a discourse community (as happens here with the ceramic industrial cluster):

1) "A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals" (Swales, 1990: 24-25).

These public goals are, in the case of the ceramic industrial community, rather tacit because, as in any industrial, business-related activity, the objectives are, in general: to become leaders in the sector, extend markets, attract clients, maximise benefits, minimise losses, effectively fight against competition, and be at the forefront of innovation, infrastructures and technology. However, the fact of sharing common, public goals like the above does not prevent individual firms from also aiming at these goals. Competition is always latent in any business activity but, although the firms forming part of the ceramic industrial community fight for their success at an individual level, they are aware of the fact that the success of the cluster as a whole is always positive for the companies forming part of it. Thus, the discourse community (the "cluster-feature") makes the individual stronger.

2) "A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members" (Swales, 1990: 25).

These mechanisms vary depending on the community and in the specific case of the ceramic industrial community these are: international fairs (Cevisama, Cersaie...), journals and periodicals (*Tile and Brick International*, *Ziegelindustrie International*, *Técnica Cerámica*, *Cerámica Informazine*, *Industrial Ceramics*, *Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Cerámica y Vidrio*, etc.), conversations, e-mails, faxes, correspondence, etc.

3) "A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback" (Swales, 1990: 26).

According to Swales (1990: 26) "membership implies uptake of the informational opportunities". In a way, this is the result of having intercommunication mechanisms which are mainly used to accomplish public goals but which can also be used for more private ones.

In the Spanish ceramic industrial community, for instance, the most prototypical example of a participatory mechanism is ASCER (Asociación Española de Fabricantes de Azulejos y Pavimentos Cerámicos), a kind of "meeting point" for the different firms in the cluster². In the same way, other companies' websites can be resorted to in order to become aware of their philosophy, products, innovations, trends, techniques, procedures, weaknesses, etc. Consequently, informational opportunities can be used either to strengthen the community's ties and benefit its common interests or to obtain information about member companies with more private objectives.

4) "A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims" (Swales, 1990: 26).

² This is the reason why ASCER's website could be considered a good, simple way of illustrating the corporate website image of the ceramic industrial cluster.

Departing from the fact that “genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them” (Martin, 1985: 250 in Swales, 1990: 26) discourse expectations are created by the *genres* that traditionally have articulated the operations of the discourse community (Swales, 1990: 26). Consequently, each kind of discourse community favours certain genres more than others because its goals are better accomplished through them and the community as such is better represented by them.

In the case of the ceramic industrial community new digital genres such as web pages fit perfectly well into the “philosophy” of the community. This is so because, apart from merely linguistic considerations, they allow rapid communication, visual potential, a much wider reach or scope and powerful advertising - factors which always benefit any business activity.

5) “In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis” (Swales, 1990: 26-27).

The use of highly technical vocabulary is a characteristic feature of any industrial field and ceramics is not an exception. The specialisation that this industrial field implies as a professional and highly technological branch of knowledge is coherently expressed by its terminology. Community membership is highly determined by the efficient communication exchange between its members (experts), and proper communication within a community implies a correct knowledge and use of the terminology specific to that community

6) “A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursive expertise” (Swales, 1990: 27).

“Discourse communities have changing memberships; individuals enter as apprentices and leave by death or in other less involuntary ways. However, the survival of the community depends on a reasonable ratio between novices and experts” (Swales, 1990: 27). Usually, a member belonging to a community like the one under analysis has a degree of expertise on the subject (procedures, materials, transformation, final product, etc.) that the layman does not possess.

With these considerations, the observation and analysis of genre can be considered one of the first and main steps for correctly understanding and analysing a discourse community and hence for designing an adequate corporate website image. This necessarily implies a good knowledge of communicative practices within the discourse community as well as a good knowledge of online discourse and its implications, as is explained in subsequent sections.

However, there is a fact closely related to Swales’ (1990) point number six that cannot be ignored in any business activity, no matter which discourse community we are talking about. It is something obvious that the members of a community, that is to say, experts and professionals play a crucial role in it. However, a business would be nothing without clients. Clients do not necessarily need to belong to the discourse community but are fundamental for

successfully achieving the set of common public goals communities/industrial clusters have (point 1 in Swales’ features). In addition to this, the public, easily-accessible nature of digital genres makes it possible for prospective clients not belonging to the community to use the participatory mechanisms employed by the community in the communicative furtherance of its aims. Therefore, it is advisable for the corporate website image of the cluster to contemplate and harmonise both perspectives. This will be translated into accomplishing the expectations not only of discourse community members –either understood as particular companies or individuals- but also of prospective customers. New digital genres allow this kind of considerations by presetting, for instance, the possibility of choosing the user profile.

3. Genre, cognition and communication

Before delving any further into our topic, starting with a definition of genre can help to clarify one of the “pillar concepts” of this chapter. Following Swales (1990, in Bathia, 1993: 13), genre “is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs”.

Cognition and communication are always given through genre. Metaphorically speaking, genre on the one hand and cognition and communication on the other are the receptacle and the water. Genre is a receptacle used for carrying and containing water (cognition and communication). Water is constantly needed, in the same way as knowledge and communication are, but without a receptacle it is impossible to carry any water from X to Y. This is the function of genre, it allows us to “carry water” (communication) and to “drink water” (cognition). This is the main purpose of genre and the main feature to be considered in the construction of genre: the communicative mission it is intended to fulfil.

Communication is frequent and necessary among the members of any community. Following Agre (1997) and in accordance with Swales’ (1990) views, although a community might have a stronger or weaker sense of itself as such, communities have a certain degree of collective cognition and this cognition needs to be communicated for the community to become stronger, evolve and develop. In the specific case of the ceramic industrial community, through interaction, the different companies forming part of it learn from others’ experience, establish common strategies, develop a shared, specific vocabulary (terminology) and follow a distinctive and characteristic way of thinking and acting. All these actions are carried out and codified through genre so that it is without a doubt a key issue to take into account throughout this chapter. Any

discourse community must be perfectly aware of agreed generic conventions when creating a corporate website image since it needs to meet certain goals and expectations.

A great deal of literature has been written on the topic of genre and many proposals for its definition and classification have been put forward. However, genres do have a rather slippery nature which does not make them easy to delimit and classify. Going back to the water metaphor, the true nature of genre is as tricky to define as it is to stop water slipping through your fingers. Miller's (1994: 23) views on the topic provide a theoretically sound understanding of genres according to which these must focus not so much on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action they are intended to accomplish. Genre is always determined by those who are the prototypical owners of the knowledge it transmits. These prototypical cognition owners, whose knowledge and communicative routines shape genre and perpetuate it within a community, are the members of such communities. Through genre "we learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and we learn how to participate in the actions of a community" (Freedman and Medway, 1994: 2). As Miller states (1994) the number of existing genres in any society is indeterminate, as happens with communities, and depends upon the complexity and diversity of the society (and, I would add, upon the subjective view of reality we as human beings have).

Another factor to be highlighted before going any further is the fact that genre must always be understood as social action. Genres are meaningful only when given in a social context: "genre, in this way becomes more than a formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action" (Miller, 1994: 25).

To sum up, the success of the digital corporate representation of an industrial cluster depends on a recognisable set of communicative purposes coherent with those previously assigned to more traditional genres but taking advantage of new possibilities and making a good use of online discourse. When designing the corporate website image of a discourse community, the latter must recognise itself in the cybergenre. Accordingly, the interplay between the concepts of genre and discourse community determines the creation of any corporate website image intended to accurately reflect the reality of an industrial cluster. This interplay allows (Bathia, 1993) cognitive structuring (in the form of genre) to show the accumulated and conventionalised social knowledge characteristic of a discourse community. It is this characteristic essence that must be maintained in the "jump" from traditional to digital genres and thus one of the main features to determine an adequate, coherent corporate website image.

4. Digital genres or cybergenres

The concept of genre has adapted to new technologies developing into new concepts such as those of digital genre or cybergenre. In Watters and Shepherd's words (1997: 54) "digital genres extend the concept of a literary or rhetorical genre by incorporating the notions of user interactions and processing". In the following subsections this gradual incorporation is described.

4.1. Keeping things clear: Internet-related concepts

Before proceeding any further, the clarification of four recurrent concepts and the way of approaching them throughout this chapter becomes essential: website, web page, homepage and corporate website image.

A website can be defined as a collection of one or more web pages sharing a common domain or subdomain name on the Internet. A web page is a document displaying information which can be accessed through a web browser and which allows navigation to other web pages via hypertext links.

In this research websites have been considered as a macrocybergenre, a global genre capable of "housing" many other smaller genres inside, a genre of genres within the Net. Websites are made up of one or more web pages so, in a way, the conception of genres in a website context can be metaphorically illustrated by Russian Matryoshka dolls. These are wooden dolls of different sizes so that each one nests inside a slightly larger one. Hence, one of these dolls can be opened to reveal another and so forth until the smallest one is reached. In the same way, websites can also be understood as prototypical, "mother"³ cybergenres containing other smaller cybergenres inside.

The word homepage admits two possible senses. On the one hand, it may make reference to a personal website made up of one or more web pages and usually created to constitute a fan site, a personal diary, a photo album or simply a virtual place to give expression to emotions, opinions or interests. On the other hand, a homepage is the first page of any website, that is to say, its front page, startpage or main web page. Homepages understood in such a way offer guidance through the website and present alternative names: home, default and index. Throughout this chapter, when no explicit reference is made to indicate the contrary, the second sense has been the one adopted.

A corporation is a large entity or firm which groups together other smaller firms or entities with common interests. The adjective "corporate" makes reference to the quality of belonging to a collection of individual entities with common features and hence grouped under a wider, common denomination (the

³ The name Matryoshka derives from "matryona", a Russian word for "mother".

corporation). This conglomeration of individual companies under a wider, common denomination is explained by the existence of common practices, objectives and rules, that is, by the existence of a discourse community. As such, these common features constitute and define the corporate image of the cluster (used here as a near synonym of discourse community and corporation). Consequently, this corporate image must be maintained as a constant in digital representations beyond the particular interest of individual companies for the benefit of the collective goals and the easy identification of the corporation's policy of action. Thus, the corporate website image of an industrial cluster makes reference to the common, representative traits shared by digitally representing companies forming part of a wider entity (the industrial cluster or community itself) that, therefore, identify and contribute to its goals.

4.2 The evolution from traditional to digital genres

Shepherd and Watters (1998) coined the term *cybergenre* to denote the new digital genres that appeared with the increasingly dominant position the Internet has acquired, especially in the last decade. These authors consider cybergenres to be integrated by two main kinds of "subcybergenres", *extant* and *novel*, which illustrate the evolution from traditional to digital genres (see figure 3-2).

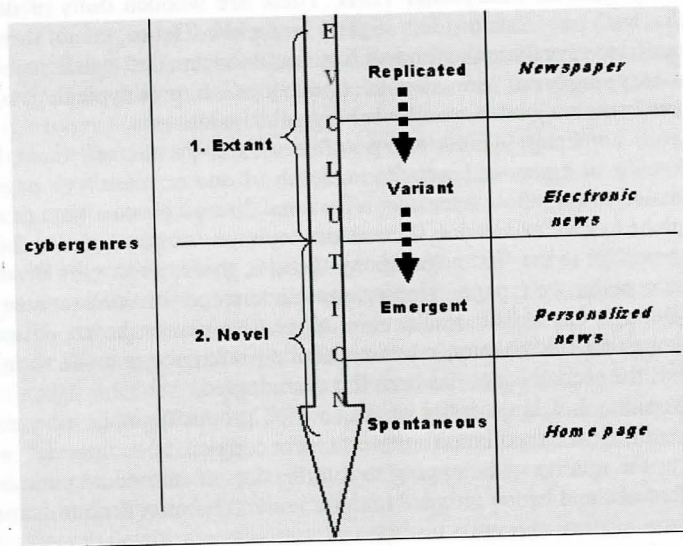


Fig. 3-2: Shepherd and Watters' (1998) classification of cybergenres

1. *Extant* cybergenres are those based on already existing genres to be found in other media (paper and video), with the particularity of having been cast in digital form. When an already existing genre (traditional genre) migrates to a computer environment, it is, initially at least, faithfully *replicated*. This means that content and form are preserved in a way that these *extant replicated* cybergenres do not take full advantage of the capabilities of the new medium. Typical examples of this initial stage of evolution are digitalised documents such as PDF ones. At a subsequent stage, *extant variant* cybergenres are created, a process originated and driven by the technical capabilities offered by the new medium. The basic feature of these *extant variant* cybergenres is the addition of multimedia features and interactivity. The evolution from merely digitalised newspapers to digital or electronic news is an example of this evolution from *replicated* to *extant variant* cybergenres, created to fit the new medium.

2. *Novel* cybergenres are fully dependent on the new medium and are created on the basis of the technical capabilities of digital media. They may originate from *extant* genres through replication and variants giving way to *novel emergent cybergenres*, the third stage of evolution. Providing news through agents and personalised interfaces is an example of this kind of cybergenres. In a final degree of evolution (although not derived from previous stages), *novel spontaneous* cybergenres are those which may not have any counterpart in other media, as occurs with home pages, hotlists and FAQ.

This chapter is focused on the study of a macrocybergenre, the aforementioned website, within which one may find smaller "integrating" cybergenres which may present different degrees of evolution in Shepherd and Watters' classification (1998). According to this dynamic classification, websites in the ceramic industrial community (and the web pages it is made up of) would constitute, as a whole, *novel spontaneous* cybergenres. They are fully dependent on the new medium and are created on the basis of the technical capabilities it offers but have no counterpart as such in other media. In Yates and Orlikowski's (1992, 1994) views many traditional genres have been adapted to take advantage of the linking and interactivity of the digital medium, but in the case of websites, everything started from scratch because no counterpart can be found in traditional media.

However, websites are also designed bearing in mind the expectations created by the generic conventions of the community. Obviously, if analysed as a whole, websites are not exact replicas of any genre traditionally associated with the cluster like catalogues or order forms, but these websites may contain or include, as in fact they do, instances of smaller cybergenres more easily

identifiable with genres traditionally associated with the ceramic cluster. Actually, it is a constant in any industrial ceramics website to find, for instance, a section entitled "catalogue" or "products" which accomplishes the same function as the traditional paper catalogue - sizes, materials, models and pictures (images) are provided as in a traditional catalogue- taking advantage, however, of the possibilities offered by the new medium. These smaller cybergenres usually belong to the categories of *extant variant* cybergenres or *novel emergent* cybergenres but even *extant replicated* cybergenres may also be found in the form of, for instance, newspaper news or journal articles faithfully replicated in a digital form. Thus, websites are considered here as prototypical cybergenres which may contain other smaller cybergenres with different degrees of evolution in Shepherd and Watters's (1998) classification and with different degrees of attachment to the expectations generated by traditional genres.

4.3 Main features of digital genres

Given the fact that genre repertoire is both a product and a shaper of the communicative practices of a community (Orlikowski and Yates, 1994) it seems logical that new digital genres are created according to the demands and expectations of such community. In other words, it is coherent and necessary for new genres to fit, in a way, into the type of communication expected. Consequently, genre has clear and important implications in website design.

Following Agre (1997), an advantage that new digital genres present is the possibility to pick a community, explore how already existing or traditional genres fit into the activities and relationships of this community, and then consider how these new genres might surpass the possibilities of traditional ones. In this way, the communicative practices of the community might be enhanced and improved, that is to say, cybergenres might "do more" for a community. Digital genres are usually designed to facilitate certain functions and to extend the options and possibilities offered by traditional genres enabling, for instance, much quicker searching, sorting or comparing.

Watters and Shepherd (1998) also emphasised the role of genre in the evolution of user interface on the Internet, thus shifting the attention to the technical functionality of electronic documents. While genres in non-digital media are determined by content and form, cybergenres are determined by content and form but also by functionality.

Digital genres⁴ take advantage of the huge number of possibilities offered by the new medium, which may benefit the public corporate image of any business activity in general. Websites, as prototypical examples of cybergenres:

- Are interactive and present a dynamic behaviour.
- Contain reproduced or re-structured (usually summarised or scanned) information which is thus, more easily assimilated.
- Have a very visual, intuitive nature with a predominant role of image which makes them, in general, appealing and eye-catching.
- Allow rapid access to other topic-related web pages through the use of links. The linking nature of the Net is not only present in text (hypertext), images can also be or contain links forming what is commonly known as hypermedia.
- Allow the immediate spread of information.
- Present a characteristic layout and visual rhetorics.
- Allow the inclusion of audio and video.

The fact that billions and billions of documents are interlinked forming a net based on interactivity and interconnection makes the Internet one of the most powerful "information weapons" of our times. The user may jump from one page to another with a simple "click". In addition, web pages can contain frames -the parts in which the web page is subdivided- which are nothing more than smaller web pages forming a bigger one containing the rest. These frames allow, for instance, four pieces of information (let's say the image of a product, its description, the general index of products and clients' opinions) to be visualized at once or to select/view just the information we might be interested in.

4.4 Typology of digital genres

In general terms, it is advisable for designers to draw on accepted genre and be aware of the user's expectations regarding genre. Although they should feel free to reject old forms that do not fit new technology, they must also be aware that new genres are often misunderstood or resisted (Crowston & Williams, 1999) when they do not fit users' expectations or when their appearance or introduction is considered too blunt.

⁴ With the exception of *extant replicated* cybergenres since they faithfully reproduce in a digital form other more traditional genres not taking advantage of the possibilities of the new medium.

Crowston and Williams (1997) were among the first to realise the importance of genre for analyzing communication on the Internet also. They noted, that the Web was an excellent place to study the development of genres, because of its easy access and its potential for experimentation, freedom of structuration, and interactions between many communities. They documented the range of genres in use on the Web by sampling and classifying 1000 randomly selected web pages⁵. Distinction was based on purpose, rather than on physical form. They identified 48 different web genres (table 3-1).

Archive item	Filmography	Problem set
Article	Genealogy	Product information
Book	Government program description	Product reviews
Box score	Guide	Publication list
Chronicle	Home page	Ratings
Column	Hot list	Regulation or rule
Computer documentation	Index	Report
Concert review	Library acquisition list	Script
Demographic data	List of research projects	Server statistics
Directory	Meeting minutes	Source code
Discography	Memorial	Submission instruction
E-mail directory listing	Newsletter	Table of contents
Essay	News wire article	Testimonial
Faculty information	Order form	Univ. course listing
FAQ	Pamphlet	Users' manual
File directory listing	Political party platform	Vitae

Table 3-1: Web genres (N = 48) or cybergenres identified by Crowston and Williams (1997); sample size: 1000.

From these digital genres the ones most frequently used by the ceramic industrial community are the ones indicated in table 3-2, although many other classifications and denominations are also possible.

Product reviews	Description and evaluation of products to advise potential customers.
Product information	A description of the features and/or benefits of a product, written by the manufacturer for potential customers.

⁵ In this way, they also considered the web page (which can be a synonym of website) as a macrocybergenre containing other smaller "web genres".

Order form	A form for recording information needed to order a product.
E-mail directory	A list of e-mail addresses.
FAQ	Edited collection of questions and answers on a topic; often labelled as such.
Users' manual	Instructions on the use of a product.
Hot list	A list of Web sites not controlled by the author of the list, often organized by topic.
Home page	A presentation of personal information, often with links to other information or a hotlist.
Report	A formal statement of the results of an investigation or of any matter on which definite information is required, made by some person or body instructed or required to do so (OED).
Article	A literary composition forming materially part of a journal, magazine, encyclopaedia, or other collection, but treating a specific topic distinctly and independently (OED).
Ratings	Numeric evaluations of products or services.
Regulation or rule	A rule prescribed for the management of some matter, or for the regulating of conduct; a governing precept or direction; a standing rule (OED).

Table 3-2: Main genres used by the ceramic industrial community according to Crowston and Williams' classification (1997).

As may be observed in table 3-2, certain cybergenres characteristic of the ceramic industrial community constitute an adaptation or evolution from traditional genres typically associated with the cluster: product information, reports, articles, regulations or rules and order forms among others. Some others, however, are novel cybergenres such as FAQ, hot lists or home pages, not identifiable with traditional genres but which maintain the essence and foster the actions of the discourse community.

5. Websites and their representation of industrial clusters

In the specific case of the ceramic industrial community, a wide range of genres is used by its members in everyday communication. Many of these genres can be considered traditional genres: catalogues, brochures, commercial letters, text books, newspaper articles, specialised journals and periodicals, UNE norms, EN norms, etc. However, the evolution and introduction of new technologies has affected the concept of genre enormously and has led to the appearance and spread of digital genres or cybergenres such as those enumerated in the previous section. The exponential growth rhythm at which digital genres are developing and their mammoth upsurge in the last decade respond to the demands of the times and people but also to the necessities imposed by market pressures. As a matter of fact, the successful representation of industrial clusters through their corporate website image depends, initially, on the consideration and in-depth study of four basic aspects: online discourse, genre analysis, market study and needs analysis.

5.1 Online discourse, genre analysis, market study and needs analysis

It seems logical and advisable for the corporate website image of any industrial cluster to be associated with an image of modernity, technological advancement and commitment, and constant innovation. In this way, clusters transmit a sense of evolution and development which is much more appealing to customers. Until some years ago, when they were the only means to do so, traditional genres represented perfectly well by themselves the corporate image of industrial clusters. However, nowadays, industrial clusters cannot afford to remain anchored in the past. What was fashionable and up-to-date, yesterday may today have become a symbol of our inability to make progress. If knowledge advances as it in fact does, genres, as the factual representation of cognition may evolve in parallel. All these factors directly related to market study and needs analysis determine that the battle against competition is translated into quality, price, reach and speed of information. Of these, the last two parameters are positively enhanced by the Internet. In business, the key is not just doing things but letting the world know we do them right and if this can be done in the twinkling of an eye, all the better.

Genre, online discourse and marketing go hand in hand in the specific case of the ceramic industrial cluster. The features that define the discourse community of this cluster, especially with regards to genre conventions, must be taken into consideration to meet Internet users' expectations. However, apart from generic conventions, a conscientious market study and an adequate online

discourse are necessary to create the corporate website image by which this industrial cluster is best represented.

A key issue to be taken into account when designing a corporate website image is the fact that "Internet does not exist in a vacuum. It should be integrated in the marketing plans just as public relations, advertising, direct mail and phone calls are used to increase sales" (Janal, 2000: 3). Another golden rule of online discourse is that consumers do not accept misleading information. If they have any hesitation about a company, a brand or an identity because a website is not clear enough or plays with ambiguity they will simply disregard it and look for substitutes "in a click". Together with these aspects, a good understanding of the "Net culture" implies basically the acknowledgement that the Net is action, more exactly quick action, and that the Internet user is more attracted by being informed than by trying to be persuaded. The Net offers freedom of action, allowing users to enter or quit as they please.

However, the Internet also presents certain shortcomings to be taken into account: cultural differences, for instance, should be carefully considered and balanced given the scope of the Net. Assuming that everything will be understood in the same way everywhere is a flagrant mistake. The Net is a powerful, global information tool that reaches almost every place in the world, but colours, forms and words are not understood in the same way everywhere.

To conclude, following Fouchard (1999) electronic commerce is a crucial objective for European enterprises since 70% of them run the risk of not being competitive any more if they ignore electronic commerce. "Trespassing" the digital barrier is thus a necessity which, however, implies that the activity to be developed on the Net requires a reorganization of the production chain and a detailed, careful reflection on the relationship with the consumer (Fouchard, 1999).

To sum up, a consistent, well-designed and carefully thought out corporate website image implies a perfect understanding of online discourse and basic business principles and objectives. However, other more down-to-earth analyses such as market studies are also necessary to determine the needs, objectives and expectations it is designed to fulfil.

5.2 Representation of the industrial cluster of ceramics through its corporate website image: analysis of characteristic features

In Agre's (1998) views a worthy goal for design in new media is to support the cognitive processes of particular communities. Design for new media requires some rational understanding of who is using the materials, what they are doing with them, and how they fit into an overall way of life. The possibilities afforded by the use of new media in the field of design are so wide

and varied that this subsection is focused only on the more relevant and hence more characteristic aspects of it. As media evolve and changes proliferate in every aspect of our lives, the task of designers becomes much richer but also increasingly difficult since many possibilities are presented and many factors have to be considered and successfully combined. Every individual visiting a website, whether expert or not, forms part of the “desirable” group of prospective clients that any company or cluster wants to attract. By showing a solid and coherent corporate website image that strengthens the ties within the community, prospective clients, even those alien to the community, are also attracted.

The cluster of industrial ceramics aims at being associated with refinement and luxury and thus it is presented as a high-tech cluster devoted to the creation of refined, comfortable atmospheres. Ceramics is in itself closely related to the world of design, ranging from classic trends to the most avant-garde designs. Probably, this is the most eye-catching characteristic of the websites of companies belonging to this cluster, how they draw on image for their websites and recreate atmospheres for all sorts of clients: those who look for warm, cosy atmospheres, those who prefer minimalistic trends, those who prefer neat, bright interiors, those more attracted by modern tendencies or those showing a liking for rustic homes. The ceramic industrial cluster wants to offer each one what they are looking for and this seems to be the premise these companies depart from on their websites: “we have it and you can see it now, that’s how your home could look and we are the ones who can offer it to you” (figure 3-3).

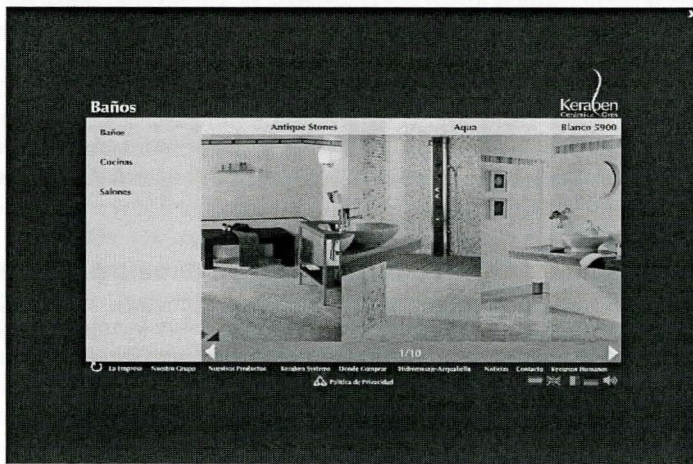
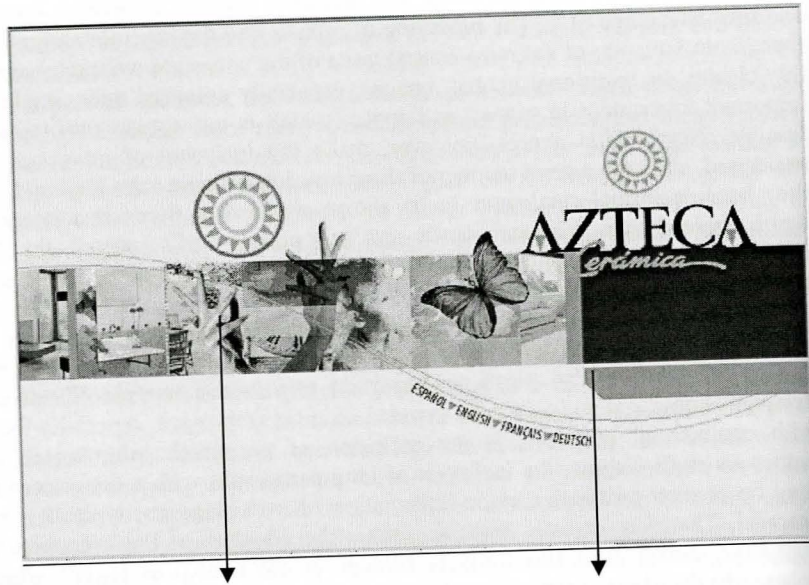


Fig. 3-3: Webpage of the company Keraben belonging to the ceramic industrial cluster.

We live in the society of image and industrial ceramic companies know it and take advantage of it. The profusion of images and the key role assigned to them is, in fact, one of the most central traits of the corporate website image of this cluster. In traditional genres, images, especially coloured ones, imply an important investment in money and space, which is not always profitable or feasible. New digital genres, however, make the inclusion of images much easier and, although a great number of them may imply some extra loading time, they become virtual catalogues to be shown worldwide. Since one image is worth more than a thousand words and this cluster “sells image”, the Net constitutes the quickest and easiest way to be known anywhere in the world with the highest visual potential.

The ruling position of image on the websites of the ceramic cluster is significant if compared with the amount of written data offered. Obviously, written information also plays an important role in the ceramic cluster but designers know that an issue to be avoided on most web pages, especially those with commercial purposes, is the inclusion of too much information. As numerous studies show, the inclusion of long paragraphs with a dense content may be counter-productive since information on web pages is, typically, just scanned. Therefore ceramic websites attract the attention of the user through appealing visual aids and keep it through a clear, logical layout which coherently distributes information. It is fundamental that the first impression of a website is that of a clear, neat organization in which the user feels comfortable and capable of finding the information needed. Figure 3-4, shows the homepage or startpage of a company in which an innovative design is not incompatible with a user-friendly interface.



Visual aids in a neat layout

Versions offered in different languages

Fig. 3-4: Webpage of the company Azteca belonging to the ceramic industrial cluster.

The use of scannable text is also supported by Nielsen (1999), who advocates the creation of this kind of text through the use of highlighted keywords; meaningful sub-headings and bulleted lists, as shown in figure 3-5.

Another characteristic feature of the corporate website image analysed is the inclusion of a series of recurrent, recursive sections which appear in almost every website of the ceramic cluster:

- a section with the different languages in which the information on the website can be viewed. This section/option is usually presented on the homepage as the initial choice before proceeding to view the other web pages on the site. (This point is explained in more detail in subsequent paragraphs).
- A section for selecting the user profile. (This point is explained in more detail in subsequent paragraphs).
- A section in which the company presents itself. This section may be given various titles such as “who we are”, “company”, “the group” or “philosophy”.

- A section devoted to products which may be named “collections”, “catalogue”, “our products”, or “product”.
- A section called “news” which usually contains the latest news in the sector or references found in the media about the company in particular or the cluster in general. This section can be said to constitute one of the participatory mechanisms used by the cluster to reinforce its community nature.
- A section devoted to company-client interaction usually called “contact” or “contact us” (figure 3-5). This communication is possible thanks to the interactivity allowed by new digital media and is usually carried out via e-mail.
- Other maybe not so recursive sections but ones with a noticeable importance within the corporate website image of the cluster are those of “environment” and “novelties”. On the one hand, the “environment” section is in direct touch with contemporary sensitivities and shows commitment with environmental concerns by making public the environmental policies adopted by the companies. Moreover, making this kind of information explicit may be considered advisable and profitable for a traditionally highly polluting industry like the ceramic one, since it places companies’ interest beyond merely commercial issues and thus transmits a more favourable image. On the other hand the “novelties” section refers basically to the latest innovations in the different companies with regard to products and trends and can be included within the section “products”. The section “user’s guide” or “advice on maintenance and installation” is also common.

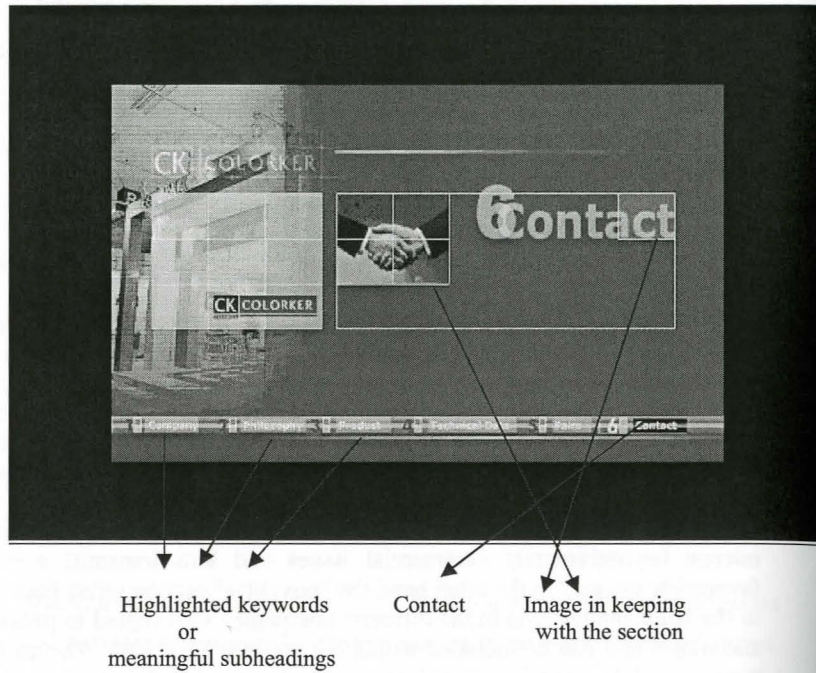


Fig. 3-5: Webpage of the company Colorker belonging to the ceramic industrial cluster.

As has already been mentioned, a feature shared by almost every company in the ceramic industrial cluster is the diversity of languages in which their websites are presented to the consumer (figure 3-4). Companies in general, as happens in almost every business area, look for international markets and consequently to expand their influence and market worldwide. This is the main reason for offering versions of the sites in different languages, which is almost impossible in traditional genres in which space is much more limited and expensive. English, Spanish, French and German are usually a constant in ceramic websites but certain companies also include other languages like Italian, Ukrainian or Russian depending on their international markets.

Taking up again the section on the user profile, as shown in figure 3-6, we can easily understand its inclusion on industrial ceramic websites if we consider that they are designed to fit the expectations of the members of the community but, in the same way, the very nature of the cluster makes it directly dependent on non-members (prospective customers). Thus, websites must contemplate the two broad kinds of users it may have in order to fulfil both groups' expectations.

Hence, it seems logical and necessary to offer the possibility of deciding the user profile so that the information can be presented for instance, in a way more easily understandable for the layman (non-member of the community) or a version more addressed to the expert/professional (member of the community). Among the possibilities displayed when choosing the user profile we may find: consumer, builder, retailer, architect, designer, contractors and distributors among others. Neither is it strange to find access limited to certain areas, usually professional ones. In these cases, a user name and a code are needed to have access to more confidential information. With the possibility of choosing the user profile, the ceramic cluster shows its involvement both with prospective clients with a non-expert profile and with those having an expertise (usually community members).

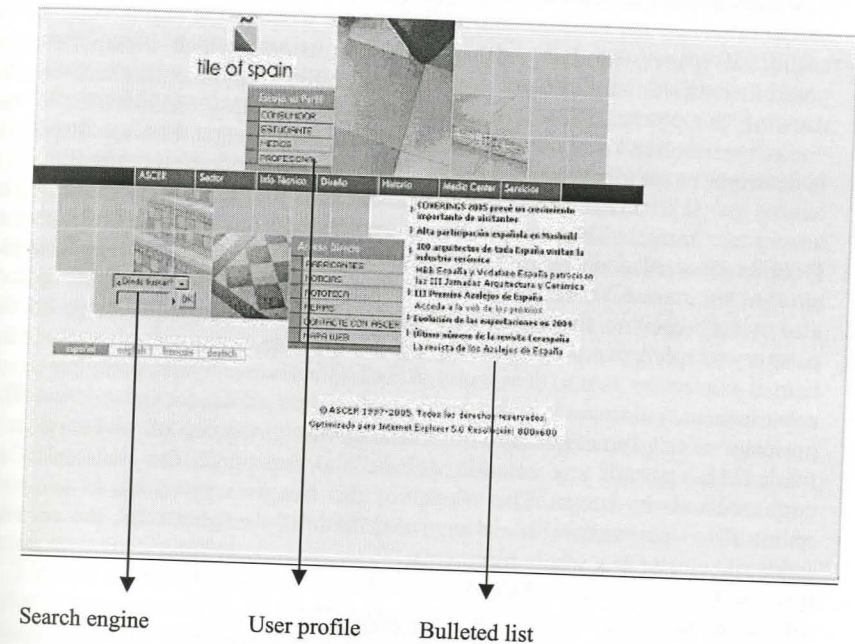


Fig. 3-6: Frontpage of the webpage of ASCER (Asociación Española de Azulejos y Pavimentos Cerámicos).

In addition to what has already been mentioned, websites in general offer the possibility of moving around quickly and easily (whereas print navigation mainly consists of page turning). This is a key factor because, following Nielsen

(1999), when analysing the “look and feel” of a website, the *feel* completely dominates the user experience. After all, *doing* is more memorable and makes a stronger emotional impact than *seeing* and this is one of the strongest potentials of the Net. The industrial ceramic community is aware of this fact and creates websites that constitute a sensory experience for the user. Therefore, it is common to find audio in ceramic websites, especially in homepages, the same as the inclusion of video with the most varied purposes (presenting a product, introducing a process, showing premises). In this context and within the triplet content, form and function, the last element has gained much importance with the advance of interactive digital documents. The websites of the ceramic industrial cluster are made up of smaller cybergenres with different degrees of evolution from the traditional genres typically used by the cluster. Hence, product reviews and product information on the web are the online versions of traditional (paper) product catalogues and brochures which incorporate the possibility of moving around through the different ambiances created for showing the product. The reports and articles presented on websites in the “news” section are also (and mostly) *extant variant* cybergenres since they have their origin in very similar traditional genres but incorporate the possibility of having access to related links (although sometimes they are simply replicated in a digital form). This potential is grounded on the INTERnational, INTERconnected and INTERrelated nature of the INTERNet. With a simple click of the mouse we can jump from one web page to another. Other genres also widely used in the ceramic industrial cluster but which belong to the category of spontaneous cybergenres are, for instance, sections such as those for E-mail contact or FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions), which complement or substitute the traditional telephone call, fax or letter asking for information. The presence of all these genres with their different degrees of evolution is a fundamental part of any ceramic website and constitutes the skeleton of its corporate website image. The “flesh” of this image is given by an adequate online discourse and website design that faithfully reflects what the ceramic industrial cluster as a whole represents.

6. Conclusions

As observed all through the chapter, transformation in generic conventions is defined nowadays by the interplay between technological and social forces. Digital genres are the product of this interplay since they are rooted in the social practices of discourse communities and respond to the transformation originated by technological evolution.

Digital genres are increasingly present in everyday life. Nowadays, it is common and highly advisable for companies to present themselves on the Net

by means of websites that allow them to be known worldwide, advertise their products and services, show their catalogues and establish and maintain contact with other similar communities and with consumers in general. These digital genres allow the “here and now effect” that traditional genres cannot so easily achieve. In this way, the use of digital genres by the ceramic industrial community can be considered a step forward in innovation and adaptation to current market trends. Digital genres allow the creation of a corporate website image coherent with the image provided by other more traditional genres or media and aimed at transmitting the philosophy of the cluster. However, they also allow the incorporation of elements totally dependent on and characteristic of the new media which give way to digital genres with no counterpart in traditional ones but which maintain the essence of their lines of action.

The presence of the ceramic industrial community on the Internet is a fact. However, for this presence to be profitable and an accurate reflection of the cognitive and communicative universe of the discourse community, the corporate website image of the cluster must be carefully designed without abruptly breaking with traditional conventions. Hence, a good interplay between traditional and new possibilities is the basis for success in website design.

In the same way that the general concept of genre is decisive for correctly shaping a cybergenre, the concept of discourse community also plays a crucial role as a unifying element in the interplay between genre, industrial cluster and online discourse. This is fundamental for the design of cybergenres. They imply a step forward in the evolution of genres but without losing track of the grounding principles and hence of the generic conventions and expectations of a community. In this sense and following Agre (1998) “putting the concepts of genre and community to work together will result in a vast space of potential genres and uses of media”. The study of genre in professional communication provides important information about how discourse communities are organised and about their textual dynamics. When Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) make reference to genre knowledge in disciplinary or professional communities they refer to the knowledge that professionals need to communicate effectively within their communities.

The Net offers easy access to a global information service as well as to a global community which, if the premise that information is power is taken into account, makes the Internet a highly powerful means from which any business activity would like to profit. Following Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 24) “when we speak of genre knowledge in disciplinary and professional cultures, we refer to knowledge that professionals need in order to communicate in disciplinary communities” and in this sense, correctly combining the use of the Net (online discourse) and the adequate understanding of genre implies an enormous potential for a successful website.

The power of the Net is impressive, probably even greater than we may think, and that is why making the most of the Internet experience depends on the conjunction of a series of elements. There are a series of key elements for the construction of a good online discourse and for the correct digital representation of the corporate website image of any discourse community. For the correct design of this website image we have observed that "genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time" (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 115). In this sense, we can see how the macrocybergenre of websites requires the analysis of many factors to successfully present adequate, accurate information that fits expectations, accomplishes goals, enhances interaction and adds possibilities.

In the specific case of the ceramic industrial cluster, its corporate website image is characterised by:

- The importance of the concept and the role of the ceramic industrial discourse community.
- The necessity to meet the expectations of both members and non-members of the community as prospective clients to be attracted (possibility of choosing the user profile).
- The profusion of carefully treated and selected images and the visual potential of the sites
- The inclusion of audio and video.
- The inclusion of recurrent sections which capture the essence and organisation of the community and describe it.
- The observation of generic conventions: the combination of the possibilities of the new digital genres with the other more traditional generic conventions adapted to different degrees to the new media.
- The luxurious, elegant and refined ambiances it presents in accordance with the image the cluster wants to transmit.
- The importance assigned to international markets (the inclusion of versions in different languages is a constant)
- The neat, clear layouts which also contribute to transmit an image of elegance and refinement.
- The environmental commitment it wants to transmit.
- The technological and innovative image.
- The importance assigned to interaction and contact with the client.
- The user-friendly interface (the importance assigned to function in addition to content and form).

The combination of all these aspects is what constitutes and shapes the corporate website image of the ceramic industrial cluster so that on the websites of the different companies belonging to it, these features act as defining and identifying traits of the whole.

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